

The Basics of Giving a Good Lesson

Consider your objectives

Exactly what do you want students to know or be able to do by the end of the lesson? Make that clear to yourself—it will focus your preparation. Tell your students what you want them to learn—it will focus their attention. ■ Is there a test coming up? Are the students struggling with homework? Was there a difficult point in class that needs clarification? ■ And what does the professor want? Talk to the professor and GO TO CLASS (to experience what the students experience, so you will have a better understanding of where they are).

Know your students

If you have an understanding of who your students are, you'll be able to work with them better. ■ What are their majors? What are their class years? What's their background in this subject, in this course, and in other courses? ■ What do they know? If you don't know what they do and don't know, ASK!

Create handouts and visual aids

Different students learn in different ways—some learn best by doing, some by seeing, some by listening, and some by reading. If you provide handouts and use visual aids, you'll reach more students, and if you use handouts, you'll enable students to pay better attention because they won't be copying what you're writing. ■ Using the board is a great way to incorporate visual aids. And when you know in advance that you'll be drawing, PLAN! In your notes, sketch the diagram you're going to draw and decide on what labels you'll use. ■ For slides and transparencies use a big font and don't cram things into the space.

Prepare and practice the lesson

If you prepare and practice, you and your students are going to experience a better lesson. ■ Notes are great to use as a support, but don't read directly from them—use them for reference only. ■ Practice in front of a mirror or capture yourself on video, watch it, and critique it. (Seriously—it can be a huge help.)

Start and end promptly

If you don't start on time (either because you're late or because you wait for late students), students will get in the habit of coming later. ■ End on time out of respect for their schedules (and your own).

Tell Them³: Tell them what you're going to tell them; tell them; tell them what you told them

"Tell them cubed" is a basic rule of public speaking. ■ If you first orient students to a topic, then discuss the topic, and then review the topic, the important points will be emphasized and your students will remember better.

Speak so your students can understand

If your students don't understand you, they're not going to learn. ■ Speak slowly, clearly, and loudly. ■ Allow time for note taking (even if you have handouts). ■ If you have an accent, there are ways to help your students understand (write terms on the board; use more handouts and slide copies; tell them (for example), "When I say 'top,' what I mean is, 'stop.>"). Discuss it with the class, and let them know that you're open to their feedback.

Pay attention to students' reactions and respond

If you respond to your students, you'll be a better teacher and they'll learn more. ■ Pay attention to their reactions and actions. Watch for puzzled looks, furrowed brows, and nodding off, and adjust what you're doing.

Plan questions (Plan to ask them and plan which ones you will ask)

In a lesson, it's important to have active student involvement—it holds their attention, and it helps you determine what they don't understand. Including questions will enhance your interactions and your relationships with students. ■ You'll probably wind up asking better questions if you plan them out in advance. ■ Begin asking questions on the first day—it will set a tone that indicates that you expect interaction. ■ A really good way to get questions from students is to have them all work on something simultaneously. Give them a micro quiz OR try casting new material in the form of a problem to be solved and have them think about it and tell them to ask (or anonymously write down and hand in) questions that arise while they think about it. ■ Make students feel that their questions are welcome, and make students feel respected when they ask or answer questions. Maybe say things like, "That's a good question" or "I'm glad you said what you were thinking because now I see how I could clarify it better" and do not say things like, "Well, if you had done the reading, you'd know why that's wrong" or "Didn't we cover that last time?" ■ If students aren't asking *you* questions, then be sure to ask them questions. Sometimes the "Are you with me?" questions work well. (You begin to work through something but you turn to them for input when particularly important details are needed.) ■ When soliciting questions, asking "Any questions?" is fine, but be sure to allow some wait time so they can formulate their questions and (perhaps) work up the courage to ask them. If you don't pause long enough, they'll think you didn't really want to get questions from them and they won't ask any in the future. ■ If you're doing a very quick check on understanding, asking closed-ended yes/no questions might be best, but if you're trying to understand students' thinking processes or uncover misconceptions, then asking questions that require them to give explanations will be better. ■ Be precise when you phrase questions because if you're looking for a specific answer but don't ask a specific-enough question, everyone will feel frustrated. For example, instead of asking, "What was significant here?" ask "What was the key step in this argument?" and instead of asking "How else could we look at this?" ask "What other method might we use to do this?" ■ When asking students questions, it might help to tell them that you already know the answers yourself but that talking out loud helps everyone understand what's going on and helps you all get familiar with one another, which may make learning easier. ■ If you're going to ask questions that some students might think are really easy, tell them that you don't mean to insult them by asking these kinds of questions but that you don't know what everyone does and doesn't know and that starting with simple questions makes the most sense. ■