

The Practical Professor

No. 23

Quick and easy tips, tools, and ideas for improving teaching and learning.

The Silent Class

Ask The Practical Professor #5

Dear Practical Professor,

I am teaching two sections of the same course this semester. One class is very engaged with the material, but the other section is just the opposite. No one in the class really participates unless called on, and they just seem to be in "there because they have to be" mode. Is it ok to develop an alternative course design for this class and/or allow students to decide which class format works best for them?

Signed,

The Puzzled Professor

J.F. – Not only is it ok, I'd call it good teaching. Every teacher worth his or her salt has faced this. All teachers know that each individual class has its own personality, group chemistry, strengths, and weaknesses. Your teaching instinct is picking up on the blatant evidence of that. We have to teach the students *who are sitting in front of us*. This is why many of us make the mistake of *over-*planning our lessons. The most important part of "meet your students where they are" is the *your students* part, as in, the students you are teaching *right now*.

B.S. – You know why I won't use presentation software? Because I found when I did a "great PowerPoint" I used it for every class. How dumb. Using Student Feedback Techniques (see our SFT series) with each different group of students makes me focus on THEM! And, different classes develop different "cultures" – some need more priming than others.

J.F. – Students like the ones you describe are absolving themselves of investment in their own learning. We can't blame them—a great deal of their school experience up until now has trained them to do this. We reinforce this when we are in talking mode: we lecture and call on raised hands. Our challenge is to immediately reverse this: *take the pressure off of yourself to talk about the material—which is not the same as teaching the material—and create situations in which learning will occur*. Give them group activities with crystal-clear tasks and criteria for success and failure. Task groups with teaching the rest of the class portions of the content.

B.S. - I time myself. Talk more than 10 minutes = TIME FOR BILL TO SHUT UP. I tell my students this. "Don't let me keep talking, that is boring us all." Ask

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questions. Give a minute to allow everyone to think. Have students work together on answers. Be clear about what a 'good answer' is and expect good answers. Engaged people learn. Passive people sit.

J.F. – Several of *The Teaching Top 10* lists that we published last year offer quick, practical tips for improving student engagement, active learning, and learner-centered instruction. The full list is below with a link for accessing the them online, but you may find these topics particularly helpful: Ways to Shake Up Your Teaching, Mixing Things Up Mid Semester, Ways to Keep Your Students Learning, Ways to Build Your Students' Self-Efficacy, Ways and Reasons to Be Vulnerable While Teaching, Students' Locus of Control, Engaging Different Input Preferences, and Using Student Groups.

In the next *The Practical Professor: Student Feedback Technique Series #7*

Also available!

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty

The Top 10...

- No. 1 – The All-Important First Day of Class
- No. 2 – Ways to Make Your Teaching Life Easier
- No. 3 – The Crucial Second and Third Classes
- No. 4 – Ways to Show Students that You Respect Them
- No. 5 – Promote Effective Student Study Skills
- No. 6 – Components of a Well-Planned Class
- No. 7 – Observe Your Teaching Tendencies
- No. 8 – Ways to Keep Your Students Learning
- No. 9 – Ways to Get Feedback on Teaching from Students
- No. 10 – Using Short Writing to Assess Learning
- No. 11 – Getting More (and Better) Student Questions
- No. 12 – Mixing Things up Mid-Semester
- No. 13 – Engaging Different Input Preferences
- No. 14 – Helping Students Stay the Journey
- No. 15 – Ways to End Your Course
- No. 16 – Resources for Learning and Teaching
- No. 17 – Create a Memorable AND Functional Syllabus
- No. 18 – Ways to Build Your Students' Self-Efficacy
- No. 19 – Practical Study Tips to Share with Your Students
- No. 20 – Laddering Thinking Skills
- No. 21 – Learning Based Ways to End Lessons
- No. 22 – Ways and Reasons to Be Vulnerable While Teaching
- No. 23 – Using Student Groups
- No. 24 – Components of a Complete Learning Experience
- No. 25 – Ways to Use Visuals for Learning
- No. 26 – Students' Locus of Control
- No. 27 – Help Students with Rigorous Writing Assignments
- No. 28 – Ways to Shake Up Your Teaching
- No. 29 – Teaching to Inspire
- No. 30 – Paths to Mindfulness

Back issues of *The Teaching Top 10* and *The Practical Professor* can be found here:

<http://gwcc.libguides.com/c.php?g=57736&p=709634>

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