

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty No. 6

The Top 10...

Components of a Well-Planned Class

Whether you have every class planned to the minute before the semester begins or you outline the semester but plan each class the night before, a good lesson plan should focus not simply on the material you want to *cover* but instead on constructing a learning *experience* for students for the duration of the class meeting. Here are the essential components of an intentional, student-centered learning experience.

- ✓ **Bridge-in.** You know your discipline and course content forwards and backwards with a great memory lesson sequencing, but your students do not. Bridge them into the current lesson by establishing context and reminding them of the material, discussions, or skills practice that they experienced during previous classes. You can also use this portion of the lesson to warm the class up the focus of the lesson in a real-world way that invests them immediately in the learning experience.
- ✓ **Objectives or outcomes.** We are often guilty of knowing what we want our students to learn or be able to do by the end of class but not sharing these goals with them, as if they were Dorothy and we were telling them to pay no attention to the wizard behind the curtain. Instead, share clear learning objectives or outcomes with students at the beginning of every class. This communicates a goal for the lesson and empowers students to monitor their own progress toward that goal.
- ✓ **Pre-assessment.** Using a brief class discussion, get a sense of how much your students already know (or think they know) about the focus of that day's class. Students may know more than you think, or they may have misconceptions, or they may lack skills or background knowledge that you presume they had. You can then refer to what students shared during the pre-assessment later in class to validate, correct, or involve what they already know.

- ✓ **Participatory learning.** Simply put, create a lesson that makes students as active and involved in their own learning experience as possible. When students *experience* content and *practice* skills, they remember that content and develop those skills. Breaking the class into small group discussions, giving students a task or a problem to work on, and asking students to write in class are all forms of participatory learning. If you tend to lecture or feel pressure to cover content from textbooks, consider the “flipped classroom” technique. Google it.
- ✓ **Post-assessment.** Did your students actually learn what you wanted them to learn? If you don’t ask immediately, you won’t find out until a formal assessment or graded assignment, which often arrive too late for you to gauge when the learning broke down and how you might address it. A quick post-assessment of learning can come in many forms, but what you’re assessing is simple: if the lesson had clear learning outcomes and objectives, simply ask students to demonstrate those outcomes. It’s as simple as that.
- ✓ **Summary.** Help them understand the experience they just had in your class and contextualize that experience in terms of what came before it and what will come next. Reminding students of what they have just learned can be powerfully effective in terms of lesson scaffolding, skills acquisition, and fostering metacognitive skills about the learning process. Summarizing the lesson brings an experience to a close and helps students to know what they know.

If you find these lesson plan components helpful or familiar, they are part of an active learning lesson plan model known as **BOPPPS**, an acronym for the six steps listed above. If you want to sound cool at teaching parties (or get invited to an active learning teaching party), we recommend using BOPPPS as a verb:

“Are you BOPPPSing yet?”

“I just BOPPPSed my class, and it went great!”

You’ve probably noticed that there are only six tips in this *The Teaching Top 10* installment. Whoops. We owe you four!