

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty No. 8

The Top 10...

Ways to Keep Your Students Learning

Sometimes we get on a roll and our excitement about our subject gets us talking, giving examples, explaining intricate points and making wonderful connections between different concepts. But are students learning? We are talking, but what are they doing? Try some of these ideas to help ensure that students are **learning**, not merely **listening**.

- ✓ **Who cares?** Ask students at the beginning of a lesson or module why they care about learning this? Be prepared to help them be clear and honest, but don't offer quickly – make them think. The more they think about what is in it for them, the more they are engaging in deeper thinking that increases the likelihood of their **learning**!
- ✓ **Quiet yourself!** Do not talk more than 12 minutes straight (10 is better). There is good research that the average person's attention waivers after 10 – 12 minutes, no matter how interesting the subject or speaker.
- ✓ **3 Questions!** Give students three questions related to the lesson that you plan to help them answer by lesson's end. Refer to the questions as you progress through the lesson. This can be a way of presenting "learning outcomes" for a lesson, without calling it "outcomes" (remember the BOPPPS lesson planning format?).
- ✓ **Stop and Don't Pop!** When you ask a question, give everyone time to think for a minute or two. This will seem like a long time, but you want to accomplish two things. First, some people do not think quickly, and this gives them time to come up with a question. Second, students drop into old habits. If they usually do not answer instructor questions, they simply wait for someone else to! Disengaged. Ask everyone – emphasize everyone – who has an answer to raise their hand, so you can change who gives the first answers.

- ✓ **2 Questions!** After students have studied something and before you have gone over it in class, ask them to work with 2-3 other students to identify 2 questions they have and hand them in to you. Putting them on separate index cards allows you to sort them in order.
- ✓ **Answer This!** As a variation on the one above, after teams develop their questions have them trade and answer **each other's questions**. Have teams report out – briefly – explaining the question and their answer.
- ✓ **Teach this!** Assign “buddy projects” – consider something like “a friend misses this lesson and asks you to explain _____, write down what you will tell him/her.” Have some groups of 2 share with the class as you gently critique. The more you do this, the better students will be at assessing how much they *really know* about new material (an important thinking skill).
- ✓ **What do you know?** Before automatically giving that PowerPoint or story to illustrate a concept, ask students to rate on a scale from 1 – 5 whether they think they understand (and hold up their hand as you call out numbers). If students think they understand, but you aren't so sure, give them a “buddy project” (as above, for example).
- ✓ **A picture is worth 1000 words!** Form student teams and have them create diagrams related to the lesson. Perhaps they can diagram key parts of a chapter, or how key concepts connect with each other, or simply diagram the components of a concept. The key is to make it visual!
- ✓ **Applications, applications!** Ask students to identify 3 ways they can *use* what is being covered in the lesson. Demonstrate how to do this and have them write applications multiple times as this is a difficult thinking skill.

BONUS!

- ✓ **What's important?** After they have read new material and before you have identified what you believe the most important points are, ask students to determine the 3 or 5 most important points in the lesson. You will have to do this regularly to help them practice. Perhaps add in a group activity where they share key points and their reasoning why something is important.