

Fifty Strategies to Improve Your Teaching

The following strategies should help you to

- create a welcoming atmosphere for students;
- set a positive tone for learning;
- engage the students actively;
- provide support for students, and show them where they can find support;
- encourage students to keep up and do well; and
- use your time efficiently and effectively.

Which of these ideas might be helpful in your teaching?

1. Come a few minutes early and engage students in conversation as they enter the classroom.
2. Introduce yourself and your teaching assistants by slide, short presentation, or self-introduction.
3. Start the semester and possibly each class period with some kind of introduction, ice-breaker, or check-in.
4. Share your philosophy of teaching with your students.
5. Let your students see the enthusiasm you have for your subject and your love of learning.
6. Make an effort to learn your students' names and get to know them personally.
7. Encourage your students to find a "buddy" with whom they can exchange email addresses and keep in touch about assignments and coursework.
8. Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times.
9. Include content, not just syllabus and "housekeeping" details, from the very first day of class.
10. Take attendance.
11. Explain why this course is necessary, important, and exciting; tell about your current research interests.
12. Tell students how much time they will need to study for the course.
13. Explain how to study for the kind of assessments you give, and what the expectations are for grading.
14. Move around the room to engage students and to discourage behavior such as chatting or newspaper reading.
15. Make eye contact with students. Choose a student, preferably by name, and alert him or her to be ready to answer the next question.
16. Start a lecture with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture, or cartoon on slide or transparency to focus on the day's topic.
17. Stage a figurative "coffee break" about twenty minutes into the period: tell a story, invite students to put down pens and pencils, refer to a current event.
18. Use variety in methods of presentation every class meeting: lecture, small group discussion, debate. Also, use multiple media during the class: overhead, videotape, audiotape, models, and/or sample material.
19. Stage a change-your-mind debate, with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal change in opinion during the discussion.
20. Conduct a role-play to make a point or to present issues.
21. Give students an opportunity to voice opinions about the subject matter.
22. Give your students time to answer questions; count slowly (and silently) to 10 after you pose a question before you rephrase it.
23. Invite students to ask questions and wait for other students to respond.
24. Ask follow-up questions to student responses and comments.
25. Make collaborative assignments for several students to work on together.
26. Have students apply the course subject matter to solve real problems.

27. Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class period (if at all possible).
28. Use the Clicker to engage students and gather information on whether they are understanding course content.
29. Set high expectations and be explicit about what they are.
30. Begin the class period with a quick summary about "last time"; end each class with a quick forecast of "next time" the class meets.
31. Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of the class and list these on the board to be answered during the hour.
32. Have students write down what they think the important issues or key points on the day's lecture will be (or were).
33. Give a pre-test (ungraded or self-graded) on the day's topic.
34. Try to incorporate student reading, writing, listening, and speaking in each class period.
35. Make learning goals explicit for each assignment; explain clearly what students are to do and how it fits into the course as a whole (and at the very least, make sure all of this is explicit in your mind).
36. Take a few minutes to allow students to freewrite on the day's reading or to explain it to one another.
37. Give students plenty of opportunity for practice before a major test.
38. Give a test early in the semester and return it graded by the next class meeting if at all possible.
39. Collect students' current telephone (particularly cell phone) numbers and let them know that you may need to reach them.
40. Be aware of students who are frequently absent. Call or email the student to express your concern.
41. Diagnose the students' pre-requisite learning by a questionnaire or pre-test and give them the feedback as soon as possible.
42. Repeat yourself—students should hear, read, or see key material at least three times.
43. Provide structure for visually oriented students by posting the day's "menu" on board, overhead, or screen.
44. Use multiple examples to illustrate key points and important concepts.
45. Be available to students before or after class and join their conversation about course topics.
46. Use community resources in your teaching: plays, concerts, government agencies, businesses, professional contacts, or the outdoors.
47. Solicit suggestions from students for outside resources and guest speakers on course topics.
48. Tell students when you will check email (two or three times per day, perhaps less?) and your timeframe for returning student messages.
49. Keep a course diary—brief notes on a calendar or a copy of the course syllabus about what worked well on a particular day, so you can plan to do the same thing next time.
50. Gather student feedback in the first few weeks of the semester to improve teaching and learning.

And one bonus one:

51. Participate in PETAL activities and/or visit the PETAL office to talk about your teaching, share ideas, or explore the resources on teaching and learning in the PETAL collection.

Adapted from "101 Ideas for a Great Start" from the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Iowa State University (<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/101ideas.html>)