



**The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning
Brown University**

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Tips for Teaching Large Classes

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Successful learning experiences in large classes are dependent upon good planning, effective monitoring, inclusive teaching, appropriate assessment, and active engagement by professors and students. Here are some tips for professors teaching large classes:

1. Planning

- Provide a clear syllabus for students, including course learning goals and objectives, student participation expectations, assessment criteria, readings/textbook information, course policies, office hours and contact information.
- If you will be using MyCourses or a wiki, test all pages, content, links, etc before classes start. Try to organize your pages so that information is clearly organized and readily accessible.
- Familiarize yourself with your classroom in advance, if you have not taught in this venue before. This is especially important if you will be using the technology in the room.

2. Teaching

- Have students provide you with some information about themselves at the first lecture (you can hand out a short questionnaire). Alternatively, you can have them post something in MyCourses. This can provide you with some information about their background (whether you are interested in what courses they've taken before; what their concentration is/what they plan to concentrate in; what countries/states are represented in your class; or what they think this course is about). You don't need to read through all of them, but you can make some general comments about the responses to create connections with the class at the next lecture, to let students know that you've taken the time to look through their responses.
- Introduce key learning goals for each class at the beginning. If you are picking up from where you left off last time, then start by reminding students of the main points from the last class, and where you will be going next. In other words, provide them with a "map" of where they've been, where they are now, and where they are about to go.
- Consider integrating different teaching approaches to allow students to engage in different modes of learning. Examples:
 - You can start the lecture by posing a key question and asking students to pair-share their ideas for 3- 5 min. Following this, you can either ask for pairs to share their responses/ideas with the rest of the class, or you can use clickers to poll the class. (For further discussion on clickers, see the Sheridan Center's "**Tips on Best Practice Use of Clickers**").
 - For science classes, if possible, demonstrations can be a way to actively engage students in analytical thinking or to apply their understanding to predict outcomes. You can either ask students to pair-share to discuss what they think will happen prior to conducting the demonstration, or to analyze what happened after the demonstration takes place.
 - If you use videos or animations in your presentation, don't let the students sit passively while the video is playing. Think of key points at which you can pause the video to ask questions, or to reiterate important concepts. This strategy can also help to identify or prevent misconceptions.
 - Case studies can also be a powerful way to get students to apply what they've learned to a real-life situation, or to analyze a situation. They can be presented in different ways: i) incrementally over several lectures, so that students have an opportunity to consider and research additional information between classes; or ii) as an in-class activity where students can pair-share or divide into groups to consider



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the case, share what they know/what they need to know further, and work collaboratively on the case.

- Role play can sometimes be an engaging way to examine several perspectives on an issue, or to present a challenging problem. It is preferable for the teacher to have had some experience in setting up role play scenarios, or has really taken the time to prepare them thoroughly. In particular, the relevance of the role play exercise to the learning objectives should be made very clear to the students beforehand, and also should be reviewed afterwards.
- Keep your own notes on what approaches have worked well, or what areas of the course students have difficulty with. These can be helpful for you the next time you teach the course.
- Don't focus only on content. Prompt students to think about their thinking. For example, if the majority of students had difficulty with a mid-term exam question, at the next class, put the question up on the board/screen, and ask them what concept/theory/principle/etc they thought the question was about. Alternatively, if you think it may be intimidating for students to speak up in a large class, you can use clickers or have them email you/post to MyCourses. This encourages students to think about their process of analytical thinking, or the way in which they approach problems (as opposed to thinking about content). This also gives you insight into what their thinking processes are, and how you might help to model the "critical thinking" you want them to be developing.
- If you use handouts, provide spaces for students to jot their own annotations. Don't use handouts as a substitute for your lectures- they should complement your lesson.
- Many students don't know how to take notes effectively. Note-taking during lecture should not be a "mind dump" of everything that comes out of the professor's mouth. Try to encourage effective note-taking and study habits in your students. There are some excellent resources for note-taking/studying:

http://www.ulc.psu.edu/studyskills/note_taking.html