



- **What are my students like**, with respect to:
 - motivation for taking this course?
 - expectations of the course, the faculty, the way the course will be taught, workload?
 - interest in the subject?
 - background, prior learning experiences, familiarity with college?
 - confidence in their ability to do well in the course, learning strategies?
 - prior knowledge of the subject matter?

- **Why do students need to learn this material?** What purpose(s) should this particular class fulfill for students? How does the course fit within the major, liberal arts focus? How will this course prepare students for post-graduate careers and/or work? What skills, competencies will the students gain?

For example, learning to apply, to integrate (integrate classroom learning with community life), learning about themselves and others, learning how to learn.

- **How will my students need to use the information** given in this class on assignments, tests and exams? What will students be asked to demonstrate in their coursework? How might students draw on this information postgraduate?
- **How will I help the students prepare out-of-class** for in-class activities, help them help them come to class having completed the readings?

Suggestion: Assign students guiding questions for the readings and ask them to come to class with written responses to the guiding questions. This guided reading exercise helps students identify main themes, concepts, topic areas and begin to read critically. Also, as students have concrete writing to refer to, they may feel more comfortable contributing to the in-class discussion. You may ask students to explore two questions and a talking point that were raised for them in the assigned readings and present these to their peers during the next class.

Suggestion: "4-square" is a writing-to-learn activity designed to help the students synthesize their thoughts about the assigned readings before class and to help prepare them for in-class discussion or small group work. Four questions are addressed: (1) What did you find to be the most interesting component of the text? (2) What did you find most confusing? (3) How does this content connect to other courses you have taken and/or knowledge that you have acquired? (4) How does this text connect with your own experiences? What aspects of the text are personally meaningful to you? How?

- **How can I best let students know how the day's class will be structured** and alert them to key points and transitions during the class?

Suggestion: Put a brief outline, no more than 4 or 5 lines, of the day's major topics on the board, slide, or handout. This will act as an "**advance organizer**" for students, alerting them to what to expect and what to consider important during the class. As experts, we know exactly how the content evolves.

- **How can I best let students know how the day's class will be structured** and alert them to key points and transitions during the class? cont.

Sharing our organization with the students (to whom it may be less obvious) communicates that we care about their learning and also helps them structure their own thinking by making the content clear. Refer back to the outline periodically to remind them where they've been, where they are, and where they are going.

- **How can I begin the class** so that students will be interested in the information that I will be giving?

Suggestion: Start class with a "hook," that is, put on the board, handout, or slide a problem, issue, case, etc. that embodies the concepts to be addressed in the day's class. Show a video clip, interview, comic that relates to the topic and provide guiding questions that students can use to make a connection between the example and the topic. Tell a story, show a real problem that connects with the content.

Periodically remind students that they will use the course information to begin to solve/analyze/discuss problems and integrate this analysis and/or application into the class on a regular basis. Doing this helps students understand why they are learning this particular material and they see and experience its application.

- **What four or five main points do I want the students to learn** in this class?
- **What concrete examples / stories** can I provide to illustrate these main points? Can I start by giving an example that my students can relate to their own experiences? How might I invite students to contribute their own examples?
- **How can I vary the pace and teaching modality** of the class? Can I break it into segments to keep students' attention? How might I incorporate students' working with each other? Keep in mind that the adult attention span is between 15 – 20 minutes.

Suggestion: Try to vary your location in class—walk around, come out from behind the desk, circulate among the students. Convey the material in multiple ways, such as oral, written, graphic, pictorial, digital, to engage learners. Engage students in individual writing, pairwork, small group work, presentations, or discussions.

After you've asked a question or posed a problem, and particularly when there is no response after several seconds, ask the students to turn to the person next to him or her and discuss a possible answer with that individual. You might ask them to write down their answer. Once they have received moral support from another student, they are much more willing to volunteer. If they don't, you can call on them to read what they have discussed or written, which is much less intimidating than being called on "cold."

The optimal time to wait after asking a question is 10 seconds or even longer. The average time that most of us wait tends to be close to 1.5 seconds. Waiting allows students to collect their thoughts before answering. If we have been lecturing, and they have been in "passive" mode, they need time to change the channel to "active" mode.

Rather than asking "Are there any questions?" try changing the syntax to ask "What are your questions?" or "What questions do you have?" The latter wording conveys the implicit assumption that students have questions and we are interested in hearing them. Keep in mind that traditional college-age students tend to be concerned about looking foolish in front of their peers.

- **How might I model** thinking, problem solving, interpretation, and/or evaluation processes for students, rather than merely presenting the conclusions of those processes?
- **How can I get feedback from my students** about their learning experience during the class?

Suggestion: Check on what students have understood by asking them to take out a piece of paper and write their answers to two questions: (1) What are the most important points you've learned in the last 15 minutes (half hour, 45 minutes, etc.), and (2) What points are still unclear? (often referred to as "One-minute paper.") You can ask them to hand the papers in, or alternatively, ask them to exchange papers with a few people and then call on several to read what is on the paper that they have. This gives you instant feedback about whether they have learned what you had intended. It also gives them the same feedback. If most of them seem to have learned the material, you can move on. If not, you and they have a chance to revisit and clarify the material immediately.

- **How will I know if and when students have learned** what I intend for them to learn?

Occasionally give students a "quick application exercise" related to material that you have been addressing. Research suggests that students retain information and concepts better when they have an opportunity to apply them immediately. This application can take the form of a multiple-choice question (especially if some of your tests have multiple-choice items), a problem to begin solving, or a more complex question to begin addressing. ("What might be the first step you would take...?") Give them a couple of minutes to complete the exercise and then ask for a few volunteers. These applications can also be made similar to the types of exam questions that students will encounter in your course. Students always appreciate the opportunity to gain practice ahead of time responding to such questions, and they often do better on exams as a result.

In the last few minutes of each class, have a student (picked at random) summarize each day's main points. A final review is good for all the students, and they are apt to pay more attention if they think they might be called on to be the day's "summarizer."

Based on materials developed by Carol A. Weiss, Ph.D., Director Emerita, VITAL, Villanova University, program session materials from the 2016 Lilly Conference on Learning and Teaching, Bethesda, MD. January 2017, *Small Teaching* by J. Lang, 2016, and *Engaged Teaching* by E. Barkley & C. Howell Major, 2022.

Contact: Gabriele Bauer, Director, VITAL, 106 Vasey Hall: 610-519-5627; gabriele.bauer@villanova.edu
vital.villanova.edu