



Foundations of Teaching in the Social Sciences

Fall 2015

Week 1, August 26, 3:30-4:45 (Notre Dame Room, LaFortune)

- Understanding your role, communicating expectations, and preparing for the first day of class

Week 2, September 2, 3:30-4:45 (Montgomery Auditorium, LaFortune)

- Preparing, structuring, and facilitating discussion sections and presentations

Week 3, September 9, 3:30-4:45 (Montgomery Auditorium, LaFortune)

- Grading and responding to student work

Week 4, September 16, 3:30-4:45 (Notre Dame Room, LaFortune)

- Teaching for critical thinking

Each workshop attended counts toward your "Striving for Excellence in Teaching" or "Advanced Teaching Scholar" Kaneb Center certificate

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Week 2 Outline:

- Welcome and introductions
- Structuring class time
- Crafting a mini-lecture
- Facilitating discussion
- Public speaking
- This week in teaching
- Wrap up

Templates for Discussion Sections

Sample Template 1

1. Begin by recapping previous class, summarizing main points and/or asking for any questions that might be lingering.
2. Introduce material for latest text. Pause in the middle for a joke. Continue lecturing.
3. Have students discuss in small groups.
4. End with a few minutes to take questions and preview what's coming next.

Sample Template 2

1. Begin with an activity that gets students to review new material from class with each other and discuss major themes.
2. Have students present their findings.
3. End with an ungraded quiz to test for understanding.

Sample Template 3

1. Begin with a quiz on previous material.
2. Discuss new material.
3. End new material by having each student write a quiz that he/she thinks reflects the main points of the day's class, and compile these to make an entry-quiz for the next week.

Sample Template 4

1. Begin with a quiz on new material.
2. Break students into discussion groups with assigned questions. While they work, look over quiz answers to identify topics that are difficult for students. After going over any issues with the quizzes, clarify/discuss these topics.
3. End by having the students write quizzes that they think reflect the main points of the day's material.

Sample Template 5

1. Have students email you questions by some deadline before the section.
2. Ask students to work in small groups to tackle the list of questions you've compiled.
3. Reconvene to find out which questions are still outstanding, and discuss those as a big group. Have groups that answered questions successfully present their solutions.
4. Summarize your own impressions of the overarching themes/topics people are struggling with. Try to provide some big-picture insights, if you have any, that might help contextualize the kinds of questions students find difficult.

Sample Template 6

1. Have a list of various topics on the board. As students enter, have them put a check by the ones they're most interested in discussing.
2. Discuss the material, prioritizing the most popular topics.
3. Jigsaw Method: Share three questions related to the most popular topics and have students form "expert" groups that will each specialize in answering one of the three questions. Ask these groups to confirm/flesh out answers to their question. Reorganize students into groups of three so that there is an expert for each question in each group. Ask students to talk about answers to all three questions.
4. End by reconvening as a class to summarize main points from the activity.

Friday “Break Out” Session Preparation Case Study

Please read the following case study paying special attention to how the TA’s preparations impact her leading of her Friday “Break Out” section.

Thursday evening, 8:00pm

After a quick dinner, Susie sits down to work on her Friday “Break Out” session. In that session, she will have one hour to help thirty students discuss and evaluate an important primary text from her field. Her students are expected to come to the session having read the text and being prepared to discuss it. Susie already re-read the primary text the day before, so it is fresh on her mind. Uncertain where to begin, Susie opens up a dictionary article that covers her text and begins reading and taking notes. After about 45 minutes, Susie has read the whole article and taken copious notes.

Since she wants to be as thorough as possible, she then decides to skim the article’s bibliography for more “relevant” secondary material. For the next 30 minutes, Susie hunts around the internet for various secondary material, downloading PDFs and saving them to a file folder. Then she begins reading through these PDFs one at a time, once more taking notes. At the end of the third article, Susie encounters another lengthy bibliography containing many sources she has not yet considered. Suddenly a feeling of panic begins to set in, and Susie tries to read faster. After another 40 minutes of furious reading and note taking, it is after 10pm; and Susie is starting to fall asleep.

Since (she believes that) it is an emergency, Susie makes herself some coffee and popcorn and begins another round. First she rereads her notes from the evening. They are very detailed but unorganized. At 11:00pm, she has a spark of brilliance; “I know,” she says to herself, “I should find some key passages to read from the primary text and link these with insightful comments from my notes.” With a highlighter in hand, Susie commences a re-reading of her primary text. Over the next hour, Susie highlights fifteen “essential” passages and begins connecting these to comments from her notes. She begins to type out a document of quotes and comments that balloons to twenty-three pages. At 1:30am, Susie falls asleep at her laptop.

Friday morning 6:45am

Susie wakes up late, takes a five-minute shower, eats a piece of fruit and drinks a cup of coffee, prints out her “lecture notes” and runs to her 7:30am Break Out session. Susie greets her groggy students with a cheerful smile and welcome. At 7:31, she promptly begins reading her notes. For some reason they do not seem as coherent in the morning as they did the night before; but she must plod onward. Every few minutes she glances up at her students; some are staring at her blankly, a few are looking at their smartphones, and three have fallen asleep. After twenty minutes, Susie disparees and changed tactics: “OK, that’s enough introduction. What did you think of the reading?” After a chilling ten seconds of silence, one student raises his hand to Susie’s relief. Ryan, the willing student, then begins his own monologue of ten minutes. Susie is too embarrassed to cut him off. When he stops talking, no one else seems interested in speaking. Susie tries to think of questions to ask, and then reads from her notes again until 8:30 finally arrives. All of the students, save Ryan, leave quickly without saying a word.

Possible topics and tricks for smoother discussion sections

BEFORE

- Use your policy sheet to make expectations clear.
- Get to know your students and vice-versa. Learn their names as soon as possible.
- Arrange the desks/tables in a circle.
- Have students submit questions in advance, or distribute your own questions in advance.

DURING

- Periodically note major points and ideas on board.
- Use discussion plus other strategies (we'll talk about these in week 4).
- Call on quiet students.
- Show respect for your students' viewpoints.
- Don't be afraid of silence. If you ask a question, count to 10 before talking again. Then try rephrasing it. Then put the question on the board and try a 1-minute freewrite.

AFTER

- You may ask students to rotate taking notes during discussions and posting them to Sakai or wherever after each session.
- Learn from each discussion group--would you do anything differently next time?

10 Common Mistakes to Avoid

From The Teaching Center, Washington University in St. Louis

1. Talking too much; answering your own questions or asking more than one question at once.
2. Asking too many questions that are "closed," or have only one correct answer.
3. Letting the discussion become a one-on-one conversation or debate with one student.
4. Attempting to lead a class-wide discussion in a large class (greater than 40 students).
5. Letting a small number of talkative students dominate the discussion.
6. Assuming that quiet students do not have questions or comments.
7. Assuming that students are able to discern, remember, and understand the most important ideas generated in the discussion.
8. Expecting students who are new to a topic to discuss it at the same level as students who have already studied the topic in depth or who are intellectually more mature.
9. Failing to redirect students back to the ideas at hand when the discussion strays off topic.
10. Asking a student to speak for or represent a group of people, especially if that group is in the minority in the class or at the University.

Some suggestions for delivering a lecture

Adapted from The University College of Dublin's Teaching and Learning Center

Connecting with the audience

- Develop an opening that captures attention
- Engage students with active learning exercises
- Talk to individuals
- Get agreement
- Encourage students to ask questions
- Use students' names (when possible)

Delivery

- Speak clearly
- Don't rush, or talk deliberately slowly
- Use deliberate pauses at key points
- Change the tone of delivery
- Use hand gestures to number points, introduce topics, transition
- Exhibit enthusiasm about the topic
- Project your voice or use a microphone if necessary
- Use a variety of audiovisual media
- Inject the presentation (or materials) with humor

Non-verbal cues

- Spread eye contact around the room
- Smile
- Move out from behind the podium
- Be confident in your delivery and interaction
- Respond to students' reactions, and adjust and adapt accordingly
- Keep an eye on the audience's body language

Things to avoid

- Reading from a prepared script (when possible)
- Standing in a position where you obscure the screen
- Getting lost in an overhead
- Excesses (of movement, enthusiasm, hand gestures etc)
- Repetitive words or phrases that may become distracting
- The use of fillers (such as "um," "er," or "you know")
- Overuse of PowerPoint

-Design Your Class Outline Here-

Beginning

Middle

End