

A 'Random' List of Suggestions for Teaching More Effectively

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Syllabi should be explicit and attempt to remove ambiguities about a variety of matters, especially how a student's grade is determined. Guidelines for assignments should be provided in the syllabus and if necessary, more detailed guidelines can be provided well before the assignment is due. Rubrics are usually helpful, as are well-regarded sample papers from previous students.

An important part of teaching is to figure out how to reach students. For example, if a physician is perfectly knowledgeable about his or her field but refuses to figure out how best to communicate this knowledge to patients then the physician is, by my definition, not performing his or her job well to the extent patients aren't following recommendations to improve their health. The same is true for faculty. Blaming students for not "wanting" to learn, while sometimes true at a certain level of analysis, gets you nowhere toward educating the student. It's our job to at least *attempt* to figure out how best to motivate the student.

In many instances it is more important to turn students on to a particular way of thinking rather than acquiring a specific body of knowledge. Yes, I would be embarrassed if students left my social psychology class and couldn't recall our discussion of Milgram's Obedience to Authority studies but I still think it's more important for them to remember that social psychology focuses on the *Power of the Situation* since that recognition has enormous application to the explanation of behavior in general.

Relatedly, I think it's better to cover less ground more thoroughly than more ground superficially, if that's the tradeoff. On the other hand, I recognize that in some disciplines a certain level of knowledge is necessary in order to pass a standardized test or move onto more sophisticated work that is dependent on knowledge acquired in a foundational course.

Any extra credit work should be explicitly connected to course material. After all, one of your obligations is to deliver a grade for each student that presumably estimates how much of a particular subject matter that student knows. If extra credit is given for work unrelated to the course, the grade is not a valid indication of what a student knows about a particular subject matter.

Never accuse a student of cheating or plagiarizing without convincing proof and you should probably discuss the matter with your chair before moving forward.

Show up before your class is scheduled to begin, begin on time, and end on time. You can't expect your students to arrive on time if you arrive late and I'm sure the instructor students have after your class will appreciate their being given enough time to get to their class on time.

Be dedicated to treating people fairly and inclusively. Avoid defensiveness in pursuit of authority since it undermines rather than enhances authority.