101 Things to Do the First Three Weeks

Helping Students Make Transitions

1. Hit the ground running on day one with substantial content.
2. Take attendance.
3. Introduce teaching assistants.
4. Hand out an informative, user-friendly syllabus.
5. Give an assignment day one to be collected at the next meeting.
6. Start lab experiments and other exercises the first time lab meets.
7. Call attention to what makes a good discussion, lab practice, successful interactive lecture, etc.
8. Give a learning style inventory to help students find out about the way they learn best.
9. Direct students to Academic Learning Services (free Math/ Writing labs-346-3226) for help on basic skills.
10. Tell students how much time they will need to study for this course.
11. Hand out supplemental study aids: library use, study tips, supplemental readings and exercises.
12. Explain how to study for the kind of tests you give.
13. Put ground rules in writing regarding absence, late work, testing procedures, grading, and general decorum, and maintain these.
14. Announce office hours frequently and hold them without fail.
15. Suggest ways to handle learning in large classes and impersonal situations.
17. Give sample test question answers.
18. Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty; be clear when collaboration is wanted and when it is forbidden.

---

Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty; be clear when collaboration is wanted and when it is forbidden.

---

19. Seek out a different student each day and get to know something about him or her.
20. Ask students to write about what important things are currently going on in their lives.
21. Find out about students’ jobs; how many hours a week they work, and what kind of jobs they hold.

---

Directing Students’ Attention

22. Greet students at the door when they enter.
23. Start the class on time.
24. Begin large lecture classes crisply with focus and content.
25. Give a pre-test on the day’s topic.
26. Start the lecture with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture, cartoon or slide to focus on the day’s topic and hook student interest.
27. Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of the class and list these on the chalkboard to be answered during the hour.
28. Have students write down what they think the important issues/key points of the day’s lecture will be. Ask some students to read these.
29. Ask the person who is reading the student newspaper what is in the news today.

---

Challenging Students

30. Have students write out their expectations for the course and their own goals for learning.
31. Use variety in methods of presentation.
32. Stage a figurative “coffee break” about fifteen to twenty minutes into the hour; tell an anecdote, invite students to put down pens and pencils, refer to a current event, shift media.
33. Incorporate community resources into your presentations: plays, concerts, government agencies, businesses, the outdoors.
34. Show a film in a novel way: stop it for discussion, show a few frames only, anticipate the ending, hand out a viewing or critique sheet, play and replay parts.
35. Share your philosophy of teaching with students.
36. Form a student panel to present alternative views of the same concept.
37. Stage a change-your-mind debate, with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal
38. Conduct a “living” demographic survey by having students move to different parts of the classroom: size of high school, rural vs. urban, consumer preferences.
39. Tell about your current research interests and how you got there from your own beginnings in the field.
40. Do a roleplay to make a point or lay out issues.
41. Let your students assume the role of professional in the discipline: philosopher, literary critic, biologist, agronomist, political scientist, engineer.
42. Conduct idea-generating brainstorming sessions to expand horizons.
43. Give students two passages of material containing alternative views to compare and contrast.
44. Distribute a list of the unsolved problems, dilemmas, or great questions in your discipline and invite students to claim one as their own to investigate.
45. Ask students what books they read over winter break.
46. Ask students what is going on in the state legislature on this subject which may affect their future.
47. Let your students see the enthusiasm you have for your subject and your love of learning.
48. Take students with you to hear guest speakers or special programs on campus.
49. Plan a “scholar-gypsy” lesson or unit which shows students the excitement of discovery in your discipline.

Providing Support
50. Collect students’ current telephone numbers and email addresses and let them know that you may need to reach them.
51. Check out absentees. Call or write a personal note.
52. Diagnose the students’ prerequisite learning by a questionnaire or pre-test and give them feedback as soon as possible.
53. Hand out study questions or study guides.
54. Be redundant. Students should hear, read, or see key material at least three times.

Be redundant. Students should hear, read, or see key material at least three times.

55. Allow students to demonstrate progress in learning: summary quiz over the day’s work, a written reaction to the day’s material.
56. Use non-graded feedback to let students know how they are doing: post answers to ungraded quizzes, problem sets, and exercises in class.
57. Reward behavior you want: use praise or a personal note.
58. Use a light touch: smile, tell a good joke, break test anxiety with a sympathetic comment.
59. Organize. Give visible structure by posting the day’s “menu” on chalkboard or overhead.
60. Use multimedia: overheads, slides, films, videotapes, audiotapes, models, sample materials, poetry and music.
61. Use multiple examples, in multimedia, to illustrate key points and important concepts.
62. Make appointments with all students (individually/small groups).
63. Hand out business cards with important phone numbers: office, department, resource centers, teaching assistant, lab.
64. Print all important course dates on a card that can be handed out and taped to a mirror.
65. Eavesdrop on students before or after class and join their conversation about course topics.
66. Maintain an open lab gradebook, with grades kept current, during lab time so students can check their progress.
67. Refer students to Academic Learning Services to see if they qualify for extra academic and personal support.
68. Tell students what they need to do to receive an “A” in your course.
69. Stop once in a while to find out what students are thinking, feeling, and doing in their everyday lives.

Encouraging Active Learning
70. Have students write something.
71. Have students keep journals in which they comment, ask and answer questions about course topics.
72. Invite students to critique each other’s essays or short answers on tests for readability or content.
73. Invite students to ask questions and really wait for their responses.
74. Probe students responses to questions and their comments.
75. Put students into pairs to quiz each other over material.
76. Give students an opportunity to voice their opinions.

82. Do oral, show-of-hands, multiple choice tests for summary, review, and instant feedback.
83. Use task groups to accomplish specific objectives.
84. Grade quizzes/exercises in class as a learning tool.
85. Give students plenty of opportunity for practice before a major test.
86. Give a test early in the semester and return it graded in the next class meeting.
87. Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class period.
88. Make collaborative assignments for several students to work on together.
89. Assign written paraphrases and summaries of difficult reading.
90. Give students a take-home problem relating to the day’s lecture.
91. Encourage students to bring current news items to class which relate to the subject matter and post these on a bulletin board nearby.

Building Community

92. Learn names. Everyday make an effort to learn at least a few names. Encourage students to do this.
93. Set up a buddy system so students can contact each other about assignments and coursework.
94. Find out about your students via questions on an index card.
95. Take pictures of students and post in your classroom, office or lab. You can also make a videotape of your students introducing themselves. Ask TEP about this.
96. Arrange helping trios of students to assist each other in learning and growing.
97. Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times during the period.
**Feedback on Teaching**

101. Gather student feedback in the first three to four weeks of the semester to improve teaching and learning. Contact the Teaching Effectiveness Program about the MAT, the new Student-Centered MAT or class interviews – 346-2177, gcooper@oregon.uoregon.edu.

"Thinking is the Greatest Pleasure."

Lousie Bishop, adjunct professor, English, Clark Honors College, received the 1993 Hersted Teaching Award. This year we decided to expand our website and offer a component called "Spotlight on Good Teaching." These interviews will be part of that new webpage. To this end, Sara Erikson, TEP's graduate teaching fellow, interviewed Louise last fall to uncover some of the secrets of her success.

How do you motivate undergraduates to read and prepare for your class?

I’m of two minds on this issue. On the one hand, I encourage a “need to know” by pointing out the importance of what a literature class provides. All my classes strive to explain the power of literary study. We work towards understanding that texts/poems, plays, letters, diaries affect us profoundly; that these texts didn’t spring forth unaffected by social-historical and political-concerns; and that our success as citizens depends on the critique we bring to reading the texts that surround us. We are made of language, down to our most cherished assumptions about ourselves, and to live in ignorance of our imaginative framework can—and does—lead to disaster. Thinking about how texts work—how imagery comes to “mean,” why a text would be replicated, who’s making and remaking our stories—alerts students to their own literary assumptions and their dependence on imaginative paradigms of the past. Their ability to analyze the texts that surround them will follow them for their entire lives. And I want students to know that their contribution to the process counts.

On the other hand, I think the consumer model of education, where students are customers and professors, employees—a model that encourages a kind of “serve me” attitude on the part of students—neglects the age-old truth of teaching, whether the teacher is rabbi, swami, professor, ornaître: our desire to learn comes from ourselves, and the engendering of that desire rests with the student.

To what degree are your lessons planned, and to what degree are they spontaneous?

For each class, I have one “big idea,” such as (in a Shakespeare class) the way Hamlet’s individual instability is mirrored in Denmark’s political instability. I also have a number of subthemes; in the Hamlet example, I have three ways to look at the instability—reflecting Elizabethan politics, challenging generic constraints, fabricating individuality—and an opinion about how the idea of instability provides a way to look at the whole play.

After setting up the “big idea,” I lob the ball into the students’ court, and let class discussion prompt where further investigation serves the class. I’ll usually try to turn discussion back to the “big idea,” seeing how it’s playing out in these other ways, providing a kind of superstructure to the class’s activities. I do have some clue where discussion will head in courses I’ve taught previously, and those three subthemes usually make it to the floor. But there’s always room for a different tack in assessing a play as complex as “Hamlet.”

Why is discussion valuable in undergraduate courses?

What are its limitations?

Discussion makes for peer testing of ideas. I don’t cotton to the model that I’m simply pouring information
into my students’ heads and, as I mentioned above, I also think students must motivate themselves. Discussion provides the arena for more than “pouring” to go on, and for motivation to pay off in a tangible way, making opinion and evidence very real for the student. College education should excite students about the life of the mind, should help them discover that “thinking is the greatest pleasure” (Goethe), while they must also learn to express themselves effectively in writing. Discussion isn’t everything, but it does authorize students’ voices. The twin concerns of trying to keep a few voices from dominating discussion and getting just about everyone to participate are the greatest challenges, I think.

What, about your teaching style, seems to work well for your students?

First, I think the seriousness with which I treat the subject of literature makes an impression. I think that my respect for students’ opinions, making the classroom an open forum, also inspires constructive thought. I think that the importance I place on writing—both the time spent in solitary composition and the time spent in peer review—serves students well both now and in their futures. And I think having a good sense of humor makes a difference.

How would your students describe you?

Well, I think they’d describe me as energetic, committed, intelligent, approachable, occasionally daring, and at all times rigorous, but fair. And as someone with a sense of humor!

What new abilities or kinds of knowledge do you want your students to take away from your class?

I want students to be more alert readers, no matter what it is they’re reading. Being alert to nuance, subtlety, paradox, evidence—here success in any number of arenas depends on their sensitivity to the effect and power of written discourse. I also want them to know how much effort goes into good writing, and how writing reflects thinking and reflects them. I’d also want them to have felt the joy of thinking historically about literature, and to bring that joy to their continued reading.

What kinds of technology do you enjoy using in your teaching? What are the limitations of technology in teaching?

An e-mail conversation with a student provides another “teaching moment,” a kind of private tutelage, that is easy to miss in larger classes. I also like e-mail lists, providing a quick way to correspond with an entire class. I’ve been experimenting with Medet conference sites, but until computer access is easy for everyone, technology will separate the haves from the have-nots, and class will suffer from class distinctions.

As a woman, do you have a special role to play in mentoring and encouraging other women in academia?

I think it’s vital for women to mentor women, to inspire our women students in what is still in many ways a male preserve. The way discourse strategies are gendered in the classroom—argument is masculine, support feminine—discourages the kind of experimentation and freedom that powerful thinking needs. To nurture the next generation of feminist scholars, we need to reiterate continually how vital feminism is to the success of scholarly and humane enterprises.

How do you think your perspective as a feminist scholar influences your teaching?

I think feminism, as a dynamic process, encourages me to keep up with current scholarship, and that’s a great help in the classroom. I’m alert to the way classroom culture authorizes masculine, rather than feminine,
voices, and try to avoid the subtle trap of letting the classroom become an arena for male voices. I use feminist critique in my own textual evaluations, and encourage student projects that explore feminist literary criticism. As a feminist I'm also looking for ways to sponsor collaboration and cooperation in the classroom. Frankly, in this day and age with people like Rush Limbaugh on the radio, I think it's important to use the word "feminism" as often as possible in order to meet head-on the anger conservative forces use to stifle the necessary critique of sexism. By using the word I can demystify it and also engage students in what is an intellectually invigorating and immensely productive field of intellectual inquiry.

Student comment on Louise Bishop

I would describe Professor Bishop as enthusiastic and dedicated. She has a boundless supply of positive energy dedicated to her field. My favorite part of her teaching is that she takes time to understand her students as people.

Each class is an in-depth discussion where we add to our own learning experience. She listens to what we have to say and takes time to reflect upon our ideas.

Frankly, in this day and age with people like Rush Limbaugh on the radio, I think it's important to use the word "feminism" as often as possible in order to meet head-on the anger conservative forces use to stifle the necessary critique of sexism.

What Should I Do if I Think a Student is Cheating?

"Did he cheat or didn't he?... Doesn't she realize this is plagiarism?... They always sit together during tests and their scores don't match their other grades...."

If you have not yet had nervous thoughts like these, don't worry—you may. Academic dishonesty is more wide-spread than most of us would like to believe, and though it lands on the classroom teacher to be the front-line for dealing with these issues, there are clear steps you can follow to make the process less difficult and legal. The following steps are taken from "Student Academic Integrity," a brochure distributed by the Dean of Student Life. Bracketed [ ] comments are made by TEP staff. If you suspect a student of academic dishonesty:

1) Call the Student Conduct Coordinator, 6-1141, to ascertain if there are previous incidents involving the same student. Notify your department head or dean about the incident. [This first step is crucial. During this conversation you can get advice about how best to handle the situation.]

2) Talk to the student as soon as possible. If requested, students have the right to be accompanied by an adviser or counselor before or while discussing this matter with you. The ASU Office of Student Advocacy (Room 334 EMU, 6-3722) will provide a student with free representation. [Though you may inform them of this right, if you choose, it is not your responsibility to arrange counsel for them.]

3) Inform the student of your reasons for believing he or she has cheated or plagiarized, and listen to the student's explanation of the incident.

4) Inform the student that instructors can refer the case directly to the Student Conduct Coordinator.

5) If the student admits the academic dishonesty, you may impose, within the context of the course in which the incident originated, an appropriate academic sanction up to and including an NP
It’s a BAD idea

by an anonymous student

I’d like to talk about an issue that has recently come to the forefront in my life, and an issue that I never thought I would find myself involved in—academic dishonesty. It has become a greater and greater problem at the university in recent years. According to the Student Conduct Code, academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to university faculty or staff.

I was caught turning in a field trip journal in Bio 307 for a field trip that I didn’t attend. A few students that I talked to didn’t consider this “cheating,” but nevertheless I was receiving credit for work I didn’t do. I think that’s the best definition of this infraction, and I think it’s important to have a clear picture of what this offense involves.

Not thinking about it is exactly how I got myself in trouble. I had accidentally missed the trip and decided to turn in the journal anyway as a last-ditch effort to remedy my problem.

Not only did I only make the problem worse, I also caused a lot of trouble for Professor Dickman, whom I like and respect. I was also disrespectful to my classmates who had attended the field trip. The truth about academic dishonesty is that it doesn’t ever just affect the person who does the cheating, plagiarizing or lying. But like most students who have done this kind of thing, I didn’t take the time to reflect about the consequences of my actions.

The incidence of academic dishonesty cases has been steadily increasing over the past twenty years at the UO, from less than 20 cases per year to the almost 100 cases reported last year. It seems likely that students are unaware of the implications of such acts. The Student Conduct Code does not provide specific maximum sanctions for academic dishonesty. Instead, any listed sanction may be chosen by the professor as an appropriate solution, and these range from a conduct reprimand to expulsion. There are three common sanctions: lowered grade, requirement of additional work, or failure from the class. In my case, Professor Dickman chose not to fail me. But I was lucky. More severe infractions can easily result in an automatic F in the class. Alan pointed out to me that although this was, in my case, an error in judgement, the repercussions in my professional life, would have been severe and far-reaching. He told me of a teacher he knew who, like me, made a similar dumb mistake. Within 24 hours, he was given the option to resign or be fired. He resigned and, unable to receive a recommendation from his workplace, found he couldn’t get another job in the same field.

So my advice to you is this: don’t even, in a weak moment, think about doing what I did. It’s a BAD idea.
InFlux: Tips for Handling Student E-mail

Last term, the Teaching Effectiveness Program launched TEPtech, a listserv to provide periodic suggestions, brief reflections and ideas to instructors interested in teaching with technology. Michael Sweet moderates the list, and posts messages only when they contain pedagogical content that he considers widely relevant. To subscribe to TEPtech, e-mail Michael at msweet@oregon.uoregon.edu.

In December, TEPtech featured out-takes from a discussion on an AHE listerv about the teacher-student e-mail relationship. Here are several concrete suggestions for handling large volumes of student e-mail that came from the University of Oregon:

1. Don’t promise instant turnaround. It’s much better to tell your students “I’ll respond to your e-mail within a couple of days” and then respond sooner, if possible. (JQ Johnson, UO Library system)

2. On your syllabus, near your e-mail address, tell your students in your 101 class that they MUST put 101 as their subject line. Include explain that you sort all your related e-mail before you read it so that it is imperative that this standardized subject line be included. (Terri Heath, Social Science Instructional Lab)

3. Don’t RESPOND to student e-mails as you receive them, but rather SORT them into folders as you receive them. I believe some e-mail software will do this for you automatically as long as your students use the correct subject line.

At a designated time, sit down to read and answer all the collected e-mail for the 101 students. Many of your students will have asked similar questions, and if you are reading them together, you can more efficiently respond to each with a standard response rather than individual responses over many days. You might even tell your students how often you’ll respond, thereby encouraging them to think ahead. (Terri Heath, Social Science Instructional Lab)

4. To better manage your time and organize your e-mail, get another e-mail account. Say, a Darkwing account for course-related e-mail and personal/professional e-mail on Oregon. (JQ Johnson, UO Library system)

5. Consider using a class-wide listerv or conferencing system and encouraging students to ask each other questions rather than asking you. You’ll still have to read the listerv and intervene occasionally to correct misinformation, but you’ll be encouraging collaborative learning while taking some of the load off yourself. If you use a free-for-all listerv, it’s generally a good idea to set minimum and maximum posting limits. (JQ Johnson, UO Library system)

6. Think about the effects of class size before introducing any new communications technology. What works for a class of 50 is not likely to work the same way in a class of 250. (JQ Johnson, UO Library system)

Motivating Math III Students

Kimberly Elce, Math GTF

How do you motivate nonmath majors to be excited about math and not afraid of it?

The question I get from students more often than any other is—“When will I ever need this?” That’s a legitimate question. In fact, it’s the heart of the matter. Whenever I introduce a new topic, I try to begin with examples of where in the real world this idea would be used. The examples may not pertain to all students, but they are getting a feel that math actually is useful. Once they start seeing that it does have a purpose, I think their feelings about math can begin to change.
How does group work help students learn better?

If I had the time I would devote at least one class a week to group work. There are so many aspects of math that are missed with lecture. Though thinking about math is important, talking about math can be much more instructive. In fact, most monumental insights come from collective bargaining rather than quiet meditation. Secondly, it allows the student a reality check. Students may be sitting at home struggling with a particular problem, thinking how stupid they are. However, when students work with a group the next day and see other students struggling over the same stuff, it eases the anxiety. Group work gives the student the rare opportunity to be the teacher, when a student is able to explain a certain piece of the problem to his or her fellow students, it inevitably instills a sense of confidence.

What are the challenges of teaching entering freshmen?

The biggest challenge is the jump into the college environment. Many of these students do not realize how much more work is involved in college courses compared to high school. Unfortunately once they do realize this, they try to handle it by closing themselves in their rooms for five hours to get the homework done, when what they should be doing is coming to an office hour. I think freshmen are intimidated by the idea of going to an instructor’s office. But if they make that first visit, they figure out it’s the way to go when they’re struggling. So the challenge for me is opening their eyes to these resources and helping them face these challenges and opportunities.

Why do you think it is important to know and use your students’ names?

Since it’s more instructive to talk about math rather than just think about it, learning students’ names allows a conversation rather than a lecture. I also think it makes the instructor seem more approachable. Most importantly, it lets the students know you care enough to learn their names. Hopefully they will care a little more in return.

What do your students need to succeed in Math 111 and how do you help them get it?

Students need discipline. As I said before, the student needs to understand why math is important. The student also needs to learn how to approach math problems. Students tend to look at each problem separately, and never realize that the last five problems they did were really exactly the same. What I try to do is help them see the connections, and always relate math to something they’ve done before. This is the whole idea of math—building on what’s been done before. I try to give them a general idea of how to approach problems, even if they are completely different. It’s almost like building a blueprint.

How do you deal with math anxiety?

The typical student with math anxiety comes to my office and says—“I look at this problem and don’t know where to begin.” So I try to break the problem down into steps. The first step is—“What is the problem asking?” It seems like a silly question, but many students completely overlook it. When a student narrows down what needs to be done, he/she can usually do the problem. If a student can look at a problem step by step, they are well on their way to conquering their anxiety.

You did the class interview this term for feedback on the course. How was this valuable for you?

The class interview is definitely the way to go, because it allows the students to say what they want me to hear. I was amazed at some of the great suggestions I got that I don’t think I would have received if I had done a written student evaluation. It is much easier to discuss what you think of a class, rather than try to write it all down in a short time.

What are your plans for the future in terms of teaching math?

I really enjoy teaching math at the university level and hope to continue doing so. I’d like a place with plenty of diversity and yet not so big that it becomes impersonal. I want to be able to get to know my students, since that’s what makes teaching so enjoyable. I want to be at a university that emphasizes teaching as well as research, because both are important and it is a shame when the importance of teaching is overlooked.