

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR LARGE CLASSES

Chickering and Gamson's seven "Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" (1987) are generally accepted as a useful summary of best teaching practices in higher education. They are:

1. Increase faculty-student interaction
2. Increase student-student interaction
3. Use active learning techniques
4. Give feedback promptly (and make it useful!)
5. Emphasize time on task
6. Communicate high expectations
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

These enduring principles can be used to organize the effective practices in teaching large classes.

1. Increase faculty-student interaction

- a. Arrive 15 minutes early and leave 15 minutes late. Talk to students about their concerns and progress. Encourage them to talk to you.
- b. Learn as many student names as possible. This can be done with assigned seating, or by taking photos of the class. Learning Management Systems (LMSs) are great tools for this, because they often include student ID photos for all incoming students.
- c. Avoid asking rhetorical questions or rephrasing a question several times quickly. Every time you ask a question, the students should feel the need to respond. Allow them about ten seconds to respond, then call on someone.
- d. When using humor, use self-deprecating humor but don't get too personal.
- e. Make sure you have clear guidelines and procedures for class policies.
- f. Check that your visual aids are clearly visible in all parts of the room.

g. Make sure your students at the back can hear you. Have a colleague sit at the back and let you know how well they can hear you.

And if you have TAs... (Teaching Assistants)

h. Help the TAs hand out materials.

i. Have TAs work interactively with their classes in the lecture hall

j. Go over sample work and establish criteria for the various grades (A, B, C, etc.). Run a grade norming session using sample student work or after the first substantial student assignment is turned in.

2. Increase student-student interaction

a. Intersperse lecture with small group discussions. See 3a below.

b. Long-term group work can build cooperation, but use a grading rubric that takes into account your appraisal of the group work as a whole, the student's self-assessment, and the group's appraisal of each individual's contribution.

3. Use active learning techniques

a. Use change-ups. To keep the class active and productive, it is a good idea to employ a variety of learning activities within a single class period. Instead of the traditional idea that a class is either a lecture or a discussion, blur the distinction between the two. Both lecture and discussion methods have their own strengths:

Lecture	Discussion
Can introduce cutting edge scholarship	Provides feedback about student learning
Can convey instructor's enthusiasm for topic	Increases student motivation
Offers expert commentary	Can change student opinions
Trains lecturer to organize content	Develops higher order cognitive goals

To use a number of teaching methods, an instructor might plan to teach a few important

concepts in the class, and run the class in the following pattern:

1. Basic introduction to the material by instructor -- 10-15 minutes
2. Beginning group work -- 5 minutes
3. Groups report back -- 5 minutes
4. Instructor enlarges on the topic and clarifies misconceptions -- 5-10 minutes
5. Group work on expanded scope of discussion -- 10 minutes
6. Groups report back -- 5 minutes
7. Instructor summarizes and moves to next concept in the lesson plan -- 10 minutes

b. Vary the styles of discussion you use (use four or five types of discussion). For ideas, look at the tip sheet on Small Group Discussion Protocols.

c. Use classroom assessment techniques (aka. "CATs") to keep a finger on the pulse of the class. Use frequent, brief assessments. A common CAT in the sciences is the ConcepTest.

4. Give feedback promptly (and make it useful!)

- a. Use minimal or light marking to reduce your grading time and to avoid overwhelming the students.
- b. Be very clear about policies for the class. Avoid flippancy on this subject.

5. Emphasize time on task

a. Design the assignments to ensure that students enter the classroom having done the reading. If you grade it, they'll probably do it. If not... well, they do have other classes to study for.

6. Communicate high expectations

- a. Establish rules of conduct on the first day, either through guidelines on the syllabus, or through creating a teacher-student contract through discussion.
- b. Watch out for academic dishonesty. Make it hard for the students to cheat, and punish them with academic sanctions if they do cheat.
- c. Include current scholarship within the class. Keep up with the research.
- d. Don't dumb it down. As long as their efforts are respected, students appreciate a challenging classroom. If you have a choice between covering a lot of material at a very shallow level, or covering a small amount of material at a very deep level, pick the latter.

7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

- a. Design assignments to develop skills that students should develop in your discipline. For example, sequenced microthemes can lead students to write better papers. For ways to use student writing in your course, talk to the Writing Center on your campus.
- b. Appeal to the students on as many levels (and through as many senses) as possible.
- c. Groups traditionally under-represented at colleges tend to have less academic support. They study alone rather than in a group, and often don't have as much access to old exams and assignments as more established groups. Use student-student interaction to bring them into the group, and provide everyone with examples of old exams. Of course, don't use the same exams every year!

SOURCE: Endicott College