

# Top Ten Tips for Teaching

## 1. Define Clear Goals and Outcomes for Student Learning

Before defining the course content, **start by defining your goals for student learning**, including both knowledge and skills. Clarify for yourself and your students exactly what you want them to **do with the content** they are exposed to. Thinking carefully about the skills required for major assignments helps define what students must be able to do with the material. Establishing these goals early will help you determine the appropriate content, teaching methods, and forms of assessment.

## 2. Invest Time Immediately in Creating a Learning Community

It is crucial to invest time and energy during the first class, in creating a welcoming classroom and a **sense of community**. Include activities and icebreakers to promote active student participation and opportunities for students to get to know each other. Students are more likely to continue coming to class if they've made friends with their peers. They are also more likely to feel comfortable to actively contribute, if they have a sense of safety and belonging. Consider co-creating with students a set of classroom guidelines for behavior, around what they expect from their peers and their instructor, and what you expect from them in terms of classroom etiquette (e.g., turning up on time, listening when others talk, use of inclusive and kind language etc.).

## 3. Establish Clear Course Guidelines Early in the Planning Process

Establishing all course guidelines, which should cover grading, attendance, and academic integrity **before the class begins** helps prevent problems throughout the semester. Ensure these guidelines follow NIC college policies. It is generally easier to set clear, even rigid, guidelines at the start and then be flexible later, rather than trying to enforce stricter 'rules' later on. When discussing and applying guidelines, ensure students understand that your goal is fairness to all.

## 4. Design Assessment to Incentivize Desired Learning Behaviors

If you value specific behaviors—such as students coming to class having completed the readings or participating in discussions—consider **designing an assessment scheme that incentivizes those behaviors**. Simply put, if you value it, give it a grade. Rightly or wrongly, grades for many students are a form of currency, and the assessment scheme fundamentally shapes student behaviors. Additionally, develop assignments and approaches to grading (e.g., 'ungrading') that advance student thinking, moving from tasks that require recall and definition toward those that require students to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.

## 5. Integrate Practice Opportunities for Higher-Level Thinking

Create opportunities, both in class and through smaller assignments, for students to practice the **higher thinking tasks** that will be required in their major pieces of assessment. Students should not encounter complex tasks, such as creating arguments or applying theoretical frameworks, for the very first time on a final assignment. They need a chance to build up strength and experience by doing these things with you in class or in preparatory tasks/activities.

## 6. Check Student Comprehension Through Action, Not Inquiry

Endeavor to dedicate time every class for students to provide you with information about their understanding. Instead of asking students if they have understood the content, **ask them to do something with what you have just taught them**, that demonstrates (or not) their understanding. Make time regularly during class to check student comprehension and engagement.

## 7. Provide Feedback That Focuses on the Student's Next Step

The purpose of feedback is to **identify the next step in the student's progress** as a learner. This "next step" will look different for almost every student, meaning the feedback should be centered on them individually. Ensure students receive regular feedback with time to implement the feedback in future assessments in the same course.

## 8. Employ a Variety of Instructional Strategies and Maintain Organization

**Plan to use a variety of teaching methods** that combine approaches to reach as many students as possible. This includes using verbal and visual explanations, offering both "big-picture" and detail-oriented perspectives, and giving students opportunities for active learning and reflection. Enhance student learning by ensuring your classes are well organized, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Consider providing the learning goals/outcomes for that class students at the beginning of each class, so students can see where they are heading.

## 9. Actively Seek Feedback and Advice, Especially Early in the Term

You should collect feedback from your students, particularly early in the term, to gauge how things are going and to make necessary adjustments. A simple and effective method is the **Stop/Start/Continue exercise** (e.g., stop doing 'x,' start doing 'y' and continue doing 'z.') Talk to students about the feedback, implement reasonable changes, and explain the pedagogical purpose of elements you cannot change.

## 10. Strategically Manage Your Time and Workload to Avoid Burnout

Spending too much time preparing is a common mistake for new instructors. It can be hard to know when to stop as there is always more we can do. However, that can quickly lead to overwhelm. Where possible, **allocate a specific amount of time on set days for preparation, marking, and other duties, and adhere to this schedule**. Aim for approximately one-and-a-half hours of prep per classroom hour.

## Resources

The above tips are drawn from the following resources:

Carlton University – [Top 10 Teaching Tips for New Instructors](#)

Tennessee State University - [Advice for New Faculty](#)

Washington University - [Tips for Faculty Teaching for the First Time](#)