

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- 87) Tell students you don't know the answer when in fact you don't.
- 88) Because teaching is a performing art, discover a personal strategy or approach you can employ to get "psyched up" and enthusiastic for a lecture.
- 89) Experiment with varying your voice tone, volume, and speaking rate. Notice how different techniques affects student attention and interest.
- 90) Plan to include humor and "extemporaneous" inserts in your lectures.
- One faculty member noted that the stories or jokes must be related to the content of the lecture in order to work. Another warned that he has had to temper his sarcastic humor, because it seemed to alienate the students.
- 91) Tape your lecture once or twice, and listen to yourself.
- One professor was quite surprised to hear that he lectured as slowly as he did. If you're concerned about your lecture speed, you could count the number of words you say in a minute; the ideal is 170 wpm. You could also check your presentation to determine if you emphasize strongly enough the points you consider crucial. Think about using pauses, intonation, or introductory phrases to punctuate main concepts.
- 92) Talk directly to different individuals in the class rather than just glancing around the room.
- Maintaining sustained eye contact with different individuals can give the students the feeling that you are accessible, even in a large lecture hall with over one hundred students.
- 93) Whenever a student asks a question or makes a comment, repeat or paraphrase it to be sure the other students can hear it.
- 94) Use an overhead projector rather than the chalkboard so that you face the students.
- 95) If a student asks an unclear question, try to paraphrase it in order to be sure you understand what s/he's asking.
- One professor noted that guessing the meaning of a student's question and attempting a hurried answer is never a satisfactory strategy. He finds that after a brief dialogue with the student, he can get to the heart of the question.
- 96) Move around the room as you lecture, both back and forth and up and down the aisles.
- One professor recommends extra-long microphone cords or cordless microphones (available from Academic Media Services) for use in large lecture

halls. Another professor suggests moving the front seats back so that you have more room to move around. Another even goes so far as to walk up the steps in the large lecture halls, so that he can direct his speech to particularly drowsy groups in the back. As one professor noted, "I'm certainly aware that if I stand still, they stop paying attention."

- 97) Check the acoustics in a room before the semester begins.
- One instructor takes her TA with her to inspect the room. They talk to each other from different points, so they can determine where the "dead spots" are. She makes a point of avoiding those spots while lecturing and repeating student questions that come from those parts of the room.
- 98) Use role-playing to introduce different theories.
- One professor's explicit goal is for students to become familiar with different theoretical viewpoints. Rather than give a critical analysis of a given theory in which he is always the intermediary talking about something, he plays the role of the follower of that theory. In this way, he feels he leaves that position as well-represented as possible. He begins like this: "I'm going to introduce a guest speaker, and you'll have to suspend disbelief for a moment..." You might also consider acting out the part of an important historical figure.
- 99) During the first few weeks of class, identify students who stand out in their predictable responsiveness to your material. Use their reactions to guide your presentation.
- One professor says, "If these people look calm, then I know the average person has gotten it. If they panic, then I realize I need to find another example."
- 100) Watch yourself teach on videotape.
- One professor noticed that he had a very strong bias toward the left side of the classroom. As a result, he then made an effort to place his notes and transparencies on the right so that he had to turn to the right.
- 101) To deal with the "ragged beginning" of late arrivals, begin the class with discussion of a related issue or controversy in the field.
- One professor begins an introductory level physical geography class with a five minute discussion of the nation's weather. He explains that "the issue is interesting to students from different parts of the country, but it is not crucial to everyone's basic understanding of the course material." The professor isn't overly distracted by late arrivals and the late students haven't missed the review or sequence of new material. A political science professor begins each class with discussion of a news item.
- 102) In order to help students whose skills are weak in writing and critical thinking, during an office appointment read their essays out loud to them asking them questions as you go along.

103) Use slides, overheads, pictures and films to show students what you are talking about.

- One professor remarked that he was a visually oriented person so it was important for him to share with his students the slides and pictures that he had collected. He felt that the visual material gave students "a feel for the real essence of the subject matter."
- Another faculty member does simulations on a computer and projects the computer onto an overhead.

104) Use videotapes to supplement your lectures.

- One professor regularly videotapes certain television shows which he knows are relevant to his course content. Another faculty member remarks that "seeing a ward of schizophrenics is worth 20 books on the subject."
- Another professor suggests videotaping demonstrations and showing the tape instead of repeating the live demonstration every semester. "It saves time not having to set up the demonstration each time and eliminates the worry about the demonstration not working or coming out wrong."
- Videotape lectures or seminars by visiting professors or speakers and use them in appropriate classes.
- One language professor uses videotapes instead of the traditional audio-tapes.

105) Draw graphs on the board before class starts and handout illustrations that are better than the ones that you can reproduce on the board.

106) Use concrete, "real-life" examples or personal anecdotes to elaborate on points.

- One professor remarks that "the students will often remember a story and it helps me to get across the fact that I am not just concerned with their understanding of theory and meta-theory, but how all of this affects real people."

107) Break up long classes with different activities.

- In a one hour and fifteen minute class, one faculty member lectures for part of the class, has a short break and uses the last 15 or 20 minutes for student questions. During the break he encourages students to come forward with the questions and problems that are giving them trouble.

108) Ask students key questions about the lecture during or near the end of the lecture to be sure that the key points are getting across. Call on students randomly; do not rely solely on the feedback from those who eagerly volunteer.

109) Use the blackboard to diagram a process of complex ideas, showing the connections that you are making. At the end of class students can point out where they missed the connection or were confused.

110) Ask inattentive students a question, but answer it yourself.

- When one professor notices that particular students are drowsy, talking, or distracted, he addresses them by name in a non-threatening tone of voice, asks them a question, and then answers it himself. He notes that it gets their attention, it brings them back to the class, and yet it spares them the humiliation of being put on the spot. For example, without breaking the flow of the lecture, he'll say, "So Nancy, how do you think this graph might change if we..." and then he'll immediately answer, "Well clearly it will..."