

Twelve Tiny Tips for Teaching

1. **Set the tone before class even starts**

You can help students feel comfortable and engaged before class even starts. Play music as students walk in. Give students something to do right away that will require them to engage with others. Ask students to talk to the person next to them and give them something specific to talk about. Consider a no-phone policy. Have your agenda and a discussion question already written on the board. Do a quick icebreaker at the start of each class. Use handing back assignments as a chance to say hello and check in.

2. **Use the space**

As much as possible, arrange the classroom to reflect the lesson. Feel empowered to ask students to move closer together or closer to the front. If you want students to talk to each other, arrange desks into a circle. Don't be afraid to get students up and moving around the room: Try a gallery walk, ask students to work through problems on the board in groups, do a quick, speed-dating style discussion, rearrange desks for groupwork, debates, or friendly competitions. As an instructor, strategically use the board space by planning your boardwork visually on paper with the same relative dimensions as the board.

3. **Start every lesson with 5-10 minutes of active learning**

Write a challenging question on the board for students to discuss with a partner. Distribute a completed problem on a handout and have students name the steps in words on their own paper. Ask students to review their lecture notes and write down one confusing point to share with the class. Share a short news story and ask students to analyze it using the tools of the class. Ask each student to define a key term or concept from the unit on the board. Play a short video relevant to the day's topic and ask students to freewrite about it. Divide the class into groups and have each group work through a different problem.

4. **Learn names**

...or at least use name tents

5. **Break lessons down into 20-minute chunks**

To ensure that you're not just lecturing at the front of the room, break down your lesson into 15-20-minute chunks. In a 50-minute section that might look like 10 minutes of warmup activity and announcements, 20 minutes of reading discussion, and 20 minutes of peer review. Or, it might look like a 10-minute warmup, a 20-minute midterm review and a 20-minute period of independent homework.

6. **Script your transitions and directions**

Scripting transitions and directions can make your presentation seem confident and prepared. Take 10 minutes before the start of class to review your plan and practice transitioning from slide to slide or from activity to activity. If you're planning an in-class activity, write out all your directions in your own notes and find some way to display these instructions visually to students as well. If you use slides, make a Directions slide with group size, instructions, discussion questions, page numbers, etc. If you don't use slides, write the directions on the board or pass out a handout containing these instructions.

7. Name the steps used for problem solving

Help students become more self-sufficient by breaking complicated skills into manageable chunks and giving each one a name. If you're solving complex problems on the board, label each step in *words* (ex. *Step 1: Identify the independent and dependent variables*) before solving it in *equations*. If you're doing rhetorical analysis, for example, break down the process into discrete steps to help guide students. Would someone walking into the class halfway through be able to follow the flow of your boardwork?

8. Give students choices

Would students rather discuss X reading or Y reading? Do they want to go over the midterm answers first or start on the worksheet? Letting students choose between a few options can help them feel more invested in the class. You can also let students make individual choices about what is most helpful or interesting. Give students 10 minutes of independent worktime to start on the homework problem that looks most challenging. During groupwork, let each group pick their own example to analyze.

9. Make students do the heavy cognitive lifting

Tip the ratio of cognitive work more toward students. Embed discussion questions or interactive activities in your slides or handouts. For every answer provided by a student, ask a why or how question. Have students repeat or rephrase answers in their own words. Ask students to prepare discussion questions. Deflect questions with more questions (“How do you solve this?” “Great question! Who can get us started?”). Get students looking at their own work: rework exam problems they got wrong, do peer review of thesis statements, make a graphic organizer from the previous week's readings, find academic sources for an upcoming paper, make flashcards or study guides.

10. Let students practice their answers before sharing with the whole group

When asking a tough or detailed question, ask students to spend a few minutes jotting down their ideas and/or discussing with a partner or group. If students don't respond to a question after wait time, ask them to talk about it with the person next to them and bring their answers back to the larger group. If you're having trouble getting conversation started, “warm call” students to let them know that you'll be coming to them for a response (“Okay, finish up your conversations. Rian, Jeremy, and Ana, I'll want to hear from you about what your group discussed when we're back together”).

11. Grant each student “one thing”

Offer each student one exception—emailing an assignment they forgot to print, missing a meeting, etc.—particularly if it doesn't affect your workflow or schedule. For future blunders, hold the line.

12. Keep the conversation going even after class is done

Ask students to complete an exit ticket on the way out and address questions and comments individually or in the following meeting. If possible, hold office hours right after section somewhere near the classroom. Have a way to collect student questions as they arise. Proactively email students who are struggling and invite them to attend office hours or review sessions. Do a mid-quarter evaluation and discuss the results with students.

Twelve Tiny Tips about Teaching - Exit Ticket

What is one strategy we discussed today that you can implement in your classroom? What effect do you think it will have on your teaching?

Do you have any questions for me? If you'd like me to respond to your question or comment, please be sure to include your name somewhere on this sheet.