

Introduction

Whether this is the first time you have taught the business communication course or you're a seasoned professional, I believe this manual has something to offer you. The text itself is brief and straightforward and this manual will continue in that style. This manual will incorporate a "zero-preparation" approach to most activities and lesson plans, to make it quick and easy for you to find what you need and get to work.

Teaching Tips

This section will briefly highlight teaching tips that I have found to work well. For more in-depth information, I encourage you to read: Teaching Tips : Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers by Wilbert J. McKeachie, Graham Gibbs. I found this text to particularly helpful as I entered the classroom for the first time. The discussion organization and planning, as well as classroom management, were helpful.

In education we frequently hear that being student-centered is key. Here are four strategies to help facilitate a student-centered learning environment that is effective and productive.

1. Students like to know their instructor and fellow students

People learn best in environments where they know their instructor and fellow students. They also like to have fun. I start the class with a survey followed by a quiz on knowledge about business communication. The quiz focuses on common myths of communication applied to the business environment and serves as an effective strategy to introduce the course, course goals, and main assignment. I then focus on "ice-breaker" activities in later classes to help everyone come to know one another. Time invested in this effort early in the course will pay dividends in terms of classroom climate, more student time on tasks, and overall classroom management.

2. Students like to have clear expectations

Clear expectations are critical to student success. I use a clear, simple syllabus with an assignment schedule to help communicate expectations from day 1. All the due dates are immediately available. The syllabus covers standard issues, includes a helpful "safe & healthy learning environment" clause, and the assignment schedule clearly makes out work to be completed during the course.

4. Curiosity is key to learning

Engaging students' sense of curiosity about business communication is an integral part of effective learning. Students are often attracted to stories and games. Students may respond well to stories, and the lecture points can be incorporated in such a way that they both remember them in context and find the information relevant. Games are a great way to stimulate curiosity and I

find on exit surveys that these are the lessons that teach the material that students are most likely to retain.

Project-based learning is also an effective way to encourage curiosity and motivate students. In two versions of the business communication course I run it like a business, and each student is enrolled in a “virtual business internship.” Each student writes a cover letter, presents their resume, applies for the position in the industry or area of choice, and then produces a set of common business communication assignments that they then tailor to their interest or career area. This builds on the common “portfolio” approach to education, where upon completing the course they have a set of common business documents that both serve to document their performance and serve to demonstrate their mastery to potential employers. Students sometimes use this “portfolio” as part of their application for a real-world internship, and feedback has been positive.

5. Organization is an integral part of a positive learning environment.

I cannot underline enough the importance of organization. Creativity, flexibility, and working with modern, adult learners that juggle responsibilities can itself be a challenge, but a well designed class built around a core model – like the virtual internship – can serve to retain and motivate students while providing an opportunity to master skills.

Lesson Plans

It is important to have your objectives, activities and goals clear for each class. A lesson plan helps you organize your discussion and activities to cover the material and reinforce learning. There are five main parts for a lesson plan outlined below.

1. Preview

This is your attention statement which informs your students about what will be covered during class. This may involve a list on the board of activities in a time order form, allowing students to forecast what is to be covered when and what is next as they progress. It may also involve a game to stimulate curiosity about a topic or content area, or start with an interpretative question (found at the end of each chapter) which facilitates discussion. Finally, your preview should link to previous material to reinforce learning.

2. Activity

Activities facilitate active learning and can capture curiosity. In our example, you want students to understand and the basic components and models which represent the process of communication:

A. Activity Ask students to draw business communication, pretending they will show what they draw to a student who speaks no English to communicate the topic of this class. No words are allowed.

B. Discussion Ask students to explain their drawings to one another and use elements from student drawings to cover the eight components. Here, for example, we see a source. What does a source do in the process of communication? From this discussion you can focus on the basic role and functions of a source before moving to a receiver or channel.

You can instruct students to label the components in their drawing or incorporate missing components and their drawings become their notes, reinforcing the content.

You can then move to the linear model, and build on it, linking it to the interactional, transactional, and constructivist model, perhaps drawing on the board yourself, again asking the students to find elements of each model in their own drawings.

In this example we involve critical thinking skills by applying the texts to a student's previous knowledge (constructivist learning strategy) with a demonstration project that involves interaction and peer-sharing.

3. Lecture/Discussion

This is your introduction and body of your class. You will have a list of vocabulary words, ideas, concepts, theories or similar material you want to cover in class. For example, you may decide to cover the basic components in the process of communication and the four models. In the above activity, you may use the activity to extend to the discussion, weaving both together to maintain interest and increase retention of the material. Powerpoints can be a useful tool and are provided with this text.

4. Reminders

As in a speech, there need to be reminders which serve as signposts, calling to attention key points which allow the students to recognize the points and reinforce previous material. Make sure you repeat and review to reinforce learning.

Your schedule may look like the sample provided, which serves as a guide to the activities that are assessed in class. Reminding students about assignment due for the next class or the text over a number of chapters and how the present material fits within the larger context can facilitate learning.

5. Summary

As in a speech, a good summary will re-capture and present the main points and reinforce the content. Providing time for a final synthesis of the material within the larger context will help

students learn the material. Link the current discussion to the material to be covered in the next class, allowing students to read and prepare for your class.

You may want to follow this simple chart to create lesson plans:

Preview	What we will cover today.
Activity	A game or activity that illustrates the concepts or ideas you are presenting.
Lecture/Discussion	A lecture or discussion, punctuated with actions linked to the activity, can provide a context for the material.
Reminders	Periodic review and reminders that focus attention and remind students of class-specific content within the larger context of the class.
Summary	A clear and concise review of the main points covered in class with a forecast of what is to be covered in the next class.

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