A HANDBOOK OF GOOD TEACHING PRACTICE

COMPILED BY MEMBERS OF HISTORY 965, FALL 1997
TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST

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SYLLABUS TIP SHEET

Prepared by William Barnett, Dorothea Browder, Sabrina Felson

Introductory statement: A syllabus is a document that serves multiple roles. It needs to fulfill certain basic requirements, but it is also an expression of a professor's unique interests, goals, and philosophy of education. There is no formula for designing a syllabus, because they can vary widely. However, below are guidelines for what to consider when you make your choices.

What Should be on a Syllabus

1. Course Design:
    - *Course title and description of main themes
    - *Course units and titles
    - *Lecture titles
2. Readings:
    - *Required reading assignments
    - *Optional additional readings
    - *Questions to help focus students' reading
3. Nuts and Bolts:
    - *Schedule of exams and written assignments
    - *Description of grading policy
    - *Description of expectations of students

The Roles a Syllabus Plays:

1. For Professor:
    - *Forces you to organize and plan the course
    - *Creates a "contract" of requirements and expectations. May eliminate later problems and disputes by clearly stating requirements early.
    - *Provides an opportunity to signpost key themes, categories, and ideas
2. For Students:
    - *Helps them select courses (serves as a marketing document)
    - *Helps them plan their time
    - *Explains the requirements and expectations
    - *Provides a framework to organize the material (and choose paper topics or study for exams)
    - *Becomes a resource for future reading and a reminder of major course themes
3. For Others:
    - *Is often seen as a statement of professor's philosophy on teaching history
    - *May be required in job interviews
    - *May need department approval

Goals in Constructing a Syllabus:

- *Lay a foundation early in the course, by defining terms and introducing key ideas
- *Plan the material so that concepts build step by step
- *Tie every lecture to major class themes
- *Create a frame that introduces class themes and provides closure at semester's end
- *Be aware of the cycle of semester
- *Course needs variety, try to offer material that will appeal to different students
- *Balance weaknesses or gaps in your lectures with readings
- *Blance diversity and coherence

Options to Consider in Constructing a Syllabus:

1. Course Design:
    - *Organize by chronology, by themes, by regions, or by groups
    - *Begin by choosing the key themes, or the books you want to teach
    - *Aim to identify about 15 major topics-one per week
    - *Consider the narrative that the whole course tells
    - *Balance departmental requirements with your own interests
    - *What are you being forced to leave out or cover quickly?
    - *Avoid the tendency to try to pack too much in leave time to review.
    - *Leave room for flexibility
2. Readings:
    - *Asses the ability and dedication of your students
    - *Use a textbook? (it can free you from need to cover all expected material)
    - *Use fiction, autobiography? (they can provide contextual richness, and students consider them "fun")
    - *Use primary sources? (exciting, but need time to interpret)
    - *Assign "classics or new scholarship? (some new controversial works may encourage lively discussions and debates)
    - *Assign readings that expose students to a variety of viewpoints
    - *Use excerpts or readings in entirety?
3. Nuts and Bolts:

*Weigh the comparative usefulness of tests and papers
*Evaluate how much time you can realistically spend grading
*Identify your top themes, or take-home points, and focus tests and papers on them (students will remember what they have to write about - especially on papers)
*Vary assignments, or teach students one format they can improve upon?
*Build in some flexibility in grading - reward improvement

Check List for Syllabus Weaknesses:

1. Controversial Issues:
   *How have you incorporated race and ethnicity? (problems of isolating it on a separate day - ghettoization; goal to weave race throughout)
   *How have you incorporated gender?
   *Will students perceive a bias in your approach? (be aware of students backgrounds)
2. Get outside imput:
   *What have you forgotten to include? (topics outside your interests?)
   *What have you overemphasized? (your main interests?)
   *What message does your syllabus send - is it intimidating, exciting, confusing?
3. Ideas for reflection:
   *How much of your personality do you allow/want to come through?
   *Does your particular approach to the topic shape the course in any negative ways?
   *Is it appropriate to highlight one category of analysis (race, gender, class) to be sure that idea come through, or must you aim for balance? (this may depend on departmental needs)

Mentoring Students

Prepared by Hiroshi Kitamura, Chris Wells

Goals and General Principles

* Use individual contact to enhance students' interest and to encourage students' academic work-class involvement, reading, independent work, etc.
* Help students resolve any problems.
* Provide the opportunity for more personal attention and engagement in out-of-classroom situations.
* Give students a chance to make up missed sections.
* Help guide students through the system's bureaucracy-academic,financial, extra-curricular. Share personal experiences if relevant.
* Help students set deadlines for their work, but be flexible especially in emergency situations. (Grant extensions, make-ups, etc when necessary.)
* Get to know students' names quickly, use those names in and out of class, and if you want students to use your first name, encourage them to do so.
* Make yourself as accessible and approachable as possible. Publicize your office hours, phone #s, and email repeatedly in the first few sections and periodically through the semester.

Time-savers

* Keep files on your advisees, and review them prior to meetings and appointments. Take notes during the meetings.
* Keep a checklist of the requirements that students must meet for each advisee. Keep it up to date.
* Keep a list of help resources, and make it available to students who have problems that are too big for you to deal with on your own.
* Take advantage of public situations to answer questions
* Manage yourself for the long run
* Use email to your advantage
* Use the 5-10 minutes after class to answer questions, chat, etc.

Troubleshooting

* Suggest that students with problems pay a visit. (E.g., write a note at the bottom of a poor test or paper suggesting that the student come to see you during office hours.)
* Encourage first meetings with students early in the semester.

What not to do

* Avoid anything that creates an unbridgeable distance between you and your students.
* Don't be oblivious to how you come across with the students-often a "tough but fair" attitude comes across only as tough, or worse as tough and inflexible.
* Don't privilege one student over others, especially in public situations like class.
* NEVER use a mentoring relationship for your own benefit. Keep it a helping relationship, not a relationship you turn to in order to fulfill your own needs.

Other

*Use the syllabus as a contract. Articulate your expectations clearly andearly-but also create space for students to ask questions about those expectations and show them how to be successful.
* Save emails sent by students for future reference later in the semester.
* Decide in advance how you will deal with potential cases of plagiarism.
* Likewise, think about how you will deal with complaints about grades.
* Be aware of gender, race, and age dynamics, and always keep things professional.
* Be confident that your leadership is much more important than how much you know-your life experience is as important as your knowledge base.
* Try to humanize the power relationship that exists in the classroom, but don't give your power away.
* Return assignments early.
* Hang out for five minutes or so at the end of class rather than immediately turning to pack up. Keep eye contact with students and look around to see if anyone wants to stay and chat.
* Treat everyone with respect. Take your students seriously.
* Listen carefully to what students say to you. If you're unsure what he/she is saying, to might help to summarize and repeat the information back to the student and ask if you have it right.
* Encourage students to get to know each other, and to organize their own study groups, review sessions, and even activities.
* Let students know about extracurricular events that they might find interesting.
* Pay attention to everyone in the classroom regardless of where they sit.

Mentoring as a TA

* Arrange for optional review sessions before big tests.
* Level with your students-use your proximity to talk about things students do in "straight talk" fashion.
* Give tips on how to be a good student that they can use through their college careers.
* Talk to students about what they expect from TAs.

The Lecture

Prepared By: Michael J. Rawson, Zoltán Grossman

Reasons for Lecturing:

* Provides students with an engaged, coherent point of view.
* Lecturer has space to be bolder and more general than he or she would be in print.
* Underscores the most important facts (and simultaneously highlights what it is ok to forget).
* Conveys enthusiasm for the material.
* Teaches students how to take notes, a skill they will likely use for the rest of their lives.
* Provides a role model for budding academics.
* Allows the use of creative visual resources, such as slides, Power Point, etc.
* Students get a sense for the lecturer's personality.
* It is an efficient way of disseminating information to a large group of diverse students.
* It is an opportunity to model passion.
* Provides interaction between lecturer and students.
* Serves an organizational function for the course (central organizing element).
* Serves as a forum for uniformly communicating syllabus changes and discipline.
* Establishes a sense of a larger community of students taking the course.
* Ensures a common level of exposure to a certain body of material.
* Enables lecturer to convey original research or recent developments not otherwise available.
* Material can be tailored to audience.
* Permits the use of "distance learning," such as the use of videotaped lectures (although in general it is difficult to watch a lecture on TV since lecture is a "hot" medium and TV a "cold" medium).

Characteristics of a Well-Delivered Lecture:

* Lecturer makes frequent eye contact with students.
* A sufficient amount of material is presented.
* Lecturer interacts and connects with the students.
* A sense of beginning and ending is imparted through the use of a clear framework and adequate sign-posting.
* Lecturer appears confident in himself or herself.
* Lecture is flexible in the face of changing conditions and needs (i.e., adaptable if time becomes short).
* Material is not found in the text.
* Material is relevant to the course.
* Lecturing style is consistent throughout semester.
* The lecture conveys no more than five take-home points.

Characteristics of a Poorly-Delivered Lecture:

* Lecturer is physically immobile.
* Lecturer reads material in a flat monotone.
* Too much or too little material.
* Too many facts.
* Unreasonable vocabulary.
* Offensive language.
* Bad jokes or stories.
* Unnecessary self-criticism.
* Effective use of sense of theater.

Researching the Lecture Topic:

* Look to text books to tell you what is important enough that it cannot be left out.
* Plagiarize shamelessly. Consider giving out a bibliography to the class so that they can explore the literature on their own.

Writing the Lecture:

* Major steps in designing the lecture:
    1. *Choose five take-home points to organize the lecture around* (i.e., five causes of the Civil War).
    2. *Decide on the flow and order of the lecture.* Transitions can be choppy, as in conversation. Think of facts as the body of your ideas, and remember that facts and arguments rely on each other. You are modeling reasoning and argumentation. Order can be chronological (or reverse), topical, or three streams taken in sequence all leading toward a conclusion. Forward movement is *essential* to keeping students interested.
    3. *Figure out how much time to spend on each of the five points.* Leave room for digressions. Build flexibility into the lecture so that, if you run long, you don't have to drop the conclusion. Make sure that you've chosen a well-defined scope for what can be covered in a 50- or 75-minute lecture, and remember that less is often more.
* Lectures can take the form of full prose, outlines with key facts, diagrams, overheads or slides (note that historians tend to read from full texts at conferences because there are critics in the audience).

* Clearly bound time and space.
* Use an opening “hook”: raise a question to be answered by the end of the lecture; relate the topic to previous class material; start with an anecdote or joke.
* Use colorful stories, anecdotes, jokes, surprises, wows, tragedies, pathos and unexpected juxtapositions to move students toward a moment of connection.
* Make clear to students which facts they are expected to know.
* Signpost your most important take-home messages so the lecture revolves around them and students will be clear about what the point of it all is ... straightforward narrative with no analytical signposts is rarely adequate for a lecture.
* Use facts to support ideas, not just for their own sake.
* Offer vivid illustrative material—anecdotes, quotations, biographical sketches, jokes, images, etc.—to make your abstract points come alive; it is this illustrative stuff that will often concretize what you say and be what your students will actually remember as the hook for hanging larger ideas on. In other words, students will remember the funny, the weird and the tragic, so use them to make your points.
* Avoid abstract, polysyllabic, Latinate, jargon-laden, passive, academic, boring language in favor of ordinary oral speech.
* Remember the crucial teacherly injunction: show me, don’t tell me.
* Consider the time of day and the place in the semester in which the lecture will be given (if early morning or right before finals, liven it up).
* Provide breaks in the information every 10 minutes or so to maintain attention.
* Use plenty of examples.
* Consider the use of slides, overhead projectors, or handouts.

Delivering the Lecture:

* Practice! Consider videotaping a practice session as a means of placing yourself in your own audience. Alternatively, practice in front of a person or mirror.
* Lecture at a speed that is right for your personality, but remember that students are trying to take notes.
* Don’t let slides control the lecture by describing them one by one. Instead, use them to illustrate a flowing narrative. Knowing what hooks connect each slide to the next will facilitate the flow of the lecture.
* Consider putting your five points on the board at the beginning of the lecture.
* A good way to reinforce the relevance of past material and its connection to the present lecture is to open class by reviewing the major points from the last lecture.

LEADING DISCUSSIONS

Prepared by Honor Sachs, Tom McGrath, Thomas Robertson, Kevin Wehr

General Principles

* Determine your role. Navigator, negotiator, facilitator; not dictator
* Determine the role of the section in relation to the lecture, the readings etc.
* Be a role model (dedicated, enthusiastic, even-handed, honest, hard working, worthy of respect)
* Keep your authority, but also don't to be too rigid
* Empower the students in your quest for stability and authority
* Help students to learn from each other - by example, through dialogue, by working together
* Encourage them to appreciate/critique all perspectives
* Grant the students ownership of the section; put the success/functioning of the section in their hands
* Be honest, especially about the limits to your knowledge
* Be organized, but flexible: allow the space for the discussion to go where it needs to
* Work towards complete class participation (cf. "group discussion" section)
* Emphasize skill development (reading, writing, speaking, listening, cooperation, tolerance, giving & receiving constructive criticism)
* Encourage critical thought
* Evaluate yourself and your students (mid-section and mid-semester)
* Create a liberal space in which everyone feels comfortable
* Make sure all perspectives can be expressed (without fear)

The First Section

* Remember that you are setting the tone for the whole term. Therefore --
* Start as promptly as possible
* Tell them explicitly what you expect.
    1) Distribute your policies, as handout or section syllabus for example: covering the grading, participation, requirements etc.
* Get the students to know each other. Ideas:
    2) Name games
    3) Use the quirky fact idea
    4) Have them interview each other (not friends) and introduce each other to the class
    5) Name tags/plates
* Consider:
    6) Telling them your hopes for the section
    7) Encouraging them to respond to your policies
    8) Asking for their interest in the course
    9) Asking for an introduction to their academic discipline
    10) Whether or not you jump right into the material, if you do, keep it broad, but not scary
* Avoid dyadic discussion patterns; prevent the wagon wheel conversation with the TA at the center

The Alpha and the Omega: Opening, Closing and Linking Sections.
(previously known as "How to Prepare"; "Components of Section"; and "Pre-section Prep")

* Avoid dyadic discussion patterns; prevent the wagon wheel conversation with the TA at the center
* Consider giving an introduction and conclusion when using the section as narrative
* Consider section closure: do you synthesize at the end, do you have the students do so?
* Make sure to leave a few minutes to conclude in some way or another
* Figure out before hand what you will drop if it becomes necessary
* Give a preview/plug of next week's readings assignments
    11) Offer tools, questions for students to think about
* Think about the next week and beyond so as to inter-connect the sections/readings for the students
* Brainstorming with other TA's, professor(s) may be quite helpful here. Talk to 'em, baby.
* In preparing know the several larger topics (or take-home messages) that you want to cover and be prepared to go through them, but not in a strict order. Allow the subjects to come up organically.

What Not to Do

* Don't:
    12) Squash them when they're wrong
    13) Over-lecture
    14) Let a few dominate (including you)
    15) Be artificial; engage in (inevitably transparent) power-tripping
    16) Constrain by religiously adhering to a lesson plan, i.e. accept new directions as they arise
    17) Be a cheerleader; i.e., every comment is awesome
    18) Ask the "what am I thinking," "what's in my head" questions

Formats to Consider

* **WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSIONS**
  0) Ask:
     a) Opinions about the author's interpretation of the material
     b) "Lob" questions that can stimulate discussion (something that everyone can have a view/opinion on or an experience with)
     c) "Many-paths" questions; that is, one providing hints/clues for several avenues of response
     d) Devil's advocate question
     a) Provocative questions
     b) Around-the-room questions; force a response
     c) Loaded questions/wedge questions to stimulate discussions
        - Try to ensure that these questions are sufficiently open to allow a wide range of responses; i.e., the first five people don't get the "good" answers

  2) Don't let egregious errors slip by without correction
  3) Give positive responses (possibly non-verbal. e.g., nods and high-fives) where appropriate
  4) Respond and rephrase only if other students do not
  5) Repeat questions back to the group, or
  6) Refer back to a previous comment(ator) (sign-posting) when navigating the discussion . Give them ownership of their ideas/comments
     a) But avoid polarizing the classroom
  7) Be lively, animated, enthusiastic
  8) Use personal references/experiences
  9) Embrace the silence! Don't be afraid of pregnant pauses.

- **OTHER FORMATS**
  1) Role playing/talk show style
  2) Debate/small group
     a) Consider giving questions out the week before or over email
     b) Give them the same question/document/etc.
     c) Give them a different question/document/etc.
     d) Encourage the drama, use props
     e) Manipulate the groups (non talkers together, talkers together)
     f) Consider separating friends (some work together, some loaf together)
     g) Your options while they're conferring amongst themselves in small groups:
        - Leave the room
        - Quick checks on progress/need of assistance
     h) Alternate the presenters of the group
     i) Encourage questions back to the group afterwards
     j) Watch the time

Problems with Participation

* Don't allow bad patterns to set in. Set good patterns

How to get non-talkers to talk:

* Have fixed assignments from students in advance
* Have open ended questions, or opinion questions that everyone answers around the room
* Appoint discussion launchers/facilitators
* Call on people - careful not to violate their space
* Send it back to the group
* Remember they may just be a beat behind in responding
* Let them write it down
* Role playing: allow them to move out of their silent ritual
* Use office hours to have those afraid of <u>you</u> get over it.

How to limit the dominant ones:

* Set limits; allotment of limited time/chances; M&M rule
* Personally meet with/talk to them
* Call on (other) people
* Go around the room
* Use smaller groups
* As the group to respond
* Use duct tape, beat them [sic]

The Post-section Section

* Explicitly state that you are available (for a limited time) after section; and
  1) Hang around for 5 minutes to make yourself accessible

2) Don't pack up right away
3) Look up, keep the possibility of eye contact
4) Watch out for and maybe even engage the less aggressive students

Evaluating yourself: How are you doing?

* Administer exit polls to students after section
* Supply questionnaires on preferred features of section/discussion
* Distribute/administer midterm evaluation
* Do your students know each others names by the mid term?
* Videotape/audiotape yourself
* Sit in on other TA's sections; have other TA's sit in on yours

Time savers

* Have them do some of the work (discussion questions, leading the class, discussion launchers)
* Don't try to script everything...it won't work and it will take all your time
* Have them grade each other
* Create a class e-mail list
* Send emails and handouts before class
* Don't be shy about asking for help/volunteers
* Early and often, clarify expectations regarding all aspects of the course in order to pre-empt later confusion and repeated questions.
* Start on time
* Watch your watch

Troubleshooting/problems

* Problem students
  1) The types to be aware of:
     a) the political loudmouth
     b) the one with the personal ax to grind
     c) the broken record
     d) the rambler
     e) the cynic
) the passive aggressive
) the rude abrasive jerk
) the intimidator
) the bleeding heart
) the whiner
) the distracter
) the (chronic) absentee
) low background knowledge
) digressors
) low blood sugar/bad biorhythms
) the course hater
) literal minded students

  0) Solutions:
) Always be aware of possible reactions/consequences by students to your response(s)
) Recall that all problems have some kind of source: students' actions are all legitimate, however inappropriate or maligned. E.g., a quiet person may be shy, only in front of you. They may be engaged but not know how to break in or they may be defense and angry.
) If student(s) angry with course or lecturer can be dealt with using a collective reinvention: a new contract, a new mission: ask them for ideas, offer ideas, reinvent the course with their participation. Written or oral evaluation.
) Your possible responses:
        - Hold a one-one-one meeting out of class
        - Ignore
        - Consider flattering them; making them your 'secret ally'
        - Shoot down in class
        - Professor intervention
        - Explicitly prohibit distracting or otherwise bothersome behavior. Ban the action.
) Consult with others
) Keep a log of actions, history, save emails

* Class Dynamics
  0) The substitute teacher scenario: what to do when you lose control. Alternatively, when you lose their interest and/or they don't prepare for section?
  0) Solutions:
) Force them to do something: writing, a quiz, brainstorm on a topic collectively

) Create a new exercise
) Go outside
) Bribe them with food or coffee
) Consider exit: leaving the classroom will send a huge message

0) What do you do when discussions get over-heated?
0) Solutions:
) Take a break, a time-out
) Change the subject, redirect to something more objective
) Take a meta-step: be self-reflexive about the discussion
) Use humor, carefully

Power - Politics of Section: age, race, gender, class, year in school

* To the extent you can, make sure subject matters are balanced regarding race, class, gender, etc.
* Acknowledge gaps in subject matter, explore them
* Encourage minority perspectives, stress the importance of getting all perspectives
* Maintain respect
* Remember that the point is to discuss as opposed to a) polemics b) competition
* Re.: the soap-box issue
    - intellectualize or historicize it immediately
    - play both sides, but be careful not to influence
    - enable every student to share their point of view. How?
        - devil's advocate
        - your personal views subordinate to the process of students self-opinion construction

* Student-student interactions:
    0) Watch for and smite asymmetries:
) Who speaks, for how long
) Who gets feedback
) Who carries in assumptions
) Who gets to bring up new topics
) Seating arrangements

* TA-student interactions
    0) Avoid arbitrary rulings-don't pull rank, explain the rulings/action
    0) Avoid intellectual bullying
    0) Watch for favoritism
    0) Take a self-conscious break to let others talk who haven't yet
    0) Use potentially explosive situations to explore important topics, cautiously
    0) Protect yourself. Know that the TA can be the subject of "bullying."
) Remember that you will fail in appearing to be even-handed; but this isn't license for being complacent

Teaching Writing

Prepared by William Barnett, Dorothea Browder, Thomas Robertson

Goals

*to improve each student's writing
*to get your students to appreciate good writing
*to convince students of the importance of good writing (to get "buy-in")
*to show that writing is a continual process, even a lifelong process
*to identify problematic writing, to give conceptual tools, to demystify jargon
*to teach students to form arguments, to balance generalization with evidence

General Principles

*give your students ownership/responsibility for their writing
*reward achievement *and* improvement; don't favor the best writers
*give a diversity of assignments, teach a number of ways to write well
*meet students at their level
*break down the process into manageable steps
*be specific and constructive in feedback yet avoid stealing ownership (for example, by rewriting too much)
*consult other TAs, profs, and the writing center

Strategies

*Provide (anonymous) examples of good and bad writing
*Provide resources (handouts and books)
*Assign one-sentence summaries of the reading (weekly)
*Teach structural elements, and ask for thesis statement and outlines before paper is due
*Assign multiple drafts
*Critique student writing as a group
*Always tie writing instruction to content
*Personalize the process; teach that writing is something that can always improve (using yourself as an example, perhaps, with anecdotes)
*When commenting on a paper, when a correction is not content-related, try to suggest alternative wordings rather than striking out a student's writing
*At the beginning of the semester and repeatedly throughout, prepare students to receive extensive commentary and stress that it does not indicate failure or mediocrity
*Encourage use of the Writing Center
*Make use of other TAs, professors and the Writing Center yourself if needed
*Always find something to praise

Research Paper Skills

*Identify reasonable scope
*Consider giving a packet of primary documents, or provide strong guidance
*Remember the process can be ovewhelming; set boundaries, identify and limit sources
*Provide list of possible topics (even if students can also choose their own)
*Require work in stages and grade each stage: abstract, outline, bibliography, rough draft, final draft

Defining Good History Writing:
* The teacher must communicate the expectations on writing for each course
* Good writing extends beyond history, but history emphasizes certain issues -recognize that other academic fields teach students other approaches to writing
* History writing is an argument, not a description
* Clarity is Job 1
* State argument early, and provide road maps (it's not about mystery or surprise)
* anticipate and address major counterarguments
* make each sentence add to the argument, and link sections with signposts
* use specific and concrete examples to support generalizations
* define key terms clearly

Constructing Writing Assignments:
* Realize that well-designed assignments give students a framework for good writing, and poorly designed questions will create frustration
* Ask questions that must be answered analytically, not descriptively (ask how and why - not what and when)
* Use shorter, directed assignments early, and longer, more open-ended ones later
* Consider using single sentence and paragraph assignments
* Provide guidelines on topics so student projects are on an appropriate scale
* Break difficult assignments into stages

* Target specific writing skills and issues in assignments: ask students to edit and shrink a paper to emphasize concision, or to focus on transitions and organization

Alternative/Fun Assignments:
* Varied assignments provide a space for creativity and give students a way to connect with the past more directly
* Non-traditional assignments help students enjoy writing more by letting them escape analytical, academic writing
* A few possibilities include:
* Historical role-playing - writing from the perspective of a person in the past
* Journalism assignments - function as a contemporary reporter
* Fiction or film-design the plot of a novel or movie centered on period of study
* Personal history - explorations of family history in a region, as immigrants, etc.
* Counterfactual assignments - what if the South won the Civil War?

What Not To Do

*Tell students they cannot write
*Grade without comments
*Single out a student publicly
*Create assignments that are easy to plagiarize
*Rewrite long sections of papers for students; instead, consider putting substantivecomments at the end or on a separate page and/or using a number or letter system
*Use red
*Make the writing instruction seem remedial

Time Savers

*have students read/grade each other's papers
*1-sentence summaries (and other short assignments)
*kill 2 birds: make other exercises work for writing and make writing work for other exercises
*address common mistakes as a group (consider handouts)
*clarify expectations early-maybe with very short assignments
*use the writing center and other resources (esp. for ESL students)
*zip through final exams

Guide to Teaching Research

Prepared by Sabrina Felson, Alexander Shashko, Chris Wells

Goals

Explain the process of historical inquiry and research
Explain the meaning of historical inquiry and research
Explain the methods used to understand and interpret the past
Explain the parameters of historical/scholarly research
Explain the process of turning research into writing
Explain the nature of the discipline
Confront students' fears of the library and their ability to produce legitimate research

Teach students the following:

Finding their way around the library and its resources
Organizing and prioritizing their sources
Defining the research question/ask interesting questions
Defining the sources and amount of research
Understanding the difference between primary and secondary sources
Using primary and secondary sources
Thinking/writing historically
Being critical of historical documents
Integrating research into your own document
Using footnotes/scholarly standards

Time Savers

Use library/librarians
- Take students on tour of library
- Have librarians explain usage of specific resources

Define the project ahead of time
- Produce handout early in the course, with clear parameters
- Ask a "doable" question -- something contained and specific

Restrict the number of sources for use
Provide "practice" research -- smaller assignments to explain the research process before a major assignment is due
Insist students check with you about topic
Give students research questions/topics
Give students research materials
Provide models of scholarly research
Spend time in class on the research process
Have students work in groups/peer research
Have students read each others' research
Refer specific research questions to faculty or graduate students who can help
Find out how others have structured assignments
Fantasize answers to potential topics, questions to identify biases and counterarguments
Teach note-taking
- Develop a system and stick to it
- Discuss the variables of research
- Explain what is and isn't relevant information

Troubleshooting

Problems:

Students don't understand the assignment
Students can't select an assignment
Students can't find relevant books/resources
Students want to use questionable resources
Students want to change topic midway through the course
Students are fighting over the same resources
Students are using their research improperly
Students are only recapitulating, not analyzing, their research
Students are waiting until the last minute to begin

Solutions:

Ask the student about their interests in detail
Emphasize the variety of potential research topics available

Provide unusual topics of puzzles to encourage research
Meet with students individually
Check questionable research/resources
Set up lots of checkpoints/mini-assignments

Possible chronology:
- Define topic
- Define operational questions
- Fantasize answers to questions
- Produce annotated bibliography
  - key sources
  - historical importance
- Produce chapter outline
- Produce rough draft
  - make due 3-4 weeks before final draft
  - emphasize that it's OK for it to be "rough"

Insure that only one person is writing on a given topic
Insist that students stick to deadlines
Set cutoff publication date for secondary sources
Peer review
Presentations
Have well-defined topics ready for unsure students
Spend extra time on the process of selecting a topic
Try to make the library friendly
Deal with plagiarism immediately; inform whomever is in charge of the course

What Not To Do

Don't assign a project too big or small for the course.
Don't assign a project that doesn't allow for considerable analysis of the research
Don't be vague about a given project
Don't assign a project too difficult for the class size, particularly large classes

Potential Variables for Assignment

Based solely on secondary sources
Based solely on primary sources
Based primarily on secondary sources
Based primarily on primary sources
Based on text-based and non text-based sources
Have each student select different research topic/question
Have each student use same research topic/question
Provide research materials
Provide research questions
Have students find research materials
Have students work in groups

Doing Research: A quick guide for teachers and students

When you do research you do several things:
- You consult sources
- You formulate a thesis that helps you interpret those sources
- You weigh the sources to decide which are most important for your purpose
- You organize the evidence to tell the story you wish to tell
- You put a design on the information so that it makes an essay
- You cite the sources to tell the reader where you got your information

Using Special Teaching Tools: Films, Fiction, Etc.

Prepared by Zoltan Grossman, Hiroshi Kitamura, Kevin Wehr

Why do we include Film or Fiction?
* Break the monotony
* Use it strategically to illustrate a point
* Encourage active watching
* Encourage critical thought
* Film and fiction can be a primary document
* Models storytelling/narrative
* Can be structured into the syllabus when little reading will be done
* Can give an image to the ideas of texts/lectures

Risks to using Film, etc.
* Can be a cop-out
* Students may not take it seriously
* Students may use it as nap-time
* interpretation is never assured (in lectures too!)
* Consider the length: think about excerpting—but it can be distracting.
* Accuracy (factual, chronological, etc.) can be violated in fiction
* Many things are inadequately illustrated by film
* Text-Media tension
* Counterfactuals
* The image given by the film may overwhelm any other imaginings

Preparation
* Give links to readings and writing assignments
* Give questions to think about beforehand
* Present filmic context (historicize)
* Handouts for note taking during film?
* Know the technology beforehand

During
* Troubleshoot for technical breakdown
* Enough light for note taking

After
* In discussion, start with gut reactions (this can help the silent ones)
* Move to analysis, history
* Discuss counterfactuals
* Discuss what was missing
* Show different film on same subject for contrast
* Assign reading that contradicts film, or text film was based on

Evaluating Learning Through Testing

Prepared by Kerry O'Toole, Mike Rawson, Alexander Shashko

What Exams Do Well:

* Provide a synthesis of class material that the students have not seen before.
* Operate as a form of control by encouraging attendance at lectures.
* Provides a more even playing field compared to papers since some students write better than others.
* Standardized nature provides more control as a teacher.
* Tests a broad group of ideas where papers tend to be more specific. Also, broad exams allow for deep papers.
* Easier to grade than papers.
* Teaches cramming as a skill.
* Teaches skill of working under a time constraint.

What Exams Do Not Do Well:

* Exams do not work as well in a seminar format. Papers are more helpful.

What Makes a Good Exam:

* The information is relevant and useful, leaving students feeling some ownership of the material.
* Students are able to apply the course material in a creative synthesis.
* The exam provides an opportunity for students to evaluate themselves.
* The exam must be fair. Students will feel that the social contract of the syllabus has been violated if:
    1. There are any surprises.
    2. The questions are unclear or too nit-picky.
    3. The exam asks for too much or too little information.
    4. There is too clearly a correct answer where there should not be one.
    5. There is an over-emphasis on material covered in the lectures, the sections or the readings rather than a more even testing of course material.

Test-Writing Strategies:

* Compose test items as the semester progresses rather than all at once to ensure that questions reflect what was covered in class.
* Frequent testing or quizzing provides students with regular feedback and helps them to keep up with the material.
* Consider a mix of the following types of test questions, since relying on one type of question gives an advantage to those students who are particularly good at that type of question. Always give a choice in all test sections.
    1. Multiple-Choice.
    2. True/False.
    3. Matching.
    4. Completion.
    5. Essay/Short Answer.
* Indicate the proportional value of each section of the test to help students gauge their time.
* Design essay questions in such a way that they can be answered on multiple levels and allow students to decide for themselves what is most important about the subject being tested.
* If you are planning to have a final exam, you should plan for a mid-term exam as well.

Troubleshooting:

* Have a friend take the exam (and/or take it yourself) to determine if you have accurately estimated its fairness and the time necessary to complete it.
* Review non-essay questions closely for the possibility of multiple or ambiguous answers.

Giving the Exam:

* Collect exam after class so it does not fall into the hands of the next class or section.
* Have students sit in every other seat.
* Distribute different versions of the same test (be careful to record who had what version).

Review Sessions:

* Discuss particular questions in class (either thought up by the class or by you), and then consider using them on the exam.
* Discuss the format of the exam
* Discuss some essay question strategies, such as:
    1. Preparing by making up and answering their own questions.
    2. Beginning their answer on the test with a quick outline that will guide them as they write and indicate to the grader the direction in which they were going if they run out of time.

* Bill Cronon runs a two-hour review session at the end of which he tells students that they can predict what is on the exam. After soliciting sample questions from them, he reads questions from old exams to demonstrate their similarity.

Prepared by: *Kerry L. O'Toole*
Michael J. Rawson
Alexander P. Shashko

Evaluating Student Performance While Maximizing Fairness

Prepared by Thomas McGrath, Kerry O'Toole, Honor Sachs

Fair evaluation of student performance is one of the greatest challenges faced by a teacher. All students are unique and it is difficult for teachers to grade students without biases. There are also differing purposes, or ideologies of grading, which too must be reconciled by the evaluator.

Different students require grades for different purposes. Although all students must receive a final grade for their transcript, during the semester grades can be used as communication devices between the teacher and student. Therefore, the uses of grades as "carrots", prods and encouragement are more appropriate mid term. Final grades would most likely fall under the category of weed, ranking/standard, meritocracy and requirement. Although a final grade is a communication device, it must be remembered that it is also a permanent mark on a student's record, and should be used carefully. What follows is a list of different grading ideologies and different tactics that might be helpful in maximizing grading fairness.

Grading Ideologies

- **to produce a transcript**- especially important to science students whose graduate school admission may depend on more quantitative information
- **a "carrot**"- use the grade as something to tempt the student, to lead them to perform
- **a prod-** a different tactic to encourage better performance
- **requirement**- an incentive used to get students to come to class and perform
- **"weed"**- use grades to "weed" out students who show little promise
- **ranking/standard**
- **signal competence**
- **communication device between teacher and student**- a vehicle through which you can relay a message about the student's performance, improvement, danger spots
- **signal a cooperative effort**
- **encouragement**
- **reify essentialist qualities**- this is very very bad
- **meritocracy**
- **PROCESS**- a grade is a marker not a commodity. It should be evaluated within the larger scope of a student's performance and does not stand alone.

The purpose of grading is always entangled with the grading process itself. When a teacher sits down to grade their students' tests/papers, they bring biases into that process. Thus, there are some tactics that might aid the teacher in making this inherently biased activity as fair as possible.

Fairness Tactics

- **grade blind**
- **be concrete ahead of time**- clearly lay out expectations in the syllabus, and stick to them.
- **individualize grades**- recognize that each student is unique and will respond to grades in different ways (i.e. don't give a D as a "prod" to a student with low self-esteem).
- **convey that you grade harder than you really do**
- **tell class that they did better than your other classes**
- **ungraded assignments**- have a series of ungraded assignments during the semester to encourage better writing, without discouraging students with grades
- **comments-** keep a cognitive distance between grades and comments
- **respect is the bottom line-** always respect your students, you care about their success, not the meritocracy
- **self-evaluation**
- **the D/F boundary** = good faith vs. bad faith. Students should be failed when they don't show up, or they have a pattern of poor work that corresponds with apathy. But this can be tricky. If you give a student an "F" they can take the class again, with a "D" there is no chance for redemption.