

Teaching a Six-Week Course: Tip Sheet

A workshop from the University of Pittsburgh's
University Center for Teaching & Learning



- Articulate **clear, specific learning objectives**, and use those objectives to evaluate the effectiveness, importance, and hierarchy of your teaching/learning activities and assessments.
- **Many students may be taking a 6-week course for the first time.** Inform them up-front that the class format is intense and may require roughly twice as much work per week on their part. Be specific. (e.g., “During the Fall or Spring, you might have 50 pages of reading to prepare for each class meeting. For this course, you will have 100 pages per class meeting.”)
- On the other hand, **convey a positive attitude** to your students about the course, its importance, your excitement for the material/skills, and the potential for student success. Avoid apologizing for “a long, boring three hour class that we’re just going to have to get through.” Conveying your enthusiasm for the course opens the possibility that your students may also be enthusiastic about it.
- Due to the compressed nature of the course, each absence is more detrimental than during the Fall or Spring. Let your students know that and **make your attendance policy clear** to them. Some instructors who may allow for three absences during Fall/Spring choose to permit only one absence or none at all during Summer semester.
- Be prepared with a **plan for students who miss the first class** or first two classes, due to add/drop or travel plans—how will they make up the work and get caught up?
- **Vary your in-class activities**—lesson-planning is always critical, but even more so in a 3hr. or longer class. Let your learning objectives govern your decisions about activities. Think of 10-15 minutes as a guideline for time on any given activity to maintain attention. One possible sequence: a 5 min. interactive review, a 10 min. presentation, 3 min. on a targeted discussion question based on the presentation, another 5 min. presentation, 5 min. on an individual writing exercise + sharing, a 5 min. film clip, a 15 min group activity, another writing exercise in which students answer a central question from class so far, break...
- **Provide multiple opportunities in-class for practice** with skills (avoid straight 3-hr lectures).

- **Include breaks** in the middle of classes (or at the 1/3 and 2/3 marks).
- Consider having students **move around physically** (e.g., getting into groups with classmates elsewhere in the room, activities involving physical movement).
- Consider scheduling **more interactive activities** in the latter part of class, when fatigue may begin to set in (merely showing a film is not an interactive activity).
- Include multiple assessments/assignments and **begin immediately** with an assignment due by the second class meeting, since there is little time for “ramping up” in a six-week class.
- Provide **TIMELY**, **targeted**, and **frequent** feedback.
- **Solicit feedback** on the course early from your students (e.g., by the 3rd week).
- Reading loads are often high in such courses: design assignments which **require the reading** to be completed (e.g., reading quizzes, discussion questions, in-class assessments/presentations).
- Consider lighter reading assignments if scheduling exams and reading discussions together in the same class meeting.
- **Incorporate media** in brief (<5min) segments. If you’re showing a long film, consider breaking the viewing up into multiple segments, separated by periods for discussion or activities.
- Avoid showing a long film in the second half of class, when students are fatigued.
- **Talk to (several) others in your department who have taught the course**—don’t assume that the way in which one person has taught the course is the only way.
- It is very common for a 6-week course to consume all of an instructor’s time. Clearly plan how much time you will spend on the course each week, and how much you will spend on other professional and personal activities (e.g. research). **Schedule your time accordingly**, and then fit your work on the course into those time limits.
- **Articulate clear goals for *yourself* as a teacher**—what skills do *you* want to develop as a result of this experience?

Teaching Center staff members are always available to speak with you about any teaching-related issues you may have. Email teaching@pitt.edu for help.