

- It is not enough to familiarize yourself with the reading material assigned by the course director. You need to ask yourself how are you going to get students to:
 1. Reflect and respond to your questions
 2. Distinguish between facts and opinions
 3. Formulate valid conclusions
 4. Recognize a central thesis
 5. Evaluate arguments
 6. Foster attitudes of inquiry
 7. Distinguish between conclusions and interpretations

- Some practical ideas on engaging students in active learning:
 1. Problem solving
 2. Debates
 3. Analogies
 4. Critical incidents
 5. Rhetorical questions
 6. Silent reading
 7. Pop quizzes (I recommend allowing students to correct/grade their own work.)
 8. Student presentations
 9. Small group discussions
 10. Trigger film analysis
 11. Relevant “case studies”
 12. Related “musical interludes”
 13. Related photos
 14. Related art work
 15. Provocative statements
 16. A discussion based on a single but powerful quote from the readings
 17. Students generating questions for you
 18. Submitting questions to your students in advance

- ***If students are not responding to your questions it probably means you are using ineffective questioning skills.***

- Structure:

Get into the habit of creating a lesson plan. It need not be elaborate but it will help you anticipate unforeseen situations. Every session should have an opening, middle/major part of the session and an ending. The third part of the lesson plan is often neglected and that is a mistake. The closing minutes of every tutorial are crucial in creating a sense of continuity and effective learning. In the last (approx 10 minutes) of your session ask for:

- 2 - 3 facts we've learned today
- 2 - 3 ideas we've discussed in today's session
- 3 - 4 names/characters that were mentioned in today's session
- 1 - 2 issues that need further discussion
- 1 - 2 difficult topics that we have worked through in today's session

Next week we will be dealing with...

Example: As you read Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) consider:

- (1) Ways in which race intersects with gender (creating women's experience of racism/slavery).
- (2) In what ways does the "return" (incarnation) of *Beloved* embody former slaves' unbearable pasts?
- (3) Among others, *Beloved* blends together several narratives/stories. As you read the novel, focus on elements that characterize the narratives associated with Sethe, Beloved, Paul D, Denver, Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid.

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- There are ways in which you can assess your effectiveness as a teacher. Whether or not students pass a mid-term or final exam is generally NOT very indicative. A much more meaningful way is to ask yourself the following:

If my students were asked to explain (in their own words) my teaching style/methods, what would they say?

- Group/cooperative learning is advocated as a recommended teaching strategy. However, it is a mistake to assume that implementing group learning is easy. Without careful planning group activity can easily become a waste of time. In order to ensure improved learning you need to know how to plan for a group/cooperative framework. Here are some suggestions:
 1. Keep group size small (a group of 4 or more is ineffective)
 2. Initially (until everyone is comfortable with this method) keep the group activity short
 3. Explain to the students why you are using this strategy and what outcomes you expect
 4. Randomly assign students to groups and keep changing the groups
 5. If there is not enough positive interdependence among members of the group – there is not enough learning taking place
 6. Learning together is a skill students need to acquire. Start with short and simple tasks and gradually progress to longer and more substantial ones.
 7. Assignments for the groups should ensure individual accountability otherwise there is nothing to prevent one student from doing the work and others from “hitchhiking”. A clear group learning goal is one in which achievement is easily measured. Example: you are finished when every member in your group can explain the ways in which Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” (1916) stands for the American icon of the value of nonconformity.

A Common TA Complaint:

My students were assigned a text to read at home. I want to engage my students in a meaningful discussion but most of them arrive unprepared; they have not read the text and are expecting that I “enlighten” them. What do I do?

- Tell them how privileged they are to be here and that this is a waste of your time and storm out of the class!
- Tell them they are no longer in high school and if they don’t do the work – tough! Contractually you are obligated to conduct your tutorial but given the situation, instead of dealing with the text, you are going to show them a movie.
- Tell them how disappointed you are and ask the students what they think you ought to do in a situation like this.
- Tell them that engaging in collective punishment is not your style, but neither is rewarding those who do not comply with what is expected of them. Hence, you will proceed as if everyone is familiar with the text.
- Divide the class into groups, hand out a group assignment based on the required reading while making sure that in each group there is a representative who is familiar with the text.
- Given how important it is to deal with the text, provide them with a comprehensive summary of the plot, main characters, historical background, themes, etc.
- Find a way (prepared in advance!) to deal with the situation which:
 1. Does not penalize those who did the reading
 2. Enables you to carry on with what you are supposed to be doing
 3. Is a way of enticing (hopefully) everyone to comply with the course’s required readings

Example using *The Plague (La Peste)* by Albert Camus (1947)

Questions, Reasons, Rational, Viewpoints, Perspectives Re. *The Plague*

(1) *However, whenever opportunity arose, he [Rambert] had tackled each of them and pleaded his cause. The gist of his argument was always the same: that he was a stranger to our town and, that being so, his case deserved special consideration. Mostly the men he talked to conceded this point readily enough. But usually they added that a good number of other people were in a like case, and thus his position was not so exceptional as he seemed to suppose. To this Rambert could reply that this did not affect the substance of his argument in any way. He was then told that it did affect the position, already difficult, of the authorities, who were against showing any*

favoritism and thus running the risk of creating what, with obvious repugnance, they called “a precedent.” (pp. 106)

Tell me two things that are happening...

Describe something that is happening...

List three things that are happening...

What is the gist of Rambert’s argument?

Was this the first time Rambert made this argument?
How do you know that?

Do the men agree with Rambert’s argument?

What are their reasons for responding the way they did to Rambert?

What would be at risk if “the men” agreed to Rambert’s request?

Is it always risky to create a precedent?

When is it not risky?

When is it risky?

Can you think of a situation when although creating a precedent would be risky, it would still be worth taking the risk?

When is it extremely risky to create a precedent?

Can you think of a situation when although creating a precedent is extremely risky it would still be the right thing to do?

...

Now... let us answer all these questions again but this time in the context of “a plague”.
(Could be done in groups.)

(2) *Thus week by week the prisoners of the plague put up what fight they could. Some... even contrived to fancy they were still behaving as free men and had the power of choice. But actually it would have been truer to say that by this time, mid-August, the plague had swallowed up everything and*

everyone. No longer were there individual destinies; only a collective destiny, made of plague and the emotions shared by all. Strongest of these emotions was the sense of exile and of deprivation, with all the crosscurrents of revolt and fear set up by these... (pp. 167)

The people of Oran are totally unprepared for the ravages of the plague. Its deadly and ferocious character illuminates several philosophical viewpoints. We will discover in the paragraph I have selected several such viewpoints. There are obviously other viewpoints which you are expected to know and will be able to find as you go back and read the entire novel. This is a good start; the rest is up to you. Please remember, next week we move on to a different reading but anyone who wishes to jot down the other philosophic themes which you discovered in the text --- I'll be happy to look at it and provide you with some feedback.

Let us explore some philosophic viewpoints which are reflected in the paragraph.

The Absurd...

Extreme suffering...

Language and its inadequacy in expressing grotesque suffering...

Exile...

Freedom versus complete confinement...

...

Many argue that the plague is a metaphor for the barbaric phenomenon of Nazism.

What's a metaphor?

Now let us see how this works based on the philosophic viewpoints we discussed.

Some Instructional Verbs/Tasks Used for Different Levels of Thinking

1st level

Tell

Describe

Name

Locate

List

2nd level

Compare

Contrast

Provide examples

Explain

3rd level

Connect

Develop

Discuss

Prepare

4th (high) level

Debate

Choose

Support

Diagram

