

Rules & Tools for Effective Teaching:

A Handbook for Faculty at the University of Ghana

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
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THE RULES

Rule #1: Understand That You Are Teaching An Academic Language!	5
• How Do You Teach the “Academic Language?”	
• Do <u>Not</u> Ask the Students, “Are You With Me?”	
• Why It Is Important for You to Teach Academic Language Quickly?	
Rule#2: Get Your Students to the “Intellectual Point of Purchase!”	7
• YOU Must Make Ideas Understandable	
• Reaching the “Intellectual Point of Purchase	
• The Accumulating Pace of New “Purchases”	
• The “Feedback” Loop in Making YOUR “Intellectual Sales”	

THE TOOLS

Tool #1: You Have to Fill the Students’ “Intellectual Toolbox!”	11
• How YOU Equip the Intellectual Toolbox	
• YOUR Choice of “Tools”	
• YOUR Planning of the Content of A Lecture	
Tool #2: The Syllabus: A Contract Between YOU and the Student!	13
• YOUR Syllabus is a Management Tool	
• YOUR Syllabus is a “Contract”	
• Don’t Change the Contract!	
• Clarity, Goals and Performance Objectives in YOUR Syllabus	
Tool #3: Your Carefully Prepared Lectures for Large Classes!	17
• Public Speaking: The Most Transferable Skill	
• Lecture Halls in New “N” Block and Jones Quarte y Are <u>NOT</u> Seminars	
• Lecture Content and Big Audiences	
• Your Choice of Words and Style of Presentation Are Important	

Tool #4: Ways to Do Continuous Assessment in Big Classes	19
• Organizing YOUR Large Class for Continuous Assessment	
• Assessment Methods in YOUR Large Class	
• A Model Assessment Program for Assigning 30% of a Final Course Grade	
Tool #5: Exams: Comprehensive & Efficiently Graded!	23
• The Role of Exams in Effectively Measuring Student Competence	
• The Purpose of Examinations	
• The Keys to Construction of YOUR Exam	
• The Clarity of Language in YOUR Exam	
• Restating YOUR Exam Items to Reduce Time in Grading Individual Exams	
• The Components of YOUR Exam	
• Time Commitments in Grading YOUR Exam	
Tool #6: Personal “Quality Assurance” To Rate Your Teaching!	29
• Reviewing YOUR Syllabus	
• Reviewing YOUR Lectures	
• Item Analysis of YOUR Assessment Tools	
• Sampling Student Opinion to Determine Their “Mastery” of the Course	
• “Have I Achieved My Purpose, Goals and Objectives?”	

INTRODUCTION

Teaching effectively is a true challenge. Most university lecturers have received no training in the skills and techniques that result in excellent performance in the classroom or lecture hall. Too often men and women are appointed as lecturers and begin teaching by using the methods they observed from their lecturers when they were students. Some of those old teachers may have been excellent, but many were not so good.

Each lecturer who does not practice good skills in teaching deprives students of learning what might be absorbed in a course that is well presented. Poor teaching degrades the quality of university education. Ineffective teaching is unfair to the student, and it is unfair to the lecturer. The lecturer should be embarrassed if he or she does a poor job. It also deprives the teacher of the great satisfaction that comes from knowing, absolutely knowing, that the students have really learned the material of a day's lesson. When those moments occur, the professional and personal satisfactions of life in a university setting are extraordinary. It makes all the years of study and pursuit of advanced degrees worthwhile.

Teaching performance does not have to be less than the best. With a few rules and tools, the performance by any lecturer can be improved. Most importantly, it comes down to attention to details and constantly thinking about how what you do will advance the learning process of your students.

This short handbook provides some of those good rules and tools that can make teaching performance better and improve the quality of learning. There are just two rules that must be thought about when getting ready to teach, rules that should guide the process of preparing and then actually doing the teaching. Then there are six tools that discuss all the key activities of doing good teaching. When combined and practiced constantly, the great satisfying moments of teaching will multiply rapidly. The students will be more attentive. The climate of the lecture hall will be more focused and serious. The evaluation of the teaching will be more positive and not just a popularity poll.

The materials presented here have been excerpted from, *The Craft of Teaching*, a larger document written for the University of Ghana in 2010 as part of the work of the Visitation Report Implementation Committee. It was also prepared by the Carnegie Consultant, Professor Peter French. It is to be hoped that this can be a useful influence on the quality of teaching in many places at the University.

Enjoy your work! It is a great and satisfying profession!

Rules & Tools for Effective Teaching: *A Handbook for Faculty at the University of Ghana*



TWO RULES:

Rule #1: Understand That You Are Teaching An “Academic Language!”

What is “Academic” Language?

Do I ever stop to ask if students understand me?

**Do I ever think about the value of learning this “new”
language so students can show their real potential?**

University of Ghana “freshers” come to campus with limited awareness of the meaning of “the intellectual life.” Once enrolled, these “freshers” meet people like YOU who are dedicated to acquiring knowledge and skills so that YOU can pursue the “intellectual life.”

This reality creates the challenging learning environment in which YOU and students are, essentially, speaking different languages.

The vocabulary YOU use is different from every day English. Even familiar words can have different meanings when part of conversation on campus. This condition makes your job more difficult.

You must not only communicate the content of your lectures; YOU must translate the content into language a new student can fully grasp so intellectual arguments are fully understood.

How YOU Start to Teach the “Academic Language?”

The willingness of students to learn a new “academic” language is necessary so they can master a new way of thinking and speaking. Teaching them is your job.

YOU can begin with two simple exercises. One, on the first day of class ask twenty students to write a paragraph answering this question, “What would you like to learn in this course?” Two, make up a list of terms commonly used in your discipline. Give the list to twenty other students and ask them to define the meaning of each word. By reviewing responses, YOU will know to two things: (1) general ability to write university level work and (2) the gap between standard language and “academic language” which “freshers” need to learn.

This “academic language barrier” is not dissimilar to asking a French-speaking Togolese to pass an examination on a technical subject by writing his answers in English. Essentially, your first-year student and the French-speaker from Togo are each making a double translation in order to meet the requirement. The strain of *double translation* will soon be evident. The ability to write answers to the questions suffers under the pressure of doing translation. And a grade that depends on the course content will correspondingly be reduced because of these conditions.

Do Not Ask Students, “Are You With Me?”

Academic language in a lecture also has translation issues. On the Legon campus, it is common for a lecturer to explain a point and then say, “*Are you with me?*” Now, students are reluctant to disappoint you and routinely nod they are “with” you. Of course they are! But that is not the question that should have been asked. You should ask:

- “*Did you fully understand what I just said?*”
- “*Was MY meaning clear in this example?*”
- “*Did you understand MY main point?*”
- “*Should I go over that once more?*”

It is YOUR job to translate YOUR thoughts into clear statements so information is learned. YOU must find examples students can understand. By repeated use academic language in lots of different examples, YOU bring the student up to a level where he or she can fully benefit from knowing new ideas. YOU must be always aware that teaching university students is a combination of providing new information and translation of that information into a vocabulary that is easily recognizable to “freshers.” The art of teaching is more than knowing your discipline. In reality, YOU are both a scholar and a linguist to students who are just beginning their academic journey in university life.

Why It’s Important for YOU to Teach the Academic Language Quickly?

Now that YOU realize there are two languages used in academic settings, the value of early mastery of a new academic vocabulary becomes apparent. The more rapidly students begin to use new academic vocabulary, the more quickly they will grow in intellectual mastery of new ideas. The emphasis YOU place on teaching a new language in a student’s first year at the University of Ghana will result in dividends as a student enters the more advanced levels in his or her degree program.

Rule #2: Get Your Students to the “Intellectual Point of Purchase!”

How do I get students to fully understand complex ideas?

When can I be assured that students have ‘got it’?

If I “sell” one idea, how quickly will I “sell” the next one?

What is the “feedback loop” in “intellectual purchases?”

YOUR job of teaching requires doing several tasks simultaneously. Fundamentally, YOU are engaged in conveying information about a subject that will:

1. expand the student’s intellectual frame of reference,
2. influence the manner in which student’s absorb information, and
3. provide new information to a student’s own perception of the world.

This is most effectively done within the structured frameworks that organize scholarly inquiry.

Basically, YOU must provide a means for organizing and placing information in convenient frameworks for (a) ease of recall and (b) developing linkages between that information and its relationship to other data that might previously have seemed unrelated.

This organizing of inquiry is accomplished by the use of such things as a table of elements in chemistry, a model of the DNA strand, a form for literary analysis, a theory of social change, or a paradigm on the functioning of an economy. There are theories, hypotheses, speculations on formal frameworks, and ordered approaches to considering philosophy. Students need to learn those theories, but they should also be introduced to shortcomings of theory.

YOU also have the job of making students aware of the value of the various methods for organizing information or conducting research while at the same time ensuring students preserve a critical skepticism that encourages reflection on the applicability of a theory to a particular setting. YOU should seek to make sure students know that use of one theoretical perspective may not yield understanding but another theory might be productive.

Reaching the “Intellectual Point of Purchase!”

Understanding that organizational frameworks can be flawed, YOU need to give attention to those frameworks that have proven most useful in gaining verifiable outcomes. YOU are working to get acceptance of ideas so students can grow in terms of intellectual understanding.

The point at which YOU get an idea across that students both understand and embrace is “the intellectual point of purchase (IPOP).”

Once the IPOP is reached, the student will begin to see new insights he or she might previously have missed or ignored.

A simple way of looking at this exchange between YOU and students is that YOU are “selling” ideas. The students who are investing their time and energy in their education are the “customers.”

An old adage about salesmanship is that, “Selling begins when the customer says ‘No!’” If YOU believe students are not getting the ideas being “sold,” YOU must seek other ways of explaining the idea being presented. It might be a different example or an image that is more easily understood. The task is to get to the place where students’ heads nod and the “**purchase**” of a theory, concept, paradigm, hypothesis or array of empirical data has occurred. When that happens, new thoughts about the human condition, the physical universe or the creativity of mankind has been “**purchased.**”

The Accumulating Pace of New “Purchases”

Aware of **Rule #1: the importance of “teaching of academic language,”** YOU must link the academic world to the students’ world so they understand the course material and its applications. Once the initial “**intellectual point of purchase (IPOP)**” is accomplished, the student begins to “**buy in**” to the wisdom and knowledge YOU are offering. The rate of future “**purchases**” of elements of “the intellectual life” will accumulate rapidly.

The “Feedback” Loop in Making YOUR “Intellectual Sales”

Getting YOUR students to the “**intellectual point of purchase (IPOP)**” is an easily understood image. It demonstrates the importance of the need for clarity in the presentation of lecture material. It reveals the importance of “**feed-back**” from students to determine if the “**purchase**” actually occurred. **Continuous assessment is a “feedback loop”** to confirm that the number of intellectual purchases is piling up as students get more comfortable with new ideas and begin to use them routinely as a way of expressing ideas.

SIX TOOLS

Tool #1: Filling A Student's "Intellectual Toolbox"

What is the "intellectual toolbox?"

How much time do I spend on planning what tools to provide?

Are my lectures organized enough so the tools are understood?

A course of study for a semester must be carefully planned. Teaching is not a "one size fits all" exercise. Planning a semester of teaching requires attention to many issues. YOU must think through strategies that can be used to insure information is retained for long periods of time. Basic questions for planning a semester of study in a course include:

1. How can I most effectively use 1500 minutes which is the limit of lecture time provided for the course?
2. What information MUST I include in my course of study for the semester?
3. How much time should I spend on each topic on the syllabus to insure students can fully understand what they MUST know?
4. What material SHOULD I eliminate from the syllabus because it is not essential (even though it may be interesting)?
5. Am I trying to do too much?

How YOU Equip the Intellectual Toolbox

In teaching a course, YOU are preparing students to engage in "academic work." Like carpentry or a plumbing, academic work requires the use of appropriate tools. These "academic tools" are techniques of inquiry and analysis. They are theories, sequences of problem solving, paradigms, theses, hypotheses, and the capacity for identifying variables – independent, dependent and intervening.

In the same fashion that a carpenter needs a hammer, level, saw, square, plane and tape measure, the student engaged in "academic work" needs to have a usable set of academic tools in his or her "intellectual toolbox."

A student's ability to master the application of these "tools" will depend on how quickly he or she has mastered the "academic language" of University life. As a student's **skills** in the use of the "tools" in his or her "intellectual toolbox" grow, he or she will more quickly reach new "Intellectual Points of Purchase (IPOP)" in improved academic performance. Carpenters and

plumbers become more skillful through the use of their tools. It is the same for students. The key is for YOU to provide them with tools they need and explain the use of those tools with clarity.

YOUR Choice Of “Tools”

YOU have preferred paradigms for your own intellectual work, “tools” you find most useful for analyzing information and building ideas into frameworks of understanding. The clearer these models are the easier it is to explain them to students. However, there is a need to be open-minded about other tools as well. YOU should not impose too narrow a range on the ways of analyzing data as to limit ability to understand a problem. In fact, YOU should constantly be adding to the range of “tools” made available to students to use for examining academic issues. Very simply, YOU should plan to equip the student with the fullest “intellectual toolbox” as can be provided in the course of a semester of study.

YOUR Planning of the Content of A Lecture:

Each time a course is presented, YOU should edit your lectures to include new information, exclude old examples, clarify points to eliminate any confusion and place emphasis on material that must be absorbed as fundamental.

Each academic lecture is an academic paper. Explain the lecture’s purpose to students when you begin. The clarity of YOUR well-prepared lecture should improve its presentation and eliminate any “floundering” when you are speaking.

The least bit of uncertainty in the presentation of YOUR ideas and students notice. Such uncertainty causes students to question the “believability” of the material being presented.

The clearly thought out, well-prepared lecture avoids the likelihood of uncertainty. The good lecture is a means for letting students observe how YOU think or approach analysis of a topic.

Finally, the language YOU use in your lectures is also important. YOU must not talk beyond the comprehension of your listeners but you must constantly bring students to new and higher levels of understanding. Declarative sentences are best on all occasions. By “reading” the audience, YOU can gain a sense of how words have been absorbed. When understanding has not been achieved, pause and ask, “Is my meaning clear?” to ensure the “tool” has been acquired.

Tool #2: The Syllabus: A Contract Between YOU and the Student

Why is a detailed syllabus so important?

What is so important about clearly stated goals and performance objectives?

How does a clear syllabus help me to teach more effectively?

When the planning for your course has been done with care so the “**intellectual toolbox**” can be filled, the next step is the preparation of your syllabus that is the “roadmap” for the student as he or she learns the material in your course.

Think of this way! When students enroll in your course, they are “**purchasing**” a **product** – the information and insight to be learned over a thirteen week semester. As “**buyers,**” each student is entitled to know the quality of your product. This is a form of “**academic exchange**” and the writing of the syllabus is a matter of “**product design**” that describes what will happen in the course.

This responsibility for a precise description of the “**product**” and a detailed statement of “**terms of performance**” is a reasonable expectation. Just as businessman emphasizes **quality assurance** in what he makes, YOU personally should guarantee the quality of the product being delivered in your classroom. The responsibility is YOURS to prepare both the goals of learning and the means for achieving mastery of those defined goals that are the part of the “**contract**” as set down in the syllabus.

The role of your syllabus is to be a **management tool** giving you complete control over what will occur during the semester. Like an architect designing a building on a blank sheet of paper, you are in control of all the variables. When YOU carefully write your syllabus, you are constructing a framework for learning. When this is done precisely, a student’s understanding of each part of the course is improved. The key is to make the syllabus detailed enough to ensure you are in control.

What Your “Contractual” Agreement Should Include

It may not be seen like it when you start to prepare your syllabus, but, in the mind of the student, the syllabus is an agreement between you and that student which includes the following:

- *It defines the expectations you have for the student.*
- *It identifies with specificity the work to be accomplished by the student.*
- *It sets dates and deadlines when work is to be completed, and*
- *Most importantly, it defines the commitment YOU are making to the student.*

By stating both goals and learning objectives you define the expectations you have for your student and for YOURSELF.

Don't Change the Contract!

YOU should **NOT** change the syllabus during the semester unless that is completely unavoidable. If for some reason that becomes necessary, a copy of the amended syllabus should be provided to the Head of Department coincident with its being provided to the students registered in the course.

Changing the syllabus and course requirements in mid-course during the semester is perhaps the leading reason for students to complain about the quality of instruction being provided.

Students do not like or easily accept confusion regarding the “contract” they have entered into with YOU. They do not want the “contract” to be breached by surprise changes made during the semester. They do want to get the “**product**” they agreed to purchase as it was “**designed.**”

Clarity, Goals and Performance Objectives in YOUR Syllabus

If you are going to teach successfully, YOU must be careful in stating the design for your course. There are certain items you should make a part of the syllabus YOU give to each student at the beginning of a semester. These items are:

A. State the Purpose of the Course:

The Statement of Purpose is a one paragraph description of what you see as the academic purpose of the course. It may also contain a statement of why this has a linkage to the wider world of Ghana, Africa and the globe. You are telling the student why they are learning the subject material of the course.

B. Your Syllabus Must State the Goals to Be Achieved:

After stating the purpose of the course, you should clearly state the goals you seek to achieve in the course. The number of goals should be a minimum of five but no more than nine. These should be declarative sentences that describe ends to be achieved and presented as follows:

“The Goals for this course are.....(then list)

C. Your Syllabus Must Then State the Performance Objectives to Be Achieved by the Student:

Having stated the general purpose of the course and the more precise goals to be achieved, you should then proceed to the statement of learning objectives for the course.

These are precise statements of information to be acquired and analysis to be performed. These performance objectives inform the student of specific expectations that are the means by which goals are fulfilled. These objectives should be placed in a format such as: “**The student should be able to.....**

1. **Identify and describe.....**
2. **Write an essay on.....**
3. **Compare and contrast.....**
4. **Discuss ()’s concept of () and contrast with ()’s ideas regarding.....**
5. **Write a description of.....**

The number of objectives should be sufficient in number to assist the student in achieving the defined goals of the course.

D. Each Syllabus MUST State the Means by Which Evaluation Will Be Done to Determine Achievement of Goals & Objectives As Well As Mastery of Material

Your syllabus should clearly state the means you will use to measure the students’ achievement of the goals and objectives of the course. This should be divided into two parts. Part One would describe the “continuous assessment” that will occur. This can include tests, essays, papers, or other exercises. Part Two of the course evaluation should be a short description of expectations that will need to be fulfilled on the final end-of-semester examination. The lecturer should also state the value of each exercise and activity so that the student knows the worth of each portion of the work.

E. And, Of Course, Provide Basic Information

The syllabus should state the instructor’s name. It should also give an e-mail address as a contact point. It should indicate: the course name, term and number, year, department name and the day and time of office hours.

MODEL TEMPLATE FOR YOUR SYLLABUS

Directions: You should include each of the points (I. – IX.) in the development of your syllabus for an individual course. Copies of completed syllabi should be e-mailed to the Head of Department’s administrative staff no later than three weeks prior to the beginning of the semester for duplication in sufficient copies so all students will be provided a syllabus on the first day of classes. All course syllabi must be kept on file and available for posting on University websites. The Syllabus should include:

- I. **COURSE NUMBER AND TITLE: + Semester and year**
- II. **LECTURER’S NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION: Name, department, day and time of office hours, phone number, an e-mail address**
- III. **COURSE DESCRIPTION: This is a one paragraph statement which sets out the Lecturer’s vision for the course and what is to be gained from the learning of the subject matter. This statement should not exceed 10 lines.**

IV. **COURSE GOALS:** This should be a listing of the “goals” to be achieved as a result of the learning in the course. The number of goals should be a minimum of four and no more than ten. These goals should be written in declarative statements in the affirmative voice.

V. **COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE LISTED GOALS:**

At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able to....

1. Write an essay on....
2. Define and describe... 3. Compare and contrast...
4. Examine critically.....
5. Etc.

There can be as many “Learning Objectives” as necessary to fulfill capacity to master the listed

VI. **COURSE CONTENT AND METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:** This section describes:

1. Methods of presentation: lecture, discussion, use of intranet/internet
2. Listing of the weekly lecture topics including the title of each lecture and the readings that a student should have completed in preparation for the lecture

VII. **TEXTS AND INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS:**

1. **TEXTS:** listing of reading assignments by specific dates in the semester
2. **MATERIALS:** other materials including internet searched, journals, periodicals or reference materials

VIII. **CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT, GRADING AND EVALUATION:** There should be a very precise statement on grading policy, explicating how the 30% of the final grade will be determined by “continuous assessment” and how the student can earn an optimum grade: quizzes, class participation, written submissions and attendance policy. There should also be a statement regarding the final examination.

VI. **PLAGIARISM:** A very clear statement on plagiarism indicating the penalties including failure of the course that will result if plagiarism including undocumented use of internet materials is detected

Tool #3: Your Carefully Prepared Lecture for Large Classes

How can I be effective when lecturing to larger classes?

How must my lectures be changed for large audiences?

What words are more useful so large audiences will understand content?

In the past few years, the University of Ghana has worked to reduce the size of the very largest classes. The goal has been to have no class larger than 300 but that is still a very large group. When you have to teach such a large class there are things you should know about how to be effective.

Public Speaking: The Most Transferable Skill:

There is significant evidence that the most transferable skill YOU can acquire is effectiveness as a public speaker. No matter what occupation or profession is chosen, a person with demonstrable skills in public speaking has an advantage over peers and is better positioned to achieve success in his or her public and professional life. Public speaking is also the one activity that creates the most anxiety for a person who is not trained in such skills. Many will avoid speaking whenever possible, but for someone appointed to the faculty the challenge cannot be avoided. This does not mean everyone can do it well. The University does have potential assistance at the Academic and Staff Development Centre. Get help if YOU need it!

Lecture Halls in New “N” Block and Jones Quartey Are NOT for Seminars

The size of the room in which lectures are delivered can change so many of the dynamics about the manner in which a course is presented. This has to be taken into consideration in preparing to be effective in teaching.

The starting point is an understanding that the lecture format is not a good way of conveying information. Even the most dynamic lecturers can hold audience attention for only twenty to thirty minutes unless there is enormous care and attention given to how the lecture is delivered.

When planning YOUR lecture think about the student in the last row of seats. Looking out across rows and rows of faces, YOU need to remember that a connection must be made with everyone in that audience. This means overcoming the poor acoustics in Jones Quartey and speaking over the noise that flows in through open doors, especially as the next class gathers near the time a lecture is ending. What is required is an approach to lecturing that is significantly different from lectures presented in medium sized classrooms or in smaller seminars. It is not an

easy thing to accomplish. Remember, a good syllabus increases management and control. It also improves attentiveness among large audiences.

Lecture Content and Big Audiences

Guidelines that can be helpful in developing a lecture for a larger lecture hall are:

1. As the size of a class grows, the content of a lecture must become less complex and easier to understand.
2. In a space with poor acoustics YOU must stick very closely to the outline of the lecture so that students will have a sense of continuity in the thoughts being presented.
3. Declarative sentences are best. This may seem boring but the need is to reach the far corners of the room.
4. Select a half dozen faces in various places to constantly determine if the message is being understood.

What YOU must avoid is evidence of too many students taking no notes, doing alternative activities like text messaging and a general disconnection from the purposes of the lecture.

YOUR Choice of Words and Style of Presentation Are Important

In the same manner that spatial dimensions of a lecture hall and the number of students enrolled influence YOUR ability to lecture effectively, **word choice** and how YOU speak matter! More precisely:

1. The words chosen must be unambiguous as to meaning. Simpler is better.
2. The diction must be flawless and sentences should be complete.
3. The degree to which the lecture is written out in an extensive outline, the better it will be.
4. The careful design keeps YOU on track and the audience will also stay on track.
5. YOU should avoid too much “academic language” but use it when necessary.
6. YOUR speech pattern is also important. There need to be pauses in presentation to insure that certain ideas have been absorbed.

It is a delight to observe lecturers who speak slowly, clearly and without ambiguity in the choice of words. It is also notable that they pause after each new thought to get some measure of the audience.

In selecting a role model for effectiveness in discourse one need look no further than the University Chancellor Kofi Annan. He speaks with a Ghanaian accent but with clarity that draws the listener into the thought process. He pauses to let his words be absorbed. He measures out each word when engaged in public presentation. Indeed, it would be a virtue for the University to be known as a place where the manner of public speaking is taken seriously and is distinguished by the Annan mode of discourse.

Tool # 4: Ways to Do Continuous Assessment in Big Classes

- Am I ready to change the style of my teaching?**
- Can I shift from just lecturing to focusing on continuous assessment?**
- What techniques am I willing to try to be effective?**

The University of Ghana adopted the new four year degree program as a means of controlling class size so that more “continuous assessment” could occur. The new four-year degree program has now been combined with a new grading scheme that lists specific activities to be used for continuous assessment. While 70% of classes will remain at less than one hundred students and permit a range of continuous assessment techniques, it is the larger classes where the task will remain a challenge.

Organizing YOUR Large Class for Continuous Assessment

A recent student assessment of teaching revealed that the primary concern of students is for increased communication between YOU and students so the students can experience a greater sense of connectivity with YOU and the course material.. To create this condition smaller groups must be created:

- **Larger classes (100+) can be divided into “cohorts” of up to 30 students each by giving each student a card which states “Cohort # and instantly creates groups that can be assigned specific tasks in class that promote “active” or “engaged” learning.**
- **Cohorts should be sub-divided into “study groups” of up to ten students each for purposes of sharing information that insures information in lectures is fully absorbed and understood. This is a form of “deutero” learning or “learning to learn” where the sharing of information affirms an individual’s command of the content. This means the card can be provided at the first class telling a student, for example, that he or she is in “Cohort #1 – Study Group A or B or C.**
- **The division of larger and medium sized classes into the “cohort/ study group” format provides a means for assigning graduate teaching assistants or tutorial assistants to specific clusters of students with whom they can work to assist the learning process.**
- **The “cohort/study group” format allows better maintenance of attendance records which are critical in determining is a student is eligible to “sit” the final examination at the conclusion of the semester.**

- **The “cohort/study group” format permits more detailed inquiry of student satisfaction with instruction as part of the overall work of the Academic Quality Assurance Unit to insure teaching is being done effectively and productively.**

The combination of a well designed syllabus, a large class divided into smaller clusters of students and use of the approved types of continuous assessment activities means “engaged” learning can occur. The activities may be less than ideal compared to what is found in a small class or the historic tutorial system, but can achieve University goals.

Assessment Methods in YOUR Large Class

Once students are provided with a well-designed syllabus that offers clear guidance as to their obligations for a semester and been organized into “cohorts” and “study groups” they will be ready for a number of activities that can be used to justify 30% of the final grade earned for the semester. The approved activities in the under the new grading scheme are:

- a. **Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs):** MCQ is a form of assessment where the questions require the student to select a correct answer out of 4 or 5 possible options.
- b. **Take-Home Assignment:** This is a form of assessment where a task is given to students which must be undertaken individually or in groups (depending on class size) and submitted within a specified time.
- c. **True/False Questions:** This is a type of assessment where questions take the form of a statement and the candidate is required to determine the veracity or otherwise of that statement.
- d. **Seminar Presentations:** Seminar presentation is a type of assessment where students are given specific topics and required to make presentations. This can be done individually or in groups (depending on class size)
- e. **Fill-in-the-Gap Items:** This is a form of assessment where the candidate is required to provide missing items in a statement or sentence.
- f. **Reflective Writing:** Reflective Writing is a form of assessment which involves writing personal reactions to an issue or topic. The student is asked to write about a page summarizing his/her thoughts on a topic.
- g. **Short Essays:** A short essay is a brief account on a subject matter that has an introduction, development or main body and a conclusion. It should not be more than one page in length.

There are several activities that can be used that require some additional explication as to how they can be used in larger classes.

The Short Quiz:

Short quizzes can be given several times a semester, involve short answer exercises and take no more than 30 minutes of the class. The grading time for an individual quiz response should be no more than 1 minute. The grading of a quiz for 300 students should be no more than 5 hours.

Quizzes can be set for specific dates on the syllabus or unannounced. Unannounced quizzes can serve as a means for encouraging regular attendance.

The Discussion Group for Class Presentations:

The use of discussion groups is designed to allow students to react to lecture material immediately following a lecture. For this activity, a single “cohort” can be positioned in the front of a lecture hall for a discussion with the lecturer and the other cohorts remain as an audience. A thirty minute discussion session can cover an extended range of topics and insure the Lecturer is aware of how students are absorbing the course materials. If a course featured ten “discussions” over the course of a semester, each student would participate at least once. If the selection of a “cohort” to participate in a discussion is random, the use of the discussion group also serves as a means for encouraging regular attendance. There is no formal individual grade for this activity but the student’s attendance is recorded against the listing of students in that particular cohort.

Reflective Writing:

Reflective writing is a form of assessment that has come in to wide use in both the UK and the US. It involves writing personal reactions to an issue or topic (see the article “*Reflective Writing – Some Initial Guidance for Students*” by Professor Jenny Moon, University of Exeter). To quote Dr. Moon: “Reflection lies somewhere around the notion of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting.” For purposes of the larger class, reflective writing is an ideal way of promoting engaged learning. By asking a student to write a page in which they summarize their thoughts on a topic, the student is moved away from passive learning to a more active format of inquiry.

Several times a semester, in a larger class, students can be assigned a reflective exercise to be completed during the “continuous assessment” class time. This exercise can take no more than 20 minutes. The students might be asked to write on such topics as:

- **What is the nature and significance of the lecture you have just heard to you personally?**
- **What other information do you feel you need to fully understand the information in the lecture you have just heard?**
- **How do you think others in your “study group” might respond to the ideas in this lecture?**

To provide an example of how surprising responses arise from these reflections on lectures, consider the comment of a “fresher” enrolled in Linguistics 111 when asked to write on “How does linguistics have an impact on your life?” The response was:

“I was very disappointed when I received my admission letter and was given linguistics. I thought linguistics is all about how to speak different languages. In fact, with the little introduction I have in this course, I now know that the University should have made it a core course. *It helps me to read my Quran very fluently and accurately*” (emphases added).

YOU simply cannot know what the outcomes of reflection will be, but in this example it is clear the student is actively engaged in processing information, has formed judgments as to how linguistics helps personally and has arrived at a larger conclusion that the course is valuable and should be shared with all entering students. This is a significant outcome for five lines on a page.

These types of exercises can be done by all students several times a semester. The reflection with the student ID # added would encourage regular attendance. Reflections are best read only by YOU to preserve some measure of anonymity. Placing a reflection in an envelope with only the ID # on the outside of the envelope would be preferred.

A Model Assessment Program for Assigning 30% of a Final Course Grade

To gain some sense of how continuous assessment can occur in classes of various sizes and how the work may be assigned a value that in total makes up 30% of the final grade, a **suggestive** model has been developed. It works as follows:

- **Divide class into “cohorts” (up to 30 students each) and “study groups” within each “cohort” (up to 10 students each)**
- **Take time at the initial class to go over each item in the syllabus and place emphasis on the student being responsible for their own learning, for helping their classmates in certain exercises, for being in attendance and for submitting all required material.**
- **Indicate there will be 2 UNANNOUNCED quizzes during the semester that will take twenty minutes to complete. The value of each quiz is 8 POINTS. Total of 16 points for quizzes.**
- **Indicate there will be 3 “reflections” randomly assigned to various “cohorts” during the semester. Submission of each reflection will be worth 4 POINTS. The three reflections will be worth 12 points.**
- **Indicate there will be 1 assigned reflection paper based on internet research and personal response to that material. The reflection will be a minimum of 500 words. The assignment will be submitted during the 10th week of the semester and will be graded and returned in the 13th week of the semester. The value of the longer reflection piece will be 2 POINTS. (Total grading time 40-50 hours)**
- **FINAL EXAMINATION: 2-3 hour examination designed for breadth, depth and integrative thinking. Grading time: 5-6 per hour. Total grading time 50-60 hours. Value: 70% of final semester grade**

Tool # 5: Exams: Comprehensive & Efficiently Graded

Is there a better means of testing than just essay questions?

How can I be sure students know all the material?

How can I get exams graded efficiently?

What are the key things an examination must do?

The University is interested in reform of the examination process to provide more timely completion of grading. Also, the new grading scheme eliminated “probationary status” so a student would need to know all grades from a previous semester before registering for the next semester. This makes efficient grading of exams a **required** assignment.

Accomplishing the University goal requires the use of alternative testing formats that contrast with the historic writing of essays. The manner in which exams are constructed and the attention to the issue of timely grading are addressed to assist YOU in fulfilling this goal of the University.

The Role of Examinations in Effectively Measuring Student Competence:

The construction of a rigorous but fair examination is not an easy task. It requires consideration of many variables. It must be attentive to the:

1. purposes of giving an exam,
2. differing formats to produce desired outcomes within the context of an examination,
3. time it will take to complete the examination
4. early completion of the grading process.
5. conscientious examination of the test items to insure the fairness of the examination as it is presented to the student.

The Purpose of Examinations:

YOUR exams are “an extension of the learning process,” meaning the student can learn as much by writing an exam as attending one of YOUR lectures. The manner in which questions are presented can help the student more fully understand the material in the course. He or she can actually learn a great deal just by being required to integrate information into an essay that might have previously seemed unconnected. The premise of YOUR exam is to draw out student:

- understanding of all the material
- awareness of the relationships between different parts of the subject matter, and
- in-depth knowledge of the empirical and normative dimensions of the course

If a student can demonstrate command of all the material in all three of these elements, the student has mastered the course.

The Keys to Construction of YOUR Exam

Constructing an examination begins with YOUR focus on what you want the student to demonstrate. There are four specific conditions:

- knowledge base of the student based on his or her exposure to the discipline and the material.
- level of the student's command of the "intellectual language" as revealed in ability to rapidly answer some critical short items.
- capacity of the student to use "tools" from his or her intellectual "toolbox" to analyze situations presented on the examination.
- clarity in the use of language in the exam to insure that the way material is stated does not confuse or compromise the student's potential.

Each draft of YOUR exam should be read over with these four factors in mind and examined carefully to insure YOU have given attention to all four of these variables.

The Clarity of Language in YOUR Exam

Students are very low risk takers when it comes to academic matters. If an examination question is ambiguously stated or the material requested is not precisely defined, students will avoid answering such a question when given a choice. Most importantly YOU should perform an "item analysis" following each exam to identify questions that were not chosen by students. The discovery of questions answered by few or none of the students taken the test means YOU failed in one or two ways:

- The material was not covered sufficiently during the semester, or
- The question was unclear as to what YOU were requesting or ambiguous regarding how the material requested should be presented.

In either case, students will not attempt such questions. Therefore, in preparing an examination, YOU should pay careful attention to how questions are stated and be precise in defining what information is requested.

Careful Editing of YOUR Exam Items to Reduce Grading Time:

A review of a number of exams indicates that items could be re-defined so they could be graded in shorter periods of time. Below is an example of a number of items taken from a sociology exam given in 2009 demonstrating how reformatting can be helpful without compromising the intent of the exam purpose.

MEANS FOR AMENDING EXAMINATIONS TO CREATE AN EXPEDITED APPROACH TO GRADING

There were a total of 30 items to be answered in 2.5 hours. Selected items have been chosen to demonstrate how information may be reported by a student in an efficient manner.

Items:

- #1 **ORIGINAL:** Why is Anthropology considered a holistic discipline?
 AMENDED: 1a. Define "holistic discipline" (2 lines)
 1b. Anthropology is a holistic discipline because (5 lines)

- #2 **ORIGINAL:** In which two ways is archeological knowledge useful to the student of social anthropology in the study of economics of societies?
AMENDED: List two ways archeology assists social anthropology in the study of economics of societies:
a. _____
b. _____
- #6 **ORIGINAL:** What characteristics were given to societies referred to by Lucy Mair(1965) as “people of simple technology?”
AMENDED: List four characteristics of “people of simple technology” as defined by Mair (1965)
a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
d. _____
- #9 **ORIGINAL:** Which two main sources of information are utilized by ethnography?
AMENDED: List the main sources of information used to study ethnography:
a. _____
b. _____
- #12 **ORIGINAL:** What objectives do social anthropologists hope to achieve by using historical studies as a methodology?
AMENDED: List three objectives social anthropologists seek to achieve by using historical studies as methodology:
a. _____
b. _____
c. _____
- #13 **ORIGINAL:** State two shortcomings of “RECALL ETHNOGRAPHY” used by American anthropologists in studying the American Indians:
AMENDED: Two shortcomings of “RECALL ANTHROPOLOGY” used by American anthropologists in studying American Indians are:
a. _____
b. _____
- #14 **ORIGINAL:** Explain what is meant by “covert participant observation” ins anthropological enquiry.
AMENDED: Define “covert participant observation” in anthropological enquiry (2 lines)
- #17 **ORIGINAL:** Why has participant observation been described as an unscientific method of anthropological enquiry?
AMENDED: Participant observation in anthropological research is considered unscientific because: (3 lines)
- #20 **ORIGINAL:** Why is culture inorganic?
AMENDED: Define “culture” as inorganic (3 lines)
- #27 **ORIGINAL:** Which two anthropological perspectives were offered by critics of unilineal evolution?
AMENDED: List two anthropological criticisms of unilineal evolution
a. _____
b. _____

The Components of YOUR Exam

YOUR well-constructed examination seeks to discover three things: (a) demonstration of **“breadth of knowledge”** over all the materials presented in the course, (b) **depth of knowledge** in terms of theoretical or empirically significant analytic criteria for understanding how to use material presented in the course, and (c) **evidence of “integrative” thinking** or capacity to link ideas absorbed in the course into meaningful analyses of complex problems or issues.

Breadth of Understanding:

To quickly establish a student’s command of materials in the course, essays are not particularly helpful. It is far more effective to request short answers of no more than two or at most three sentences to define, describe or give the importance of a particular item. Very quickly, a student might answer eight to ten such items in no more than 20-30 minutes while providing a good index of mastery of all the material covered in the course. The quality of these responses will be an indicator of mastery of “the intellectual language.” Economy of language is much preferred in the presentation of responses.

Depth of Knowledge:

This portion of the examination is devoted to conceptual thinking and places emphasis on the application of concepts or theoretical materials to empirical situations. There can be test items emphasizing “compare and contrast,” briefly describe _____’s theory of _____, apply the theory of _____ to a research the analysis of data on_____. An ability to quickly respond to six to seven such items from a choice of eight or nine and establish that he or she does know the material in the course and how it is used. Again, the mastery of “the intellectual language” improves performance and economy of language is much preferred. The student can be advised to use no more than six to eight lines of script. This portion of an examination can be completed in 40-50 minutes.

Integrative Thinking:

Integrative thinking is the “third level of academic development.” Students gradually develop this ability during the course of their undergraduate education. First year students are able to provide descriptive responses. As students move further into their academic careers, they become more capable of applying theory to empirical data to establish the manner in which inquiry is conducted. The final or “third” stage is the ability to see the linkage between disparate information and apply material learned in one setting to other settings. This is the point where students bring in information learned in other courses to buttress arguments made in presenting integrated responses to an a complex question requiring an essay response.

This is where the historic purpose of essays is preserved and the student is given range to demonstrate how they have linked together information. To insure the student provides the information sought, the essay topic needs to be shaped with great care. It should be broad enough to see if the student can see the linkages and narrow enough so that the student does not engage in a “fishing expedition” for what he or she thinks might be an acceptable response.

Confronted with the choice of answering two topics out of three presented, it must be assumed the student chooses the two he or she knows best. The examination must state the response will

be assessed on clarity of thought and precision in making statements (both conditions designed to eliminate “fishing” for solutions). Again, mastery of “the intellectual language” and command of all the “tools” in the academic toolbox should be on display.

This third part of the examination should be completed in 60-70 minutes. In combination the examination can be completed in 2 to 2.5 hours and has been structured to be graded in a considerably shorter period than would be the case if the examination were comprised exclusively of essay topics.

Time Commitments in Grading YOUR Exam

An informal survey conducted among more than a hundred members of the faculty established that if an exam is entirely an essay format, the number of examinations that be graded in an hour is between 3 – 4 an hour. The initiative to have graduate teaching assistants assist in grading examinations should help this condition. By re-designing the exam items as suggested above and providing a template for a graduate teaching assistant to grade the shorter answers, a means is created to meet the 30 day deadline for submission of final grades.

A Step-by-Step Process for Designing an Efficient Examination:

This is a step-by-step sequence for the preparation of an examination that will satisfy questions of rigor while also creating a model that can be graded in an efficient manner.

STEP ONE:

- Review all of your Performance Objectives for the course
- This is what you have previously told the students they must know
- It is best if your Performance Objectives were clearly stated in the syllabus
- If Performance Objectives were not stated in the syllabus, the students should be provided with such a list of Performance Objectives by the 11th week of the semester.
- This is a list that begins, “The Student Should Be Able to.....”

STEP TWO:

- Begin to outline a list of possible questions based on the Performance Objectives, dividing your draft questions into three categories
- **Category One:** short answers can be definitions or brief descriptions where you are testing for breadth of understanding. You want to know if the student has a broad grasp of all the material by QUICKLY assessing using short definitions.
- **Category Two:** Identify Performance Objectives where you want to know if students understand conceptual items. This is for tests of depth of understanding.
- **Category Three:** Essay topics test integrative thinking. HINT: IT IS WISE TO START WITH POSSIBLE ESSAY TOPICS AS EACH TOPIC MAY COMBINE THREE OR FOUR PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES.

STEP THREE:

- In category one, consider how it can be determined that a student knows material by writing comprehensive definitions of terms. Prepare 10 such items.

STEP FOUR:

- Identify a number of performance objectives that involve conceptual objectives that involve conceptual knowledge.

- These can be descriptive items (5 lines)
- There can be compare and contrast items (7 lines)
- And there can be application items (“How is _____ applied in the.....”) (6 lines)

STEP FIVE:

- Create three broad essay topics that each incorporate several different performance objectives
- It should be clear to the student that they are required to link the topics together in answering the essay topic
- Seek to balance the degree of difficulty of each of the three topics

STEP SIX:

- Carefully review each item in all three categories to eliminate any ambiguous language.
- You are seeking to insure that students write precisely what is requested
- This insures the student does not present answers that are off the topic.
- It also insures the lecturer does not have to waste time reading material that is irrelevant to the topic.

STEP SEVEN:

- Review all items to see how many Performance Objectives have been incorporated into the draft examination
- Remember, you do not need to test on all of the Performance Objectives.
- The student has to anticipate being tested on any item.
- You are only seeking a measure of mastery of the material presented in the course

STEP EIGHT:

- If you discover two items that tend to overlap, replace one with a different item that examines a different performance objective

STEP NINE:

- Make a final review of all items to satisfy yourself that the material tested has been effectively covered in the lectures or in the readings used in the course of the semester
- The intent here is to insure that the student has a fair and equitable opportunity of performing well on each item if he or she has prepared diligently
- The intent of the examination is to determine mastery of material.

STEP TEN:

- Determine how many items need to be answered in each category.
- For example, a student might be required to answer 8 of 10 items in category one, 6 of 8 items in category two and 2 of 3 essays in category three.
- Assign points to be earned for each item. For example:
 1. In category one, each item is worth 4 ($4 \times 8 = 32$ points)
 2. In category two, each item is worth 5 ($5 \times 6 = 30$ points)
 3. In category three, each essay is worth 19 ($19 \times 2 = 38$ points)

PREPARE THE EXAM AND STORE IN A SECURE PLACE!

Tool # 6: Personal “Quality Assurance” to Rate Your Teaching

- **How much time do I spend examining my teaching at the end of a semester?**
- **Do I go over each lecture to edit and amend it for greater future effectiveness?**
 - **Did I review my “tools” for continuous assessment to see what worked?**
 - **Have I done an item analysis of each question on my final exam?**

The completion of a semester does not mean that YOUR task of teaching a course is over. What remains to be done is YOUR personal “academic quality assurance” activity. The University has made a commitment to insure that the teaching is of a high standard by creating the Academic Quality Assurance Unit. The survey of student perceptions of teaching commenced in March of 2009 is just one step in the process. Actions by the Academic Council to have greater scrutiny of teaching in the review of faculty for possible promotion means that personal responsibility for “quality assurance” has to be one of YOUR priorities.

Reviewing YOUR Syllabus

Start YOUR personal review with the syllabus. Answer these questions:

- Did students have questions about their various assignments?
- Was it presented with clarity?
- Were the readings properly linked to the weekly lecture topics?
- Was the list of goals clear or should it be amended?
- Were the Performance Objectives sufficient to help the students in understanding important material and preparing for in class activities and for the final examination?
- Did the students pay attention to admonitions about the penalties for plagiarism?

Reviewing YOUR Lectures

While the lectures are still fresh in YOUR mind, review those materials. Think over how the 1500 minutes allotted for lecture were used. Ask some questions:

- Was each lecture well organized so students could follow the narrative?
- Was the lecture followed or did was there too much diversion from the topic?
- Did diversions from the topic result in not being able to cover all the topics?
- Were the examples used really illustrative or should they be edited and changed?
- Did the lectures each have a conclusion?
- What good questions, really good questions, did students ask that suggest that portions of lectures need to be re-written?

Item Analysis of YOUR Assessment Materials

In the same manner the syllabus and lectures need to be reviewed, the materials used for continuous assessment or final exams need to also be reviewed. Important questions are:

- Were the quizzes effective in getting an index of how well the material in the course was being understood?
- Were the questions used on each quiz clearly stated or do they need to be rewritten?
- Was the use of “reflective writing” helpful? Did it assist in establishing a link between the class materials and how the course has had an impact on the student?
- Were there questions on the final examination that were not chosen by student s unclear or ambiguous?

Sampling Student Opinion to Determine “Mastery” of the Course

In addition to the surveys of student opinion about the course that are now a routine part of University operations, there is a value in asking the student’s opinion regarding how they feel about the learning that has occurred. Taking a small sample of no more than ten percent of the students enrolled in the course, it would be useful to ask student to rate their mastery of the various performance objectives. Each of the Performance Objectives can be rated on a scale of 1-5 with the lowest number being does not feel confident to discuss the topic and the highest number being a sense of real understanding. In conducting this review, the student should also be asked about how much time they spend studying each week

“Have I Achieved My Purpose, Goals and Objectives?”

When considering the course in its entirety, there is the larger question of “Have I achieved my purpose, goals and objectives?” YOU should write a summary assessment and keep it on file for future use when applying for promotion or other opportunities within the University.