

## From VP Ross Tomlin

The winter term is going by very fast. I hope you all are having a good term.

We do plan to hold a Part-time Faculty Committee late in the term. You will get a message about it soon. We'd love to have you there.

There are a lot of exciting things going on at the college now. We will be advertising for at least five new full-time faculty due to retirements and new programs. We will also interview for the new Vice President of Administrative Services position because of Linda Kridelbaugh's retirement.

We are also finishing an accreditation report and preparing for a visit in April. We are strengthening our student learning outcomes assessment process. We will share that with you.

Thanks for all you do.



## SWOCC Teach

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## First Exam of the Term

Students are terribly optimistic about their grades, especially at the beginning of a course. Then comes the first exam.

If we return the exams during class, disappointment hangs heavy in the air. In those moments of despair students may question what they might have done (or not done) that caused that disappointing score.

Richard Felder who teaches chemical engineering at North Carolina State University sends a questionnaire and a memo to his students after the exam to help them determine possible reasons for the disappointment scores. Often, the questionnaire reveals possible reasons for the lower scores.

- Did you make a serious effort to understand the text? Just hunting for relevant worked-out examples doesn't count.
- Did you work with classmates on homework problems, or at least check your solutions with others?
- Did you attempt to outline every homework problem solution before working with classmates?
- Did you participate actively in homework group discussions (contributing ideas, asking questions)?

- Did you consult with the instructor when you were having trouble with something?
- Did you ask in class for explanations of homework problem solutions that weren't clear to you?
- If you had a study guide, did you carefully go through it before the test and convince yourself that you could do everything on it?
- Did you attempt to outline lots of problem solutions quickly, without spending time on the algebra and calculations?
- Did you go over the study guide and problems with classmates and quiz one another?
- If there was a review session before the test, did you attend it and ask questions about anything you weren't sure about?
- Did you get a reasonable night's sleep before the test? (If your answer is no, your previous answers may not matter.)

The question "How should I prepare for the test" becomes easy once students have filled out the checklist.

—Richard Felder



## Tips for Grading

Read a few assignments before you begin grading just to get a sense of the range and the ways students are responding to the assignment.

If you have a big stack of papers to grade, pace yourself! Try to read in chunks so that you can stay fresh and positive while grading.

Grade when you're in a good mood with energy in a supportive environment.

Make comments marginally on papers and exams that are encouraging and firming of good ideas; are constructively critical of problem areas; and are in the form of questions so that you are in dialogue with the students' ideas; challenge the students to push their ideas further; and raise issues of concern to the course that are relevant to the students' arguments.

Reserve your final grade until you have read through all the assignments from the section; this is so you can evaluate the students according to their own personal progress as well as to the rest of the class.



## Tips for Efficient and Effective Grading

Tips can help instructors grade more effectively while enhancing student learning.

**Many instructors dread grading, not just because grading takes up a sizable amount of time and prove itself a tedious task, but also because instructors struggle with grading effectively and efficiently.**

However, effective grading does not have to take inordinate amounts of time, nor does one need to sacrifice quality for speed. The following tips can help instructors grade more effectively while enhancing student learning.

- **One and Done.** Mention the error and explain how to correct it once.
- **Bank Comments.** Keep a bank of comments about frequent errors students make and organize them in groups for easy access.
- **Frontload Feedback.** Instructors need to write comments students can apply to future assignments. This will save time later and hold student accountable.

- **Global Comments vs. Local Corrections.** If a student has written the paper in the incorrect genre in the draft, comment minimally on local-level issues and instead focus comments on global issues.
- **KISS (Keep It Simple for Students).** Keep language and comments simple.
- **Attitude and Approach.** Make student learning the primary goal. Effective feedback is a mutual process involving both student and instructor. Students' involvement in learning is at least partially dependent on their perception of their instructor's interest and friendliness, as well as their instructor's engagement and communication about their performance and their grades.

- **Conscious Use of Comments.** Effective feedback is applicable to future situations. Comment only when there is still something the student can do to enhance learning and the quality of a subsequent assignment.
- **Avoid Surprises.** Distribute rubrics well in advance of assignment due dates.

Effective grading does not have to take inordinate amounts of time.

- **Less is More.** Avoid the temptation to respond to everything. It is better to

target two or three areas that need to be addressed for the students' success on future papers.

- **Questions for Reflection.** Instead of telling students what they did "wrong," ask them to rethink their approach.

—Victoria Smith



# Structured Discussion

Students struggle with academic discourse. They have conversations with each other, but not discussion like those we aspire to have in our courses.

And although students understand there's a difference between the two, they don't always know exactly how they're supposed to talk about academic content when discussing with teachers and classmates. More structure provides that clarity and makes the value of discussions more valuable.

**Starter and Wrapper.** The starter” launches the exchange with a question, a quotation, a comment about an example in the text, or by suggesting possible links between text material and previously discussed content. The “wrapper” identifies themes, pulls out key ideas, or lists the questions that next need exploration. Maybe two or three students put “wrappers” around the discussion.

**Save the Last Word for Me.** With this discussion strategy, half the students find a quotation from the reading, say one they don't think they really understand or would like to

Understand more fully. They post that question and then the other half of the students provide their understandings of that quotation. Then have the students switch roles.

**Time for Reflection.** Encourage students to reflect on the discussions. Even for a few minutes, students think about key ideas, new insights, thoughts they like to explore further or questions promoted by the exchange. Maybe one or two of those thoughts are voiced or shared to launch the next discussion.

—Maryellen Weimer

## Effective Class Discussions Tolerate Silences

Allow silences in your classroom and wait for participation from students. When students pose questions to one another, encourage them to wait for a response.

## Model Behavior You are Seeking

Discussions can spark heated topics. Be cognizant of how you respond. For example, how do you answer when you feel challenged by a remark? What do you do when your evidence for a point has been refuted? How do you recover from defensive behavior?

## Identify Facts vs. Feelings Statements

Most discussions will center on facts about an issue. By ensuring that all students share the same facts, you have set the stage for a conversation among equals. When students lapse into discussing feelings, not facts, diplomatically draw their attention to this. There may be times where a discussion of feelings is important; however, you want students to be clear when they are deliberating facts and when they are sharing their feelings.

## Facilitating Discussion

### Setting the Stage for Discussions

- **Write Student Learning Outcomes.** Before you give students guidelines for class discussions, be clear in your mind about the outcomes. Do you want students to demonstrate mastery of key concepts? Do you want them to demonstrate critical thinking skills? Are you giving them time to develop ideas for upcoming assignments?
- **Explain the Purpose of Discussions.** People come to a deeper understanding of knowledge when they not only read about concepts, but hear others' thoughts on them and apply workings from these concepts to craft their own sound arguments.
- **Prepare Students for Discussions.** Students need to partake in a common experience before launching into a discussion, so students have shared “facts” for the discussion.

## Questioning Levels

### What are different categories of questions?

#### Cognitive-memory Question.

This question requires only simple processes like recognition, rote memory, or selective recall to formulate an answer. (“Name a novel written by Stephen King.”)

#### Convergent Thinking Question.

This question requires analyzing and integrating data to formulate an answer. There is only one correct answer for questions at this level. (“Which is the better temperature setting for a home freezer: -2 Celsius or -2 Fahrenheit?”)

#### Divergent Thinking Question.

This question requires a response using independently generated data or a new perspective on a given topic. (“Write two different equations for which -5 is the solution.”)

#### Evaluative Thinking Question.

This highest level question level deals with matters of judgment, value and choice. (“What should be done to improve our health care system? Explain your answer.”)

—Kenneth E. Vogler



### Good answers depend on good answers. That's why we work so hard on the content of our questions and why we should work with students on how they ask questions.

What also helps to make questions good is asking the right type of question. It goes to intent—what we want in the way of an answer. The type of question we ask conveys this intent to listener.

Question typologies begin pretty simply—most of us know that closed-ended questions are answered in one or two words and have correct and incorrect answers, as compared to open-ended questions that invite longer, less definitive responses.

A lot of us also ask leading questions without being aware that we are doing so. These are questions where the answer is implied in the question. But leading questions are not always in always inappropriate in educational contexts. If you're using an inquiry-based teaching approach where you don't want to answer questions that students should be answering on their own, you can help them figure

out what they need to know by asking them a leading question. In this case, the question doesn't contain hints about the answer you want to hear; rather it guides students to the information they need.

### Most of us use mirror prompts to explore questions more deeply.

Several students of online exchanges have used a five question typology first proposed by J.D. Andrews.

- **Direct Link Questions.** Here we are asking for interpretation or analysis of something specific, like an aspect of an article, a quotation, some text content, or online resources. “What do you think of the author's suggestion that whole discussions be graded rather than individual contributions to them?”
- **Course Link Questions.** As the name suggests, these questions ask students to take information from the course and link it to the text. Students might be asked to use a course concept

## Better Questions

Good answers depend on good questions.

to explain something in an assigned reading. “The text says that people are often motivated to participate in discussions of controversial topics. How might cognitive dissonance explain this motivation?”

- **Brainstorm Questions.** These questions want respondents to share a collection of ideas and information. “How might teachers encourage students to offer better answers?”
- **Limited Focal Questions.** These questions present the respondent with options for comment, often involving comparison and contrast. “What should teachers do: praise student answers more often, or give them more time to prepare answers?”
- **Open Focal Questions.** Here the questions present an issue, offer no alternatives, but solicit the respondent's opinion. “How should teachers respond when students give a wrong or not very good answer?”

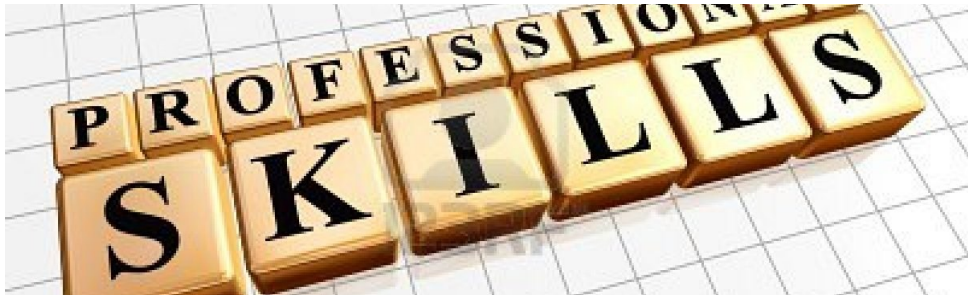
—Maryellen Weimer



## Professionalism in College

- Develop reliability, diligence, consistency.
- Develop problem-solving mindset.
- Be a team player
- We willing to go the extra mile.
- Develop discipline.
- Make knowledgeable decisions.

## Helping Students Learn to be Professional in College



**One of the big problems that we face with students is convincing them that what happens in college classrooms is very similar to what happens in the world of work.**

A possible solution is to frame the course as a work experience. The teacher functions as the supervisor, students as employees, the syllabus as the employment contract, and the assignments are authentic—tasks employees could be asked to do on the job.

