Lesson Beginnings and Endings

Student Feedback Technique Series #7

As instructors, sometimes we forget that the two most important parts of a lesson are the beginning and ending. We focus on the middle – the content, yet we know that initial interactions affect everything afterward. Similarly, we know that people remember for a long time how an experience ends, especially learning experiences.

How can we know what kind of closing helps the students you are working with in a particular course? What if your typical initial approach to beginning lessons confuses some students, or somehow gets in the way of their learning? Alternatively, what if the way you typically end a lesson leaves things dangling or even confuses students?

This week’s Student Feedback Technique (SFT) helps identify ways that either your approach to beginning lessons or the way you wrap things up helps or interferes with student learning. You may be surprised to discover that something fairly insignificant either helps a number of students or actually interferes with their learning.

Process:

- Ask students to fill out this SFT individually in 5 – 6 minutes and to be as complete as possible in their responses so you can target your teaching to help them learn
- Reiterate that this is not a quiz – emphasize that there are no “right answers” – that you are merely gathering information so that you can tailor your teaching
- Tell students you will report back to them quickly and show how their input has affected your teaching. Then do this.
- Mention that if another instructor does something that particularly helps them, you would appreciate it if they would share it on the form

Do some of your students need a personal connection before a lesson – perhaps talking informally, or a question about their life? Perhaps some need to be reminded about the last lesson, or maybe some need to know why this new subject is important? What about the end of a lesson? Do some need practical applications, or a summary, or …?

In the next The Practical Professor: Tip Series #7
Lesson Beginnings and Endings

I need your assistance to see if the way I introduce lessons and wrap up lessons is helpful to you. Please do not put your name on this – I only need this information to target my teaching in ways that are helpful to you. You can be brief with your answers, but please write enough so that I will understand what you mean. If nothing particularly stands out in your mind as either helpful or not helpful, feel to write “nothing specific”. Thanks for your help.

Consider the way I typically begin a lesson. How is this helpful to you? What do you like most about it?

Again considering the way I typically begin a lesson, is there something I do that confuses you, or gets in the way of your learning?

Now, please consider the way I typically end a lesson. What do I do that helps your learning?

Again considering the way I typically end a lesson, what do I do that gets in the way of your learning?
Also available!

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty

The Top 10…

No. 1 – The All-Important First Day of Class
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No. 3 – The Crucial Second and Third Classes
No. 4 – Ways to Show Students that You Respect Them
No. 5 – Promote Effective Student Study Skills
No. 6 – Components of a Well-Planned Class
No. 7 – Observe Your Teaching Tendencies
No. 8 – Ways to Keep Your Students Learning
No. 9 – Ways to Get Feedback on Teaching from Students
No. 10 – Using Short Writing to Assess Learning
No. 11 – Getting More (and Better) Student Questions
No. 12 – Mixing Things up Mid-Semester
No. 13 – Engaging Different Input Preferences
No. 14 – Helping Students Stay the Journey
No. 15 – Ways to End Your Course
No. 16 – Resources for Learning and Teaching
No. 17 – Create a Memorable AND Functional Syllabus
No. 18 – Ways to Build Your Students’ Self-Efficacy
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