

Classroom Teaching Skills for ARES

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Regardless of how much you know about the subject, effective teaching results from the use of proper teaching methods, and preparation.

Define your goal One easy way to do this is to create the final exam first. If you know which questions you want your students to be able to answer when you are done, putting together the course material is much easier.

Determine your starting point To teach a subject effectively, it helps to know how much your students already know, and how much experience they have. If you teach basic material to an advanced group, they will be bored. If the material is too advanced, your students may not understand it.

If you have worked with a group for some time, you may already know where you need to begin. If not, you can find out by reviewing volunteer records for on-the-job experience, previous courses taken, with a simple questionnaire, or by interviewing each student.

Stay focused The most effective presentations are short, concise, and handle one subject at a time. Do not try to meet too many diverse goals in one session or course. If you try to cover too much at once, a phenomenon known as "learning interference" occurs - a type of "learning overload."

Organize your material A common ratio for course preparation is two hours of preparation for each hour of presentation time. This will vary with how many times you have taught the material and your general teaching experience. The first time you present a segment, you may need three to four hours of preparation time for each hour of class or even more. When gauging the time needed to prepare, follow the general rule that it is better to over-prepare than to under-prepare!

Use an interactive teaching style Straight lectures can be terribly boring. During the lesson, ask questions of students to ensure you have their attention, and get a good two-way dialogue going. Active learning is more effective than passive listening, and helps you gauge your students' progress.

Use examples, but stick to the subject - A well-placed account of what happened during an actual disaster situation will help to galvanize interest in your presentation and help students remember key points. Everyone loves action stories and your students are no exception. Be sure that any story you use is accurate, and illustrates your point effectively. If there is any chance that your story could embarrass someone, leave names and other identifying information out (such as dates, the name or type of incident, or location), or don't use the story at all.

Examples used to make a point are good, but be careful not to waste valuable time with too many war stories at the expense of other instruction.

Make sure they get it Highly technical information should be presented at a slower rate than simpler material. Subjects that are simple to some students may be quite complex to others. Highly technical information can be difficult for many to grasp. It isn't always a lack of intelligence—it may be a lack of foundation knowledge or experience on which to build, or simply a different learning style. Proceed slowly, and be sure to get feedback from every student to be certain they are getting it. If they are not, slow down, reword your explanation, provide any missing foundation material, or approach it from a different point of view. Ask students to tell you in their own words what they think you are trying to say, and you may spot the problem.

Use charts and diagrams as applicable - Many people find it easier to learn material when it is presented visually. Remember the old adage a picture is worth a thousand words? An excellent tool for making graphic presentations is Microsoft's PowerPoint® software, a staple of just about every professional presentation these days. However, neatly prepared handmade sketches on a newsprint board or overhead transparency can be effective, as well.

Photos of ARES groups in action on site at disaster scenes are riveting to trainees. If you do not have a video projector, overhead transparencies and slides work well for larger groups.

Make copies of visual aids for your students - Handouts give the student a way to review lesson material later, and provide a good place to take notes. Microsoft PowerPoint® has the ability to generate copies of slides for audience members.

Use role-playing This can be an effective way to let students test a new skill or concept. For instance, a class for net operations might include a mock tabletop net in which each person gets to take a different role.

Make notes to yourself On your own presentation copy, write easily read notes about which examples worked best for a given segment. That way, the next time you are called on to give the presentation, you can repeat those things that worked, and omit the ones that did not.

Have fun while you teach - Be enthusiastic! Remember, if you appear bored or complacent when teaching, your audience will most certainly feel exactly the same way. If you are lively, enthusiastic and appear to enjoy teaching, the students will enjoy learning. It has often been said that you learn more about a subject when you teach it!

Play it straight - Be honest and up front with your students. If a student senses that you are faking it, you will lose their confidence and your credibility will suffer. Do not try to fool or impress them with knowledge, skills, or experiences you only wish you had. If a

topic or question arises and you do not know the answer, then tell them so. You can offer to research the information and get back to them.

Measure your students progress If you know how well your class is absorbing the material, you can adjust your presentation to fill in the gaps. Use frequent quizzes and informal question and answer sessions, and review any material they seem to be missing.

Measurement can take several forms:

- Short written quizzes
- Verbal question and answer sessions
- Formal written tests
- Informal random questions to weaker students
- Student projects and activities (individually or in groups)

Your final exam should be designed to determine whether a student has absorbed key concepts and critical information. It doesn't need to test on every single detail. It can also be used to support and reinforce the lesson material.

Review the course After a course is completed, take some time to review its overall effectiveness. The test results and student feedback can help you here. If something did not work as intended, make changes in your course material while it is fresh in your mind.