Teaching Skills

Davis, James R. and Arend, Bridget D. (2013). *Facilitating Seven Ways of Learning.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

The authors recommend professors create learning objectives for each class period and design the class based on them. The following evidence-supported insights and advice are for teaching skills. Many of these ideas can be used also in individual and online instruction.

- Clearly describe the skill from the learner's perspective as observable behavior.
- Choose words with few interpretations, such as "identify" or "classify" instead of "know" or "understand."
- Measure present performance to see what students already know or can do.
- Students learn when the objective requires some but not excessive assistance.
- Not all assistance has to come from the instructor; help can come from handouts or other students.
- Assign activities that enable you to develop students with weaker background knowledge or skills, while other students work with assistance only from each other.
- Students with less aptitude need more instruction; students who are slower need more time.
- Divide the skill into a series of steps or tasks.
- Organize the tasks into an appropriate sequence.
- The best sequence for teaching a skill may differ from the best sequence for performing a skill; determine what students have to know first in order to perform each task.
- Provide instructions in writing for students to revisit as needed.
- Model the skill and open the process to discussion.
- Have students repeat the skill with incentives and rapid feedback.
- Frequent practice is better for mastering simple routine tasks or those that require attention to detail, whereas spaced practice is better for more complex skills and more mature learners.
- Allow room for errors; if trying is too frustrating, students will try less.
- Students tend to generalize and associate negative comments and other forms of "punishment" with tangential elements, like the instructor or even the course content.
- Negative reinforcement stops behaviors, but in most cases, the goal is not to stop behavior, but rather to steer it in the right direction.
- Summative evaluations (grades) do not contribute to learning; only feedback with opportunities for improvement contribute to learning.
- Measure proficiency or competency rather than compare students to each other.