

# Principles of Effective Instruction

As educators, we should strive to design and develop instruction that is effective, consistent, and meaningful. In their research on best practice and student learning in higher education, Chickering and Gamson (1987) identified *seven principles for good practice* which can be used toward efforts of best practice in teaching and learning.

*Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is a most important factor in student motivation and involvement.*

Principles can become even more useful when accompanied with examples of how they can be implemented in the classroom. Following the description of each principle below you will find useful strategies that support ways each principle can easily be modified and used in any discipline.

## 1. Good Practice Encourages Contacts Between students and Faculty

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is a most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and plans.

*Example:* Set up and maintain regular office hours with a welcoming presence.

*Example:* Establish an email response protocol so students know when to expect a response from you.

## 2. Good Practice Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students

Learning is enhanced when it is structured more like a team than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's ideas with others' ideas improves thinking and deepens understanding.

*Example:* Establish guidelines for group work so students understand group dynamics.

## 3. Good Practice Uses Active Learning Techniques

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to the instructor, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. Students must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. Students must make what they learn part of themselves.

*Example:* Use an in-class discussion technique such as *think-pair-share* in which all students are posed a question or situation to think about, then pair up with a classmate to continue to discuss the topic, and then share their thoughts with the entire class.

*At various points during the semester students need opportunities to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how they might assess themselves.*

*Time + energy = learning*

*Establish realistic deadlines, keeping in mind that many of your students have responsibilities other than your course.*

#### **4. Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback**

Students might need help in assessing their existing knowledge and competence—having students think about what they know and what they don't know helps them focus on their own learning. In class then, provide students frequent opportunities to perform and to receive constructive feedback on their performance. At various points during the semester students need opportunities to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how they might assess themselves.

*Example:* Establish a means for feedback. Give prompt feedback when students ask questions (in class) and let them know when you have received their work—this is especially helpful when students submit work electronically.

*Example:* Provide an opportunity for students to reflect on course content through a Web-based discussion forum in which you offer feedback.

*Example:* Use the end of the class period for a one-minute paper in which students write responses to one or two questions related to content covered during the class period. This feedback will inform you of students' comprehension which can be used to plan subsequent class periods (Were course objectives met? Do you need to modify content?).

#### **5. Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task**

Time plus energy equals learning. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty.

*Example:* Establish realistic deadlines, keeping in mind that many of your students have responsibilities other than your course. Some instructors set up assignment and exam dates during the first class meeting where you are able to get to know your students' needs.

#### **6. Good Practice Communicates High Expectations**

Expect more and you will get more. High expectations are important for everyone – for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well-motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

*Example:* Communicate high expectations at the beginning of the semester rather than change your stance in the middle of the semester. It may be helpful to provide examples of certain assignments (written work, projects) to convey your expectations so students know what you are looking for. This can help alleviate issues later in the semester after students receive graded work and complain that they didn't know what they were supposed to do.

**7. Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning**

Many roads lead to learning. Different students bring different talents and styles to the university classroom environment. Bright students in a seminar might be all thumbs in a lab or studio; students who possess lots of hands-on experience may not do so well in theory. Students need opportunities to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be motivated to learn in new ways that do not come so easily.

*Using non-examples can better help students understand what to do by seeing what not to do.*

*Example:* Provide examples or models for students to follow such as papers, projects, and your expectations of class participation. Using non-examples can better help students understand what to do by seeing what not to do.

**Summary**

Designing and developing instruction that is effective, consistent, and meaningful can be achieved by following principles for good practice. The principles presented here can help you be a more effective teacher which in turn will help students be more successful learners.

**References**

Chickering, A. W., & Ehrmann, S. C. (1996). *Implementing the seven principles: Technology as lever*. <http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/seven.html>

Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. (1987). *The seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education*. <http://www.aahea.org/bulletins/articles/sevenprinciples1987.htm>