

Teaching Tips/Notes



Adopting Teaching Strategies to Accommodate Different Learning Styles

Educators are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of students who have different learning styles and expectations for classroom structure, content delivery, and assessment design. In an effort to have a flexible learning environment that meets the needs of diverse learners, this work examines the variety of different teaching methods and strategies that can be effectively employed to deliver content and teach concepts in ways that reach diverse learners. There are four distinct learning styles, and the teaching methods employed in classrooms are best designed when they appeal to each type of learner. Visual Learners prefer to see information and visualize relationships between ideas. Charts, graphics, and visual aids to show relationships between points are ideal for students who learn best by seeing concepts presented. Infographics are great tools to use during class. Auditory Learners desire to hear information rather than reading it or seeing it visually. Students who learn best in this way like to listen to and verbalize concepts. By repeating important information and asking students questions throughout class, educators can effectively engage auditory learners. Reading/Writing Learners absorb information best when reading and writing, as interacting with text facilitates learning more than hearing or visualizing concepts.

Assignments written in class and handwritten notes are key ways to facilitate learning for this group of students. Kinesthetic Learners are hands-on, experiential learners who learn best by doing. In-class activities that get students moving, group assignments, and problem solving exercises with specific examples work best for active learners. Teaching to all learning styles during each class can be difficult to achieve. However, there are ways to enhance course content delivery in order to reach each of the diverse learning styles of students. Effective teaching strategies include incorporating PowerPoint and other visual presentations, group discussions, guest speakers, in-class activities centered on reinforcing course content, and experiments requiring full-classroom participation to simulate a market environment.

While PowerPoint has become a standard that is expected by students and facilitates content delivery with large class sizes, it can be difficult to keep students engaged when using this tool. While Visual Learners often prefer PowerPoint notes with graphics, and auditory learners thrive when PowerPoint content is verbally discussed, Reading/Writing Learners can be engaged while writing select information that is omitted from PowerPoint slides, and Kinesthetic Learners can be reached when an in-class activity is used to teach concepts delivered via PowerPoint. To teach in the most effective way possible, provide opportunities for students in each class to see the information, draw or write down concepts, say or discuss the information, and interact with the material. Opportunities for enhanced classroom engagement include the inclusion of infographics, short readings with written questions and discussion, video clips to communicate key concepts, group work that varies in depth and duration, as well as in-class activities and experiments. While incorporating these activities in class does require additional time for implementation, group interaction promotes the use of valuable skills and facilitates increased student success in the college environment (Caruso & Woolley, 2008; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006).

Just as content delivery is most effective when targeting diverse learning styles, assessment design that includes a variety of homework assignments that differ in requirements for completion and an exam structure comprised of multiple methods to evaluate knowledge and understanding of course content, are effective ways to assess student comprehension of course material. Exams that comprise a mix of multiple choice, fill in the blank, short answer, problem solving, and essay questions provide a diverse way for students to demonstrate knowledge.

Student feedback confirms that while employing various teaching methods enhances the learning environment, students may struggle to appropriately organize the material sequentially throughout the semester as content is presented in a variety of formats. Identifying ways to facilitate student organization of course material is essential to successfully teach to and accommodate the variety of learning styles without students feeling lost in the shuffle of the class throughout the semester. Examples to facilitate organization include easy access to materials online or in class, clear communication, and including variety with consistency throughout the semester. When the class environment includes a varied structure that accommodates diverse learning styles, enhanced learning opportunities for all students are facilitated.

References

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Submitted by:

Amanda M. Countryman
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
Colorado State University