Teaching Large Classes: The Magnificent Seven!

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This booklet is designed to give some pointers that can assist beginners in this challenging process. It does so from a couple of perspectives:

- Tools that can assist in teaching, including information and communications technologies (ICTs);
- Modifications to pedagogy (the ‘how’ of teaching);
- Ways to motivate and engage students to contribute to their own learning;
- ‘Survival’ strategies for coordinators of large classes.

Some of these themes overlap and this is by no means an exhaustive list of perspectives. The aim is to provide some useful beginning points in a fairly generic way so that readers who are about to engage with big classes can take and modify as they wish and as their needs, curricula, and professional and personal contexts demand.

There are innumerable scholarly articles outlining research outcomes based on analyses of teaching approaches. This booklet isn’t really designed with this kind of text in mind. The focus here is on what works for teaching large classes – pragmatics. If you want the research behind the pragmatics, then check out the databases in tertiary education and teaching.

Readers may already teach large classes, so some of the information here may already be part of your practice – in which case, please go straight to the Tips and the Websites for Tips on Teaching Large Classes, where you may find some useful strategies. We’ve linked these in to literature so that you can go back to the ‘source strategies’ if you wish. Equally, if you find new strategies or have refinements or other modifications of the tips outlined here that you’ve found to be effective, we encourage you to share these with colleagues, the broader university community and us.

Teaching large classes can be daunting, especially when time, geographical space, resources, administration and effective teaching for optimal learning are all taken into consideration.
Teaching

Teaching is a complex process, largely due to the diverse needs of the students. The larger the group, the more diverse—and it’s tempting with a big group of people to ‘teach to the middle’ in the hope that high flyers will be self-motivated enough to delve deeper or wider into issues, while the strugglers will be self-motivated (or scared) enough to work hard to catch up. Many simply fail and drop out. Neither of these scenarios is good. Bright students need to be given chances to excel. Poor students have a right to expect help. The reality is that just because someone teaches does not guarantee learning—for anyone. It’s impossible to ‘make’ someone learn; they have to have a reason to learn—even if it’s to pass an exam or in order to meet a professional standard. Often students are very capable of learning and doing well in their studies, but sometimes they don’t, for various reasons, show their actual abilities. While we can argue that ‘this is university’ and it’s up to the students to learn what they’re supposed to, not all failed students did so because they lacked motivation and/or ability. Students have lives outside of the university that affect their studies. They have work commitments and families. They have language differences, disabilities (including mental health issues), religious requirements, concerns about gender, race and/or sexuality, backgrounds in settings of socio-economic poverty, worries about age, height, weight (etc) and/or (perhaps) vast differences in their technological acumen. Excelling students can still misunderstand concepts, strategies or rules and need a teacher to guide them to understanding and success.

Good teaching can enhance student achievement, turning a pass to a credit or a distinction. Our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Warren Babington, is very clear in the Beacon of Enlightenment: the University of Adelaide Strategic Plan 2013 – 2023, (2012; hereafter the Beacon): the university will produce ‘independent, educated leaders’ (p. 7), with a union between teaching and research, realised by including Small Group Discovery Experiences (SGDE) across all levels of our teaching. If we’re serious about producing quality graduates of the kind envisaged by our VC and his leadership team, then we need excellence in teaching so as to provide opportunities for quality learning, and this amid the constraints of time, space and resources. It is these constraints which also often contribute to large class sizes.

This booklet doesn’t deal with the specifics of SGDEs: these are best explored via the recently created website. If you’re new to teaching at university, then keep in mind that teaching is like any other skill that you learn. It takes time to develop. Remember that even our VC was once an undergraduate!

Large Classes

What is a ‘large class’? Allan Gedalof, of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Canada, judges that a large class is:

one in which I cannot make individual, protracted eye contact with each student in the room over the course of a standard 50-minute period, so for [Gedalof], a large class is more than 50 individuals (2006: 11).

This seems laughably small compared with other university contexts where enrolments in some courses requires repeat and recorded lectures, as the student numbers are regularly around the 5-600 mark.

Gedalof makes the additional point that his view is that he ‘is not teaching a collective entity but a number of individuals, each of whom responds differently to the material under discussion and my approach to it’ (2006: 11). The previous section is written with a similar perspective in mind. For the purposes of this booklet, it’s assumed that a large class will be taught by a team of people, including a lecturer (or a team of lecturers, coordinated by one person) and a group of demonstrators or tutors, which can include the lecturer or not. This means that the assumed format for teaching is a lecture/tutorial style, usually with some added ICT support, such as MyUni, and with an embedded SGDE, where students are given the opportunity to develop their research skills. Lecturing seems to still hold a significant place in university teaching—justified or not, they seem to be preferred in large group teaching scenarios. And the SGDE is a very practical way to deal with a large class.

Lecture theatres usually seat around 250 to 400 people. Just to get started, we’ve assumed that a large class means a lecture of about 250 people, but we agree that this is a completely arbitrary figure. Our caveat is that the strategies outlined here should be useful for smaller, not so small, large or huge groups of learners. As always in teaching, it’s important to take on strategies that work for your particular learning context and only you can really know what this is.
**Tip 1: Getting Started and Getting Help**

If you’re new to tertiary teaching, we can’t emphasise enough that you seek assistance and advice from the Teaching and Learning Coordinators in your Discipline areas before you begin your planning. Have a clear idea about what areas of the curriculum you are teaching and how they “fit” with other courses and programs. Talk to more experienced tutors and your course and program coordinators. Some Schools run induction and training programs for beginning and sessional tutors, so do take advantage of these. At the University of Adelaide, there are also courses in using MyUni, iPads, effective teaching strategies in tutorials and so on. Keep your eyes open for these learning opportunities and take full advantage – they’ll give you some starting points and they have the added bonus of looking great on a CV.

If you are new to coordinating a large class, then the same holds true. Find out who taught the course last year and arrange a time to meet and discuss the course, what they did, what worked and what didn’t. Take notes and make a list of follow-up questions. Update your skills as and when you need to. It still looks good on a CV.

**Tip 2: Plan**

We’ve included this section on planning because this is where you can begin to address the issues that come with teaching large classes, and nearly all of our suggestions begin by setting in train approaches that require planning. Teaching must be as pragmatic as it is creative, motivational and content focussed. You have a limited amount of time to do the job. Planning, delivery, assessment and feedback all need to happen, and you need to have a life beyond your large class. Students also have a limited amount of time with you: you need to decide how you are going to make the most of this time and provide a quality experience in terms of student learning outcomes – some of which will be achieved via a SGDE. How are you going to do this when there’s lots of them, all different and all wanting your attention?

The axiom goes: Poor planning promotes poor performance. If you’re teaching something for the first time, then you will need time to put together a plan that makes sense: it has to have a set of learning objectives which concur with program requirements, Graduate Attributes and any other professional needs (such as being able to meet the standards of accrediting bodies, such as the ‘Teachers’ Registration Board). The course of study has to have a logical trajectory, with appropriate resources, such as readings and/or opportunities to develop skills. There needs to be a workable teaching strategy incorporating the SGDE, where, depending on the year level, students are guided through a group-based research inquiry process. The students need to be assessed according to your learning objectives and this assessment needs to comply with university and school policies. Also, the course needs to be assessed, and not just by you: the students need chances to feed back to you what worked and what didn’t, about the course itself, about tutors, lecturers, content, assessment and so on.

This last step, which in education is called ‘reflective practice’, is absolutely critical in your planning for the next iteration of the course. The university does run Student Evaluations of Learning and Teaching (SELTs), but to be effective, the comments provided by students need to be analysed, evaluated and steps made to address concerns, if they arise. Ideally, all of this stuff needs to be planned BEFORE you step into the lecture theatre in the first week of semester.

Meet with your teaching team regularly and keep records of what you decide. Also have them report to you the names of students ‘at risk’ and issues or concepts they’ve found difficult to comprehend. Be clear about the course trajectory, tutor responsibilities, assessment and the most effective ways for them to spend time in tutorials, seminars or practicals. Continue to meet regularly to discuss how the course is going and ways of improving it. Keeping everyone on the same page is ultimately a lot less work and it makes it easier when you have to benchmark results against one another at the end of the course.

Create a detailed Course Profile. If you provide a clear schedule, focus questions, problems for consideration, topics or research questions for the SGDE, extra reading lists, the name of the subject area librarian, an assessment outline, rubrics for marking and so on, and put it all in a course profile on MyUni, then you don’t get the purely annoying distracting requests from students later. One hint is to make reading the course outline part of the ‘homework’. You can even run an informal quiz on it.

At the beginning of your course, give students a concept map where you show them what they’re learning and how this learning fits with the rest of the course and other courses. A lot of the stress from students comes from not seeing the ‘bigger picture’ of your subject area. When you lecture, have a slide that indicates the key learning areas and issues you’ll be covering. Repeat this slide during the lecture and check off what you’ve covered.

Provide one example, not several, in your lecturing. Or provide lots of examples and get the students to choose one to work on, perhaps in a group situation that could be part of your mentoring them through a SGDE. It’s important to see any time NOT focussed on your teaching and the key areas of learning required for passing as a distraction.

**Tip 3: Get to Know Your Students**

You may not have the kind of brain that retains names – and this is impossible in very large classes. Nevertheless it is to your advantage to learn something of your students from an academic point of view, if nothing else. The way to do this is via a diagnostic assessment early in the semester. There are advantages to this:

- You can build your teaching on what students actually know, rather on what you think/hope they know;
- You can tailor your teaching more closely to student needs.

An early diagnostic quiz can also help you to modify your teaching program so as to account for what is not known. You can then develop remedial strategies as and when needed for those who need them.

Organise your lectures for presentation, but know your material so that you don’t have to be stuck behind a lectern. Make eye contact and establish a rapport – you’ll get better cues about student understanding if you unhitch from the media island at the front of the lecture theatre and move around the lecture theatre. Also it means you can have a look at your own slides and see if they make sense. Build in definitions of commonly used words and terms: remember that all teachers have to teach the language of their discipline area, and this is often quite specialised – so not for a study adviser who isn’t familiar with your subject area. A glossary is a good start. Along the same lines, if you’re in a profession that uses lots of acronyms, give the students a glossary of these too. Or get them to create an ongoing evolving list of acronyms and award a prize for the most lengthy or detailed. You could do this using the wiki on Myuni.

Ask questions and provide chances to be active. Questions and tasks make lectures more interesting, increases student input into your teaching and the key areas of learning required for passing as a distraction.
heightened engagement and leads to better retention of knowledge. For example, a lecture on Asia in the hour before lunch could have a few pictures of plates of food. Sounds frivolous, but it was used to keep students engaged and it evoked discussions in seminars about how food is an indicator of cultural diasporas active in Australia.

**Tip 4: ‘Use the Web, Luke...’**

The web is a tool in the same way that a shovel is a tool. The only caveat with the use of online technologies is that they need to serve an educational purpose, not just be there because they’re nifty. The landscape of ICT use in education is moving rapidly, so these suggestions should be considered as starting points only.

There are lots of ways to use the web to deal with large and diverse classes. At the end of this section there are a selection of weblinks to information and research about different strategies for using ICTs in learning. As with the suggested strategies, consider these starting points: there are hundreds of research papers, projects, conferences, journals and in-house publications by faculties and disciplines about ICTs in tertiary education.

We will begin with the obvious: MyUni. MyUni is the University of Adelaide’s online learning environment. Every enrolled course of study has an online presence in the form of a MyUni course. Your lecturers may use the features of MyUni to varying extents. Most commonly used are the Announcement and Send Email features. Many lecturers also upload course information and assessment requirements, as well as lecture notes. Some lecturers also use the quiz, discussion board and group features. In most cases MyUni does not replace face to face lectures, tutorials and workshops, but is used to enhance ... learning by allowing ... access [to] information and course materials online at a time and place that suits [the student] (http://myuni.adelaide.edu.au.)

MyUni isn’t difficult to use, but it’s best if you take the time to do some of the training sessions as it can look daunting. Giving students access to important information means that you don’t have to: they can be more independent and the responsibility for keeping track becomes their problem, not yours. Putting copies of your power point slides with an audio recording (available now in most lecture theatres) on MyUni means that if students didn’t understand or didn’t attend the lecture because of English language issues, or distraction or too much Monday morning, it’s there for their perusal. They can also access them on mobile learning devices like iPads and iPhones. Readings can also go on MyUni and the Digital Resources Management Centre (DRMC) is very helpful in getting your readings up and avoiding all the copyright issues.

MyUni is also available for

> Online quizzes – these are great if you want to set up an assessment that you don’t need to mark and this can be ideal for large classes. There are short answer, multiple choice and other modes of assessment on offer. Once set up (and this can take a bit of time – it’s worth it), online quizzes can be a way of monitoring how your teaching is going. You can use them to check student understanding as it can allow a bit of reiterative practice if it’s obvious that the students aren’t with you. MyUni has a version, but there are other programs on offer, such as Respondus, which can be imported into MyUni.

> Discussion Boards, Voice Boards, Wikis, Blogs and so on. If you go to the Tools section of MyUni, you’ll see a lot of online tools that can be used to help with online delivery, communication, the development of an Online Learning Community (see next point) and so on. The beauty of these is that students have to engage with the process of creation, so it isn’t you doing all the leg work – and makes the students more responsible for their own learning. Some of these modes can mean you have to monitor what’s going on weekly, so again, it’s best if you can spread this monitoring around a teaching team.

**A Few Online Sources**


http://schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/alex/bulletin_board.pdf

Explores the use of Discussion Boards and Email more fully.


http://advances.asee.org/vol02/issue03/papers/asee-vol02-issue03-p09.pdf

Screencasts – Can be used via MyUni or in a Lecture. This article outlines an Engineering context for the use of screen casts, but there are points that other faculties may find useful.

> Creation of an online learning community (OLC). Students who use the web regularly for social chat (eg. via Facebook) are already in a good frame to create their own OLC. Sometimes students set these up themselves using publically available software, but you can also facilitate this via the Blog and Discussion Board sections of MyUni. Students can then ask each other questions and initiate discussions about your courses themselves. You can monitor these and respond as and when you need to. One useful tip is that, when you’re asked a question by more than one student, send out a ‘blanket response’ everyone via the email or voice email (Tools in MyUni). You can also do this with assessments. If everyone is making similar errors, deal with the whole cohort with one ‘common issues’ response. Then you only need to respond to the new or outlying problems of individual students. It cuts your response time and workload considerably.

Beyond MyUni there are a lot of options for integrating online elements into your teaching of large classes, from virtual worlds to e-simulations, hardware (such as iPads) and software (eg. LAMS, Moodle and so on – see below). Also, some disciplines have discipline-specific software which can be used in teaching. Ask around and see what other staff use, and other schools, and in other universities.
LAMS

LAMS [Learning Activity Management System] is a tool for designing, managing and delivering online collaborative learning activities. It provides teachers with a highly intuitive visual authoring environment for creating sequences of learning activities. These activities can include a range of individual tasks, small group work and whole class activities based on both content and collaboration (www.lamsinternational.com/).

LAMS can be trialled online, has technical support, training, templates and an online newsletter.

The beauty of LAMS is that a lecturer can set up an entire sequence of activities for a large cohort of students. A lecturer can monitor student progress, respond to questions and generate more specific responses for struggling students as needed. Students work their way through a sequence solo and at their own pace, so if a student finishes early, their lecturer can organise extension or enrichment for them. LAMS can be fiddly to set up, but once you have, the sequence only needs to be updated for ongoing use. There’s also a LAMS Online Community.


Moodle

Moodle is a software package for producing internet-based courses and websites. It’s an ongoing development project designed to support a social constructionist framework of education. Moodle is provided freely as Open Source software (under the GNU Public License). Basically this means Moodle is copyright-free, but that you have additional freedoms. You are allowed to copy, use and modify Moodle provided that you agree to: provide the source to others; not modify or remove the original license and copyrights, and apply this same license to any derivative work (http://pukunui.com.au/mod/book/view. php?id=1&chapterid=3).

Moodle is a learning platform like Blackboard/MyUni, but with general access. Many institutions (DECD for one) have chosen Moodle over Blackboard, so one consideration might be that you explore which learning platform is most often used in your discipline area and/or profession and then use that with your students.

iPads

iPads have unplumbed depths for learning options. The sciences at the University have issued iPads to all their first years and are putting all textbooks, lab sessions, lecture notes and slides on these lightweight versatile little bundles of technology. In other Faculties, iPads are becoming common because they provide many different approaches to tertiary learning, they negate the need to carry around heavy laptops and books, and they are expandable, enabling new programs and applications (or apps) to be used. Here are a few.

Soundnote (or Audionote - they’re almost the same app): This app will digitally record lectures plus enable simultaneous note taking. When a note is tapped, the app takes the listener to that point in the lecture. This means that important points in the lecture can be flagged and/or headings can be created to enable fast access to specific points.

Books: This app comes with the iPad. Some publishers have online versions of textbooks which can be downloaded to the iPad ‘Library’. The program also allows PDF versions of articles to be downloaded – and e-books are often (not always) cheaper than hard copy texts. The program has built in ‘voice’, such that when a section of text is highlighted, an audio version can be played. Some books have a high degree of interactivity, so that music, video clips and so on can be accessed. More simply, in e-books fonts can be changed, size of fonts can be increased and/or decreased, and there are search options for key words and subject areas. The Books’ library can be sorted into topic areas. In terms of dealing with student diversity that could include such disabilities as dyslexia, visual impairments or attention disorders, the access and flexibility means students in whatever class size have the best chance to effectively engage with texts.

Dropbox: for passing on documents. If you’re the owner of an iPad, explore the possibility of using Dropbox as it means that you don’t have to carry hard copies of texts, notes, articles and so on. You download Dropbox onto your desktop computer (with the help of ITS) and then when you want to pass on documents, simply download a file into the program. Useful for teaching, but also useful for busy academics.

There are literally hundreds of apps for the iPad – too many for one person to explore.

One strategy might be to create a forum on MyUni where students can identify good apps and let others know about them. Also iPad use at the uni has grown so rapidly that staff are creating new ways to use them with teaching almost daily. The Higher Education Research Group of Adelaide (HERGA) puts out a journal (Ergo) where some of this innovation is outlined, and they’ve run sessions where iPad technology is used to facilitate assessment in a large class. Contact HERGA (via the university website) for more specific information.

Tip 5: Modifications to Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the ‘how’ of teaching (the corollary to curriculum being the ‘what’). A great deal of research is directed toward exploring how teaching can be done more effectively and efficiently. What follows are some suggestions, with the caveat that some strategies will need to be modified to suit specific circumstances and discipline area contexts.

Group work – and this includes the SGDE – can be good for tutorials and groups where students nominate to do particular topics in a course. Groups best work when you have a team of tutors and lecturers, otherwise you can find yourself spread even thinner by the need to deal with all the group-born issues. Part of the responsibility for groups can devolve to your tutors, but some can’t.

Getting your teaching team to work with you is critical, and so is the need to monitor groups, and provide opportunities for them to report to you and their peers.

One of the more difficult logistical challenges is how to effectively assess group work, with one strategy involving peer assessment.

There are resources for peer assessment – have a look on the ‘Pedagogical Possibilities’ website, which has a vast store of information on this process.

The University of Adelaide has policies on group and ‘peer’ assessments, so keep updated. A well-designed peer assessment can save a lot of work, even if it does mean that there is a fair amount of careful planning involved, as well as a need to teach your students how to do it explicitly.

There innumerable scholarly articles on peer assessment, most of which are specific to a discipline area, so this is one way to narrow the field. Here are a few to begin with:

Tip 6: Motivating Students to Contribute to Their Own Learning

There used to be a person who ‘taught’ the students in universities until it was realised that graduates need to be able to continue their learning beyond university and into the rest of their lives. This is partly why we have Graduate Attributes outlining what university educators agree are key generic skills, where ‘a commitment to continuous learning…’ is explicitly identified, and the ability to work, think, synthesise, critique (and so on) independently are recognized as important. Instead of the ‘Sage on the Stage’, students are now encouraged to take the controls in their own learning and become self-directed, most commonly under the auspices of the SGDE. This is, for the teacher of a large class, most opportune.

If you can get the students to direct their own learning, with lecturers and tutors moving to roles that are facilitative rather than directive or inquisitorial, it means that your graduates are better prepared for lives in the professions where expectations of independence, leadership and self-efficacy are usual.

Letting go of the reins can feel like letting loose bovines in the Wedgewood section of an exclusive shop, and we’re not suggesting that you step back completely and let the students crash. Your role, however, does change: you take on a leadership role in setting up a self directed learning ‘unit’, and then you assist students with the process of discovery. You direct the students to the resources, rather than provide them yourself. You advise, warn, encourage and generally keep everyone on track. And remember that a set self-directed learning task can have stages and processes where you monitor progress, scaffold those students who are struggling and extend or enrich the tasks for students who are excelling. You can build in both formative and summative assessments into the process.

Here are a few other strategies for your consideration:

> Relate your subject matter to current events or research which may be of interest to students and give them assignments for which there may be “real world” audiences whenever possible. Consider a site on MyUni for ‘Student Publications and Reports.’ Make sure you get the students’ permission before uploading anything. Better yet, have a release form in your Course Profile.

> Give students advance study questions to help them prepare for tests. You can encourage students to form their own study circles, with Hub Central as the focus.

> Instead of having a student consultation time in your office, take your office to the Hub (Professions or Central). Be in a set place and available to answer questions. You could arrange to meet your SGDE groups for a progress report.
Hold review sessions before examinations. Review sessions can happen online and could involve quizzes, Discussion Board entries, podcasts and other ICT based interactions.

Have the students write exam questions as part of the review. You get final ‘say’ of course, and they don’t have to write the whole exam. Students are a very good resource when it comes to ideas for new ways to examine course content.

If you get stuck for ideas, go back to basics. People think Edward De Bono’s “Six Thinking Hats” are for Primary School. Not so: this is just one of De Bono’s lateral thinking options (see www.debonothinkingsystems.com/about/Edward.htm) and is a really great way to unpack a problem or debate. You can allocate groups to a hat, or members of groups to a hat. The important thing is that the groups or group members get back together and share what they’ve discovered. The moral here is not to worry where good ideas come from. If a Primary School technique can be massaged to fit a university context and you get effective, useful, deep and relevant learning, who cares?

Leave the last 5 to 10 minutes of any lecture or tutorial for student questions; if you get several questions about the same issue, then consider an online response in the form of a mini-lecture on Power Point with ‘voice over’ where you address the questions. It’ll save time in the long run.

Did you ever get a teacher’s note on the point that says “Everything is in the exam.”? If a student is truly doing really badly, then a lecturer has a responsibility to find out what’s going on and what help can be offered. This could be a recommendation to see a medical practitioner or a counsellor, tutor, ITAS tutor, or a study adviser at the Professions Learning Centre or the Maths Drop-In Centre. It may be that the student’s home situation is putting their academic success in jeopardy. Encourage students to be self-diagnostic about their academic progress, but also give them some feedback on how they’re going and get them to see you if you think they’re in trouble. Very often, if a student deals with a bad academic context earlier rather than later, a great deal of time is not spent later trying to salvage an academic success from a disaster.

Have a slide at the start of your power point that says “Everything is in the exam.”

Have slides in your power points where you ‘let go of the reins’: in other words, build the interactivity into your presentations and lectures.

Ask the students to provide focus questions for a lecture in the week before it’s due to be presented. It means you can keep the lectures focussed on what needs to be taught and you don’t have to think up questions yourself.

Encourage leadership – so if someone finds a really neat new bit of research on a topic in your course, acknowledge their input. Students who volunteer to take on other kinds of leadership roles in your course should also get some recognition for their contribution. You don’t have to go on and on, but thank genuinely, frequently and publicly.

More Strategies


The hybrid approach described in this paper stimulated students to be self-directed learners who maximized their learning of content and skills by means of problem-based learning and action research strategies.


This study investigates student engagement from the teachers’ perspective, to identify current practices in teaching, learning and assessment designed to promote student engagement in courses with more than 1000 students enrolled at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.


www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Large_Class_FAQ_Active_Learning_Elements.pdf

FAQs about teaching large classes.

Tip 7: More Tips. ‘Survival’ Strategies

Do you need to use the whiteboard? Can you use a prepared slide for a projector or document ready for the scanner instead? Saves time writing up and can be added to the file for repetition next year (unless you come up with a better one).

Never underestimate the value of a sausage sizzle, group table at the pub, coffee morning, mintie movie marathon or pizza night. You learn a great deal from students about how your course is going by asking them.

If you’re not sure if an online site is working, ask your students via an email: “Can someone with a surname beginning with ‘T’ get back to me about whether this is working?” It means you’re not cleaning out hundreds of complaints from your inbox - or hundreds of ‘It’s working’ notifications, either. Pick a different letter each time and avoid Q, X and Z unless you have hundreds of international students.

Engage engage engage: give an extra mark (one percentage point in a total assessment package, say) for the best Economics or Management limerick, the best Law cartoon, the best caricature of an Education lecturer, the best Architecturally designed tent... Some of your students will be in your School for more than four years. Schools are like villages and you’re in the process of building a community. (Note – it’s a huge help if you can laugh at yourself.)

Provide some tips for effective study methods and how to prepare for exams, but don’t attempt to assist one on one with remedial English or Maths. Refer students on to study skills advisers, the Maths Drop-In Centre or Learning and Teaching assistance. The students need these skills in more than just your course, so send them on to people who specialise in assisting students to develop these skills.

Don’t allow late students to disrupt your lecture. Some lecturers lock the doors (not recommended), some submit students to mild embarrassment (like a pointed pause), and some make it clear that if students arrive late, they’re to come in quietly, and whatever has been missed will not be reiterated. It’s up to them to catch up via MyUni. (Note: most professions abhor having to wait for disorganised staff. In teaching, punctuality is critical – you can’t ask school students to ‘hang around’ while a tardy teacher finishes their coffee or their photocopying. Remember you’re training students for workplaces. If they can’t show up on time for a lecture...)

Keep a journal or log of what explanations, techniques, or assignments worked well and share these with colleagues teaching the same or similar courses. When you plan for the next year, have these questions in mind.
Similarly, build a teaching repertoire and keep a record of what you tried, even if it didn’t work. Teaching usually has an ‘Active Research’ process. If stuff doesn’t work, then make sure you don’t waste time repeating it.

Do not plan massive essay-type assessments that take hours to mark. Plan assessments with the size of the cohort and the number of tutors you have in mind.

Plan assignments with clear assessment foci, and then create a rubric to speed up marking. You can create a ‘general feedback’ sheet where you outline the mistakes students commonly made and then do shorter individual feedback.

Another trick with feedback is to forward the computers crash. The weather fails your fault. e.g. MyUni ceases to function. Similarly, build a teaching repertoire and keep a record of what you tried, even if it didn’t work. Teaching usually has an ‘Active Research’ process. If stuff doesn’t work, then make sure you don’t waste time repeating it.

Plan assignments with clear assessment foci, and then create a rubric to speed up marking. You can create a ‘general feedback’ sheet where you outline the mistakes students commonly made and then do shorter individual feedback.

Another trick with feedback is to forward it as usual, but only provide a mark when students review their feedback in an email to their tutor or you. This ensures that they actually read it.

Warn student that you won’t be providing feedback for the last assessment item of the year unless it is specifically and individually requested. Generally (there are exceptions) students don’t even pick up their final assignments. Why spend time writing extensive feedback that will never be read?

Sometimes things happen that are not your fault, e.g. MyUni ceases to function. The computers crash. The weather fails to cooperate. Someone fiddled with the lecture room computer and you can’t turn the sound on. If disasters happen, work out a solution WITH the students. They will usually readily accept that sometimes because of glitch, bad luck or human error, things go wrong. It’s the solution that matters.

Students are quick to condemn poor organisation. Plan.

If you walk away from this booklet with only one thing learned, please let it be that no teacher or lecturer is perfect. There’s always something to improve.

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**Websites for Tips on Teaching Large Classes**


This link takes you to University of Adelaide websites for Teaching Large Classes.

**Websites elsewhere**


(Explores the effectiveness of instruction of large-size undergraduate classes via use of eLearning strategies.)


(From the Abstract: This paper reports on quantitative and qualitative research that explored social work students’ perceptions of different teaching and learning strategies in a large mental health course designed with reference to principles of student-centred learning and constructive alignment.)

Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, (no date). ‘Assessing Large Classes.’ [http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/earlycareer/teaching/LargeClasses.html](http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/earlycareer/teaching/LargeClasses.html)

University of California, Berkeley: [http://teaching.berkeley.edu/](http://teaching.berkeley.edu/)

(Primary schools – but may have some useful tips.)


(From the Abstract: This paper reports on quantitative and qualitative research that explored social work students’ perceptions of different teaching and learning strategies in a large mental health course designed with reference to principles of student-centred learning and constructive alignment.)

Center for Instructional Development and Research, University of Washington [www.washington.edu/teaching/](http://www.washington.edu/teaching/)

(Also well worth a look around.)


(Primary schools – but may have some useful tips.)
