

Sample Portfolio Methodologies

**Sharon Hughes
Psychology
Lansing Community College**

III. Teaching Methodologies

My teaching has been based upon the implementation of my teaching philosophy. I have summarized my teaching performance in the following categories: Instructional Design, Instructional Delivery, and Classroom Environment.

Instructional Design

I try to design courses to reflect my overall philosophy of engagement. I believe that engaging students in the material requires using a variety of teaching methods. While this demands careful planning and preparation, I feel the extra effort is worthwhile. Students learn in a variety of ways, and to tap into these different preferences, I try to incorporate a variety of teaching strategies, requiring the use of different cognitive skills.

I have found that a well-organized course, one which progresses logically in terms of both content and cognitive skills that are required, sets the stage for an engaging class. Students are able to process material in more complex ways if it is presented clearly and in an organized manner.

“The course was very well organized”

“The order in which she teaches is easy to follow and totally comprehensible”

“Logical”

“Well-planned and insightful class”

“The plan was organized very well, and she followed it well”

“The class was presented in a clear manner”

Students respond best when they know what is expected of them. They lead complex lives, and they appreciate knowing when certain things will be due. At the beginning of the semester, I give students a very clear idea of what we will be doing in the course, and what my expectations for them are. A clear, concise syllabus clarifies misunderstandings and confusion about the course. An example of a syllabus from my Social Psychology course is presented in Appendix A.

“As a return-to-school-after-20-years student, the clear class outline and student responsibilities were greatly appreciated”

“She was very clear about everything from the notes to grades”

“Student responsibilities clearly stated”
“Grading procedures were clearly defined and followed through”
“Course followed the syllabus as scheduled”
“As a student, I knew exactly what was expected of me”
“Explicit, can’t ask for more”

Given that I believe students are more motivated if material is relevant to their lives, I also plan each class with an eye towards relating the material to them. How can this apply to my students’ lives? How can they use this information? How can I relate the material to something they are familiar with?

“Very useful, probably one of a few classes that I found myself quoting information from to family and friends”
“We learned many things that we could take with us outside this class”
“In my field of study, this class will be very useful”
“The subjects covered here are easily applicable to everyday life”
“The information given in lecture by Sharon Hughes is certainly useful to me”
“This was a great class for applying theory to real life situations”
“I enjoyed this class and will use a lot of the information learned in my life”

Some examples of activities and assignments designed to make the material relevant are presented in Appendix B, C, and D. Appendix B is a handout I give to my Human Sexuality students before we begin the unit on conceiving children. After covering the material, I use the handout as a basis for class discussion. Appendix C is an example of an application project I have students write. In it, students develop a behavior modification program to alter or modify a behavior they would like to change. Appendix D is an activity I use in my Social psychology class related to love and relationships. By doing this activity, they are able to research and identify what factors are truly important in relationships.

B. Instructional Delivery

As stated earlier, I have found that that engaging students in the material requires using a variety of teaching techniques. It is not enough, however, to simply design a course utilizing a variety of strategies. I feel that in order to be effective, these strategies have to be delivered in an enthusiastic, well-organized manner, which allows students to see the relevance of the material to their lives. Some methods I employ to present material include lecture, discussion, small group activities, application projects, reaction papers, role playing, and classroom demonstrations.

Regardless of the technique employed, a well-organized delivery is key to the learning process. I typically begin each session with a brief review/discussion of material covered during the previous class, then give them an overview of what we will be doing during the current class. At the end of each class period, I try to summarize what we’ve accomplished, get feedback on what

they thought about the class, what they learned and didn't learn, and give them a preview of what we will be doing next time.

“She is extremely well organized in her representation and presentation of the material in this class.”

“You obviously prepared very well in class and I liked how you organized the material into outlines”

“The instructor was well prepared and organized”

An example of a lesson plan for a workshop I facilitate on Teaching Portfolios is presented in Appendix E.

Lecturing is one technique I use to present material. I strive to make my lectures lively and interactive. One way I try to make lecture more exciting is to choose examples that students are familiar with, such as current events or popular culture. During lectures, I frequently stop and ask them for examples that demonstrate the concepts I am presenting. This keeps them actively thinking about the material. For example, when covering research and theory on the bystander effect and helping behavior, I ask students for time when they were in a situation when help was needed. Using students' experiences as the foundation, I then proceed to lecture about helping behavior. When presenting leadership theory, I might ask a basketball player to describe her experience with leadership. Does she notice different leadership styles? Are there socio-emotional leaders and task-oriented leaders? Are certain styles more effective? Knowing about individual students' lives requires more effort, but I feel it is warranted. This approach personalizes the lecture, making all students more interested.

One technique that I have found to be very helpful in maintaining student interest during lectures is the use of “timeouts”. While I am lecturing, I pause and take a break about every 15 - 20 minutes. This timeout gives students time to go back over their notes, fill in any blank spots, ask for more examples of a concept, or just think about the information they were just given. After I answer any questions, I put a few matching or short answer questions up on the board. I have students work through the questions in pairs, and then we go over them as a class. These mini assessments give me (and them) a good indication about whether or not they “got it”. If it's clear most of the class had trouble with the questions, I can go back over any trouble spots. An example of a “timeout” slide is presented in Appendix F.

“Appreciated use of current examples by instructor”

“Instructor was very interesting in relating material to students”

“The use of specific examples was informative as well as insightful”

“Very useful, interesting, and enjoyable content”

“She knows how to keep the class interested in what she's lecturing, made me look forward to coming to class”

“A very enjoyable instructor, witty, well-organized, and a joy to listen to”

“Material presented in a very knowledgeable and interesting way”

“Excellent lectures, very interesting”

Discussions, either in small groups or with the class as a whole, help students process the material more deeply, and develop higher-level cognitive skills. I have developed a variety of discussion questions to complement and expand on my lectures. This is a technique I use frequently.

“Dr. Hughes presents this course in such a way as to encourage debate and discussion.”

“Active student participation was encouraged and facilitated by the instructor”

“There was feedback between the students and instructor, she listened to what others had to say”

“The intra-class relations and discussions were a bonus”

“Very relaxed, conducive to classroom participation”

I also make use of small learning groups during class time. A key to their success is careful planning and clearly articulated goals. I have them work on a variety of activities in small groups. Sometime I have them solve a problem, analyze a case study, discuss a question or situation, or design an experiment to test a hypothesis. Whatever the activity may be, I try to provide structure and guidance as needed. This has the additional benefit of developing rapport and support among students, something that I believe facilitates the learning process. One activity I use after presenting the unit on personality theories is to break students up into small groups and give them a case study to analyze. After giving them 20 minutes or so to analyze “John” from one theoretical perspective, I then ask them to analyze the case from a different perspective. Afterwards, I have them take the case study home and write a brief paper from all three theoretical orientations. This exercise requires students to analyze and synthesize the material, as well as evaluate the various theoretical perspectives. A copy of the case study is presented in the Appendix G.

“Very effective use of examples/group work”

“Fun class-the little group assignments were nice to demonstrate the material”

“She forced us to interact with one another when we otherwise wouldn’t have.”

“Sharon allows us as students to feel like a class of one big family”

Because writing permits students to exercise and further develop advanced thinking skills, I try to incorporate graded and non-graded written assignments every class. An example of written assignments are application papers. For these papers, I give students a situation, perhaps a current event or a case study, and have them write a brief paper applying the information covered in class to the stimulus material. For example, in my social psychology course, I developed a teaching technique utilizing short works of fiction to elucidate psychological concepts and theories. I had students read the stories, then write a brief paper applying concepts and theories we discussed to the story. The response to these assignments was overwhelmingly positive, and I am in the process of writing an article on the use of this method. An abstract of the paper is presented in the Appendix H and an example of a student paper is presented in Appendix I.

“Especially useful were the paper assignments, which afforded us an opportunity to actually apply the theoretical constructs covered in class”

“The writing assignments helped to assess how well I understood the lecture and reading material”

“Our paper assignments helped to reinforce the material, thus helping us to retain it as well”

“Application assignments were interesting way to add information”

“The writing assignment were good for me because it helped me to get feedback as to what was taught to us by Ms. Hughes”

My experience convinces me that the best way to present some concepts is through the use of demonstrations. It is not always enough to hear how something happens, sometimes it is more understandable if you see how it happens. For example, in my introduction to psychology class I not only lecture about the principles of classical conditioning, I actually classically condition them. For this demonstration I pass out lollipops. Students are instructed to lick their lollipops whenever I say the word “Pavlov”. After 20 – 25 trials of having them lick their lollipops when I say “Pavlov”, I then have them put down their lollipops. By this points, students begin salivating in response to just the word “Pavlov”. I then use this as the basis for a discussion of classical conditioning, having them identify concepts from the demonstration. Not only does this demonstrate the acquisition stage of classical conditioning, I also use it to demonstrate stimulus generalization, extinction, and spontaneous recovery.

“We did our own studies with in class which also helped to learn some of the information we were studying”

“The instructor made this very interesting by including surveys and class interactions”

C. Classroom Environment

My classroom environment can best be described as enthusiastic, interactive, and lively. I try to create an atmosphere in which students are excited about the material. The best way I have found to do this is to let my enthusiasm for the material show. I tell them about how I felt when I was first exposed to a certain theorist, or how I applied a concept or model to my life. I think learning about psychology is fun, and I want my students to think so as well. I go out of my way to show them how psychology impacts their lives.

“Excellent knowledge of subject and great enthusiasm”

“Her enthusiasm, motivation, and fairness in presenting the course material was beyond compare”

“It made us want to learn, not have to learn”

“Energetic”

“Instructor’s enthusiasm and pleasant personality made the course a great deal more enjoyable”

“She made it very easy to want to learn”

“Other instructors should take note of her teaching style and enthusiasm”
“She made the topic of social psychology interesting and fun”
“I am not a psychology major, but the class made me interested in taking more psychology classes”
“Because of Sharon, I want to major in psychology”
“She did a good job in keeping the class lively and interesting”

I try to create an interactive classroom environment, where students feel free to express their thoughts and concerns. I think good rapport between instructors and students facilitates the development of this type of milieu. I want my students to perceive me not only as their instructor, but also as a fellow learner. I try to forge a relationship of mutual respect with each of my students.

“The atmosphere was that of respect between instructor and student”
“Open and effective communication. Very respectful of all students”
“The instructor was down to earth, approachable, and genuinely seemed to respect and like the students”
“I appreciate the fact that she related to students on an equal level, not speaking down to us”
“Relaxed and open, instructor did a good job keeping things focused”
“It was a comfortable and exciting atmosphere”
“We were able to feel free to ask questions”
“Comfortable, friendly”

I also want students to know that while I care that they learn the material, I also care about them as individuals. When students feel like their instructor knows them, and sees them as a person and not just a number, this motivates them to work harder and learn more. I want students to see me as someone who is approachable, and who cares about how they are doing in class as well as out of class.

“I was very impressed with the personal nature of Ms. Hughes’ instruction, i.e. learning everyone’s name, remembering facts about individuals lives, including everyone in class discussion”
“She was very personable with each student. She answered many of our question regarding other things besides social psychology, like graduate school or other courses we should take to prepare for graduate school”
She was very helpful locating studies she talked about and was always willing to give a copy of a particular study to a student”
“She was one of the nicest and down to earth instructors, stays on the level of the students
“Great job-I really enjoyed the class. It’s easier when the instructor has a sense of humor, as well as understanding the demands of being a student, working, etc.”
“She related very well to the whole class and yet was extremely professional”