

My Teaching Strategies

Shannon Murray
Department of English
University of Prince Edward Island

I have a basic and flexible framework which I like for my classes. All of the strategies I describe below work well within this framework:

- a brief introductory statement, preferably one that connects what we are doing that day to past work or to the world
- some specific textual work
- a series of directed questions or an exercise
- a more open discussion
- a concluding statement

Many of the strategies I use in my classes have been adapted from others. For example:

Collaborative Learning Practices

I have adapted Michaelson's (1994) ideas about forming permanent, heterogeneous groups to work on Critical Reading and Issues Tests, library assignments, and so on. These have been especially helpful in large classes and in first-year literature classes.

WebCT

I have built Web Course Tools (WebCT) pages for the two Shakespeare classes, for the English 101/195 linked courses, and for the Children's Literature class. These have been especially helpful for large classes and for shy students, because everyone can be heard through their fingers instead of in class.

Quick-writes, 5-minute essays, and other WAC Techniques

The Writing Across the Curriculum initiative at UPEI has suggested many helpful ways to make writing a part of what students do in the classroom, rather than what they do at home on their own. I regularly integrate [five-minute papers](#), [think-pair-share exercises](#), in-class writing workshops, and peer editing sessions in all levels.

Marking in the Presence of the Student

This technique for marking and grading composition students' paper is especially helpful; I adapted it from the work of my colleague, Terry Pratt. Students meet me every two weeks for 20 minutes, and they read their paper aloud to me; then we talk about it, based on their impressions and on the notes I've made for each paragraph. They have the chance to talk through what they don't understand, to explain what they meant to say, and to try alternatives. And they also can talk about the criteria for grading.

Other strategies I like are more particularly adapted to the material I teach, and they often involve having students learn from the inside out, by imitating a process such as editing, rehearsing as a Renaissance player, or

Random Acts of Poetry

In my Introduction to Poetry classes, my students are asked to write an anthology of poetry and "publish" it, using the spaces of campus as their pages. Each student searches for two poems, copies them onto a special form (attached), and with their team, arranges those choices into a "Chapter," which they then

post in some specifically chosen place on campus. The exercise allows students to examine the process of selection in their own anthology of poetry critically; to assess audience for their textbook; and to arrange the final selections we discuss in class. There is also a fun, team-building element of the subversive in the early-morning plastering of campus walls, doors, and even bathroom stalls.

Course-edited anthologies of Renaissance Women's Writing

One of the challenges of teaching a one-semester course in Renaissance literature at a small university is finding a way to represent the writing by women in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. My students in these classes edit their own anthology of women's writing. At the beginning of term, we have the first of a series of editorial meetings, in which the students read, discover names, and select the works to be included. By near the end of term, they have each chosen one of the selections, have edited and annotated it, provided a brief introduction, and a list of secondary sources. We then spend the last two weeks of the term reading and discussing that anthology.

Cue-Script Preparation and Reading of Shakespeare's Plays

I attended an acting workshop at the Globe Theatre in London, given by the Original Shakespeare company, in which they do not rehearse and only work with their own parts and the three "cue" words before their parts; the director, Patrick Tucker, argues that this would have been closer to the process for Shakespeare's actors than modern rehearsal techniques; and he argues that actors are forced to listen better. In class, I have my students imitate this method of performance, by assigning each a "cue script" part, meeting with them individually to make sure they understand their part and can pronounce it well, and then arranging for a reading of the play. We normally make it an event, with Renaissance food and drink to complement the occasion. The purpose is to give students the chance to master one part; to have them imitate the method of Shakespeare's own actors; and to train them as better listeners to Shakespeare's verse.

Reference

Michaelson, L.K. (1994). Team Learning: Making a case for the small group option. In K. Prichard and R. Sawyer (Eds.) *Handbook of College Teaching: Theory and Applications* (pp. 139-153). Westport, CT: Greenwood.