How to Write a Workshop Response Paper

Writing a reflection on a teaching-related workshop is a new experience for the majority of workshop participants. In order to clarify our expectations for response papers and to reduce the number of re-submissions, we have prepared guidelines for each component of a workshop response paper.

- **Personal Information** – Be sure to include all pertinent information regarding the teaching event or workshop, the date of submission, your name and your student number.
- **Response Prompt** – For some workshops, you may be provided with one or more response prompts throughout the course of the workshop. If one is not provided, you will need to follow the generic prompt:
  - How you plan to implement the ideas presented in your own teaching (or not).
  - Why you think it will be successful (or not), and
  - How your plans will benefit the students.

  Please be sure to clearly and thoroughly address the prompt, as this is what we are looking for when reviewing your response.
- **Structure** – Each successful response paper should include: (1) an introductory paragraph, in which you introduce the subject, briefly summarize the workshop/event and outline the objectives of your paper, (2) a body, in which you explore your objectives using concrete applications, and (3) a conclusion, in which you reiterate your objectives and synthesize the material presented.
- **Content** – The goal of a response paper is not to summarize or evaluate the workshop content. Instead, you should focus on how you plan to apply the ideas gained from the workshop to your own work as a Teaching Assistant. While it is acceptable to briefly outline (in 2-4 sentences) the ideas presented in the workshop, the remainder of your paper should proceed to discuss prompts provided by the presenter or the generic prompt located above.
- **Style** – A response paper should be personal and reflective in nature. Use the first person, and feel free to speculate and propose new ideas. Think of the response paper as being similar to a well-structured and comprehensive learning journal entry.
- **Length** – Your response paper should be 1-2 pages long, single-spaced.
- **Proofread** – Before submitting your response paper, please proofread it! Be sure to employ the spelling and grammar checker available through your word-processing software. Also try giving your response paper to someone else to read – it is very common to miss mistakes in your own writing. If English is not your first language, please consider using the services of the Writing Tutorial Centre (4th floor MacOdrum Library) which provides support free-of-charge for graduate students wishing to improve their writing.
- **Submit Electronically** – Send your response to Joe Lipsett at joe_lipsett@carleton.ca

We enjoy reading your reflections on teaching and learning and we want to make response paper writing a beneficial exercise for you. Please read on for a sample response paper. Good luck and happy writing!

Adapted from the University of Waterloo
What are interactive teaching activities? How and why should they be implemented in the classroom? The answers to these questions were the focus of this skills-based teaching workshop offered by CTE on September 26, 1998. Twelve interactive teaching activities were presented that allow several important objectives to be attained in the classroom: participation, expansion and comprehension of ideas, application of material, and motivation to learn. Attaining these goals in any classroom creates an active learning environment and is essential for enhancing the learning process. This paper will focus on three of the interactive teaching tools presented in the workshop, describing their applicability to my own teaching career.

**The Debate**

One of the interactive teaching activities that impressed me as being very useful for increasing class participation and facilitating the expansion of ideas was the debate. Informal debates were presented as a tool that encourages students to think critically about an issue or issues presented in class and allows for interactive class discussion. This activity is a tool that I would definitely consider using in my teaching as it has many advantages. For example, informal debates are independent of class size and can be independent of planning. Thus, this activity can be facilitated spontaneously within any classroom to discuss course material. In addition, this break away from the traditional lecture format of a class provides the students with an opportunity to exercise their own thinking skills rather than simply listening and taking notes.

As a TA, I have seen this activity successfully implemented in a second year undergraduate course in sociology. The informal debate was implemented by dividing 120 students into two groups and assigning each a point of view to debate based on controversial material that had been presented in class. Although the debate started off quite slowly, once some of the students began expressing their points of view in their own words, more and more of their peers became interested and developed and expressed their own thoughts on the issue. This exercise appeared to be extremely successful not only in generating student participation, but also in enabling the students to expand and consolidate many of the ideas that were a part of the course material.

I think an excellent alternative to the informal debate in a large classroom is a more formal debate in a smaller classroom (e.g., in a 4th year seminar course or graduate course). This activity could involve presenting the class with an issue to debate and, without assigning points of view, having each student research and prepare arguments to defend each point of view. At the next class, the instructor would create two groups for the debate by randomly assigning each student to one point of view. The groups would then be given 5-10 minutes to gather and organize their materials and, finally, the debate would begin. This more formalized debate could be the focal point for the duration of the class that day as the instructor could ask challenging questions to facilitate and guide the debate. The nature of this activity continues to enhance class participation and interaction and it also allows for further expansion and comprehension of ideas since students are required to appreciate and defend both sides of an issue.
The One-Sentence Summary

Another activity that I found particularly useful as a teaching tool was the one-sentence summary. This exercise is an opportunity for students to identify the major point or "take-home message" of a lecture or section of material. I think that this exercise is extremely valuable to students, especially first and second year undergraduates, since it is not uncommon for students to listen to an hour long lecture, madly scribble notes, and copy overhead material without stopping to think about the gist of what they have just "learned." By asking students to produce a one-sentence summary of class material they are required to actually think about what was presented as well as its relevance and importance. Essentially, this activity enables students to consolidate and retain important information.

Although I do not have any experiences as a student or teaching assistant with this teaching technique, it is a tool that I will certainly add to my repertoire of teaching techniques. I think that this activity would be particularly helpful to students after the presentation of a major section of course material or following the presentation of a key concept or issue. I would most likely introduce the one-sentence summary technique by giving examples of its use during the first couple of weeks of a course. For example, following the presentation of a section I would re-state the issue and quickly answer the important 'W' questions - what, when, why, where, who, how. Finally, I would turn these answers into a grammatical sentence to provide the students with a take-home message. I would also encourage the students to practice this exercise on their own at the end of every lecture and/or section. During later classes where I felt that a summary might be particularly useful to students, I would announce the issue/topic to the students and have them produce one-sentence summaries to hand in.

The Field Trip

Finally, one of the alternatives to lecturing that I found particularly useful for increasing motivation and highlighting the application of classroom material to the real world was the field trip. This activity is an excellent opportunity to facilitate learning outside of the classroom in an interesting and purposeful way. As a student I have had many positive learning experiences with field trips. During a first year recreation and leisure studies course I had the opportunity to visit the K-W Children's Rotary Centre and K-W Habilitation Services. In addition, during a third year sociology course on culture and the media I had the opportunity to attend a behind-the-scenes workshop at the Stratford Festival. These trips to professional institutions provided me with knowledge about the diversity of various fields of study as well as first-hand experiences with where my studies could lead me.

An effective alternative to the field trip that is useful in large classes is to organize pairs or small group field trips. Specifically, the instructor arranges to have a number of relevant institutions or sites host student tours or observational visits. The instructor could also arrange a variety of possible dates during the term when these trips could take place. After clearly stating the goals and purposes of the field trip to the class, the instructor would inform the students about the various sites that they could visit. Each student would then sign up to visit the site of his/her choice at a time that is convenient. In this way, the students are responsible for taking the field
trip on their own and would be required to write a short paper on the particular institution they visited.

I had the fortunate experience of such a 'pair field trip' during a second year course in the sociology of corrections. The students in the class had the option of visiting one of many possible correction-related institutions in the community - police departments, prison system, legal offices, etc. - and were required to write a paper on the nature of the curriculum at the site visited. This was a wonderful opportunity since I had been very interested in the legal system at that time; hence, I was able to choose to visit a local legal office and talk with a legal professional about the criminal justice system. The subsequent paper that I was required to write on this issue was much more meaningful since it was on a topic that I was interested in and had first hand experience with.

With these two variations on the field trip in mind, I would likely use the traditional field trip tool with a very small group of students (e.g., a graduate or 4th year seminar class), whereas I would implement the pair or small group field trip with a much larger sized group of students.

In summary, the three interactive tools discussed were ones that impressed me as being the most applicable to my teaching career and experiences. Nevertheless, these tools were simply a few of the activities presented in the workshop that I would implement in my teaching as alternatives to lecturing. To sum up my learning experience at this workshop, I will conclude with a one-sentence summary . . .

Utilizing interactive teaching activities in the classroom is not only a great way to vary one's teaching methods, but also an excellent tool for facilitating student participation, motivation, comprehension, and most importantly, learning.