

Strategies for Teaching a Split Class

Assessments often clarify differences among students, and most classes include students who arrive with various levels of motivation and preparation and who have a variety of academic backgrounds and learning styles. Below are a few strategies for teaching a heterogeneous group of students.

If there are differences in . . .

Motivation

- Show your own enthusiasm for the subject matter.
- Tell students exactly what they need to do to succeed in your course.
- Provide your students with opportunities to get actively involved in the course material.
- Offer positive reinforcement and pair your criticisms with suggestions for improvement.

Level of preparation for class

- Communicate clear goals and expectations for each assignment.
- If you are assigning a long or difficult reading, direct students to particular passages ahead of time and tell them why you think those passages are important.
- When planning a class activity that requires prepared students, think of a task that could involve under-prepared students as well.

Background in the discipline/fundamental skills

- Create opportunities for struggling students to hone skills outside of class by doing extra exercises, coming to office hours, etc.
- Provide tiered in-class assignments or exercises, so students can practice a skill starting at their own level of self-assessed competence.
- Engage the experienced students in teaching the inexperienced students.
- Work with different groups separately. You might even dismiss one group 10 minutes early so that you can give the other your full attention. In the next class, do the reverse so that all students get class time specifically pitched at their level.
- Avoid allowing the inexperienced students to railroad your lesson plan by asking questions that may not be applicable to everyone. Instead, ask all your students to email you with questions ahead of time so that you may answer only those that may be most relevant for everyone in class. Respond to off-the wall questions individually.
- Build frequent and short review moments into your lesson plan. Even experienced students can usually tolerate a 3-5 minute review session if you move quickly on to other things.
- If you are planning on holding a longer review session, make it optional for students who received above a certain score on a practice test or cumulative assignment.

Learning styles

- Be aware of your own learning style and the modality (Verbal, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic) you feel most comfortable with in your teaching.
- Help your students be aware of their own learning style so that they can become more adept at translating the information you give into their own modality.
- Vary your presentation and classroom activities to address different learning styles.
- If your initial presentation was in one modality, follow it up with a review or reinforcement activity that targets a different modality.
- Ask students to rephrase a concept in their own words, or demonstrate it with a diagram, activity, or practical example, either in class or on assignments.