

Teaching Tip Topic: An Online Instructor's Best Friend

To reduce the likelihood of being sued for false advertising, I am changing the title to One of an online instructor's best friends. A recurring theme in these podcast segments is how can instructors make their courses more engaging to students while at the same time encouraging their critical thinking? Here are two tips: one for the online instructor and one for the on-campus instructor.

I imagine many online instructors know about the MERLOT site. But not all of them know that the site when through a significant revision recently. For the benefit of those who may not have heard of it, MERLOT stands for Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching, and is, among other things, a repository for "learning objects." Learning objects in this context are resources, including assignments that online instructors have developed, used in their classes, and made available to others. These resources are grouped by discipline and are peer reviewed so one can count on a reasonably high quality.

There is an Assignments link that can be searched by discipline in which instructors have prepared student assignments along with detailed instructions for implementing them. In a way it's like going to a good instructor and saying what are some assignments you've had really good luck with? And then that instructor gives you a complete assignment that has been particularly effective.

MERLOT <http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>

For the on-campus instructor I highly recommend the University of Oklahoma's Instructional Development Program web site: <http://www.ou.edu/idp/tips/techniques.htm> There are many excellent resources here. I'll make mention of one related to lecture-based classes that presents some good ideas for enhancing that format – in fact it's titled just that: Enhanced Lecture Formats: <http://www.ou.edu/idp/tips/ideas/lecture.html>

The paper presents four ideas, any or all of which will make lectures more memorable.

1. Lecture with periodic pauses – lecture for 15 minutes, stop while students work in pairs to review, discuss and revise their notes; repeat several times, allow last several minutes for students to summarize the whole lecture
2. Lecture with immediate Test – give a test or quiz at the end of every lecture
3. "Feedback" lecture - Give students study questions before the lecture, lecture for 20 minutes, small groups discuss a question related to the lecture for 10 minutes, lecture for 20 minutes, students follow-up by revising their answers to the study questions.
4. "Guided" lecture – 30 minutes: students take no notes, 5 minutes, students take notes on what they remember, 15 minutes, small groups discuss teacher-provided question