

10 Teaching Tips

*To Help You Be
Successful in the Classroom!!*

Edited and Compiled by Ed Straka, M.A.

Introduction

The following is a manual I put together to help new teachers be successful in their teaching endeavors.

Principally, many of these “tips” have been utilized by teachers everywhere to help their students learn. Thus, there really is no author although you can find these tips, tasks and teaching tenets in all education books.

Therefore, I offer it free with no copyright restrictions!

- Ed Straka

Teaching Tip # 1 – Without Apology

Teaching is one of the most rewarding and difficult tasks that a person can undertake. On the high end of the equation the teacher is in complete charge of everything that goes on in the classroom model. On the low end of the equation, the teacher is in complete control and is completely responsible – for better or worse – for how their classroom functions and how they run their education program. And that is where the fear begins! As educators, we all wonder, “how do we work this? Where do we begin each day and each lesson?”

These are great questions and reasonable questions which all teachers, everywhere, have wondered about and at times agonized over. Indeed, what I – Ed Straka – learned as both a homeschool dad years ago, as well as a high school teacher and university professor was how to manage the classroom thing so that the students can learn in an efficient and effective manner.

In tips to follow, I will share a variety of strategies that I have found helpful in teaching and believe you will also. In fact, many of these “tips” you may already have used in your school! But if not, I believe you will find them extremely helpful in managing both your time and tasks in an efficient fashion as well as give some structure to your educational endeavor with your students.

That said, let’s begin with tip # 1:

1. **Without Apology:** Don’t make excuses for what you are teaching! As an adult teacher, you are in charge, not your students. You are the adult who has been given authority over the children God has given you for that class period. You decide what is what and they, the students, need to meet your expectations as to what you require for them to be successful. Equally, do NOT negotiate what you are teaching. Again, you are in charge. Your job as a teaching professional is to set the rules for engagement and the conduct of your students. They are not adults nor are they your buddies. There is work to do that is necessary to prepare them to be self-governed in the real world when they are in charge and on their own (I Corinthians 13:11). Remember: if you place no expectations on your students, then don’t expect much (Galatians 6:7).

Teaching Tips # 2 – Begin with the End

As stated above, “teaching is one of the most rewarding and difficult tasks that a person can undertake.” That’s why it must be done correctly. And to do “it” correctly requires planning!

We have all probably heard the adage: “if you have no map – any bus will get you there!”

Clearly this is the case in education!

2. Begin with the End: planning that ensures academic achievement requires asking the right questions. Why are you teaching this? What is the outcome you desire? How does it relate to what you will teach tomorrow?

One of the most important aspects of education is continuity. You want there to be an overall flow to what you are doing from one lesson to the next, so it is important to have an overall goal in mind as you begin to plan out your school week. You want lessons and assignments that are manageable, measurable, and most important in helping you achieve your goals for your student come assessment time.

That said, always keep in mind the concept of the **Shortest Path:** what’s the goal and the shortest way to effectively reach it? Understand, this does not mean that your lessons and assignments are minimalistic in terms of the goals you are striving for as a teacher and the workload you place upon your students. Rather, you are really ensuring that you don’t give schoolwork for the sake of just giving busy work that your students get so busy that they cannot see the forest through the trees in terms of your ultimate end goal for a specific assignment.

To assist you in the Shortest Path concept is our last concept for today: **Post It:** post the reason you are teaching what you are that day, so your students know, and you stay on track as the teacher on your weekly lesson plan. Remember also: a “plan” also includes all reading assignments you give students for individual reading on their own (a.k.a. “Homework”).

Happy planning!

Teaching Tips # 3 – Have a Plan

This “teaching tip” will also deal with planning, but also room organization. Once again, we will be focusing on why you, as the teacher, are doing what you are doing. We will consider not only the issue of academic/class planning – but your classroom plan also.

When you begin your class for the day, do you have a **Double Plan** in effect? In other words, do you have a plan for both the students and you – what will you both be doing during a lesson? Granted, the purpose of the class time is to be instructing your students, but an organized teacher should have an idea of what, specifically, they will be doing while the students are working. Will you be lecturing, explaining, examining seat work completed by students, grading or?...

Again, what are you doing and why?

Room Plan is our next concept to consider. As a teacher who may or may not “share your classroom,” you will only have so much room to arrange a teaching space not to mention so many resources available. Nonetheless, in as much as it is possible, determine the reason your school room area is laid out the way it is, and why.

To be considered also, is not only the students and where they will sit, but equally where will you be located during the length of your class time with the students? Will you be sitting, standing, or moving around the room? When you are not moving around the school room – where will you be?

Lastly, and like the **Room Plan** noted above, what do you have as wall decorations? Why? Do you have any wall decorations related to education that are moveable, that can be changed per the subject being taught?

To be sure, your classroom budget offered by the school may be limited, thus you may not have all the materials on the walls for obvious reasons. Nonetheless, similar to your Room Plan, if it is possible for you to decorate your teaching space in a thoughtful, thought-provoking manner for your students – the stimuli will be good for them!

Happy Teaching!

Teaching Tips # 4 - Review

This teaching tip will deal with the concept of **Review**. Teachers often can get so wrapped up in the “who” and the “what” they must teach, that they forget to think about both how to begin and end a class.

Below is a simple method that will allow you to maintain continuity within the theme of what you are teaching whether math, science, history or even sports instruction. Equally, it will keep your students moving in the right direction while allowing them to warm up their brains and recall what they had learned in the previous lesson, whether the day before or at the end of a class period the previous week.

Begin every class with a slight review – no more than 5 minutes if it is for a previous day’s class, or 10 minutes if it was the last class before a holiday and much time had passed. Remember: this is to warm up both student and teacher and to help both find their flow and get back into the subject after some time off.

Again, this allows both you and the students to warm up your brains and re-engage the topic. From there, you begin in a clear, concise fashion to introduce the new topic of the day to be taught. In other words, the “new” should flow from and out of the “old.”

When you are nearing the end of the ‘new’ lesson, determine a good place to stop for the day and end with a very brief review of today’s class lesson then give the assignment to prepare the students for tomorrow.

Tomorrow you will once again review what was covered the previous day (i.e. today) so that you keep the flow of information coherent and connected in the minds of your students and yourself!

Happy Teaching!

Teaching Tips # 5 – No Opt-Out

This “teaching tip” will also deal with the concept of **No Opt-Out**. Teachers live under the burden of both the tyranny of the urgent and the nitty-gritty of teaching students. There are day school duties, emergencies, and often children that are not yet in school that will need your attention when they arrive. And then, after all this, the lesson plans to complete with only so many hours to get it done. Equally, there are living, breathing human beings who, as individuals, have their own personal issues that they bring to class that the teacher is forced to deal with daily. These “human beings” are your students!

The great thing about Students is that they are essentially like sponges that can absorb so much information that it is truly amazing to behold! The bad thing about Students is that they can be resistant to absorption of the information that their teachers want them to absorb which is the “nitty-gritty of teaching students” noted in the first paragraph above.

What’s a teacher to do?

If we go back to our first Teaching Tip, we considered the necessity of the teacher to realize that he/she is not only ‘the adult in the room,’ but equally the adult teacher who oversees the classroom and thus in charge of the students.

Essentially, the teacher should not make apologies for what is being taught, nor negotiate with the students. Again, the adult teacher oversees executing the lesson plan. Part of said “lesson plan” will of course mean work the student must do independently.

The teacher gives an assignment to the student: a series of math problems or reading assignments or writing assignments. Whatever the task might be – the teacher is responsible for teaching and assigning work, and the student is to comply and do the assigned work in preparation for the next concept to be learned. Simple.

The concept of **No Opt-Out** means that the students are held accountable for the work. They cannot “Opt-Out” of the assignment. In a classroom situation, assignments given as homework are often just not done. If the student does not complete the assignment, they will not go forward to the next concept. In other words, they cannot skip an assignment.

The main concept here, is that the **unprepared** student is **not** allowed to “Opt-Out” of the assigned work. Thus, it is imperative that as the teacher of the students – you are willing to hold the line and keep those students accountable and working.

Hold the line teachers!

Teaching Tips # 6 – Right is Right

This “teaching tip” is **Right is Right** and will build upon the previous concept of **No Opt-Out**. Just as students are not allowed to be unprepared and then be “let off the hook,” as it were, likewise students are not allowed to have a lackadaisical attitude to the quality of both the work they turn in or the answers they give to questions during their study time. When St. Paul admonishes us to do whatever we do with all our might to give glory to God, so likewise must the teacher be gracious yet firm in requiring their students to give their very best (Colossians 3:17).

Right is Right: answers must be correct!

Whether in answering a question that the teacher asks, or in a student-led discussion amongst class mates, the student must give the correct answer. The idiocy of so-called “new math” as well as the “self-esteem” movements floating around the public schools at all levels of academia today is a fast path to intellectual destruction and an incompetent, inarticulate working class. Such “movements” are the result of psycho-babel psychology, Marxist sociology, and the whine of second raters.

Sadly, the results will be a dumbed down rabble of low-performing drones always looking for the lowest level of performance and having found it, the blame-complain game will begin as they seek to blame others for their low performance and look for “breaks” everywhere to get out of hard work.

As Christians, both the Old and New Testaments mitigate against such an attitude toward work (Proverbs 13:4; 14:23) and Christian education is no different: **Right is Right!** Whether we are dealing with math problems, science formulas or who was involved in the War of 1812 – the student must answer correctly before moving on to the next part of the lesson for the day. If he or she seems confused or unsure, then he or she needs to go back to the previous day’s lesson and relearn the previous day’s teaching target/goal. To do otherwise is merely putting off the inevitable bad news of failure and an inability to press forward academically. Simple.

Granted, there are days when both teachers and students are not feeling up to par and are just having an off day. Nonetheless, the general rule must be upheld that **Right is Right: all answers must be correct**. Do we not require the same from our doctors, dentists, and auto mechanics?

Part of Christian Education is character development as the book of Proverbs makes clear (Proverbs 22:6). If, as teachers, we give into our student’s whims and desires, we only set them up for a harsh reality later in life (Galatians 6:7).

Be diligent teachers, and your students will be also!

Teaching Tips # 7 – Stretch It!

Our last “teaching tip” was **Right is Right** and was built upon the previous concept of **No Opt-Out**. Students are not allowed to come to class unprepared and then be “let off the hook,” as it were, so likewise students are not allowed to have a lackadaisical attitude to the quality of their work whether verbal or written.

Now, we will discuss the two aspects of work that teachers deal with on a weekly basis: verbal answers to questions and written work. In both cases, teachers must have expectations that they are willing to place upon their students to not only prepare for the day by doing the work required the day before, but also be prepared to work and complete a given assignment.

Just as **Right is Right: answers must be correct**, as we noted in our last tip – it is important that parents are willing to add another Teaching Tip to their tool kit called: **Stretch It!**

This is a simple process wherein you ask your student (s) a question; they answer it correctly, and you **Stretch it**. You do this when they answer the first question correctly, and then YOU, the teacher, ask your student (s) another question. You are essentially asking the student to Stretch It a bit by asking for more information about the topic at hand.

The request “for more information” is to facilitate the higher order thinking skills of your students so that they learn to think more clearly, and deeply, about the subject at hand. Equally, you are building up their ability to formulate deeper concepts within their head about the subject being taught, and thus become more thoughtful when it comes time to discussing things of import!

The second aspect of teaching within the spectrum of the **Right is Right** noted above, is that when students turn in written work, Right is still Right. (Imagine that!)

When students turn in written work, they may be trying to get an assignment done quickly (who hasn’t at one time, or another done that?). No problem! Yet, even when a student attempts to get their work done quickly, he or she still must be held accountable to turn in written work that anyone could read and have a fairly clear idea of what the writer is attempting to communicate.

The best way to ensure that is the case – is in the area of sentence writing. **Format Matters: complete sentences are a must**. The main thing to keep in the minds of your students is that a complete sentence expresses a complete thought. What and who are they writing about? What did that person do? Whether there are one or more people being written about in their essay or their one sentence response homework – people have names, and those names should be used so the reader can understand who and what is being discussed!

This does not mean that they must rewrite the first 2/3rds of the question in order to have a “complete sentence” – but it does mean that a person with no knowledge of the assignment should be able to tell what the general ideas are, and who the people noted in the written material are, and what is important.

Bottom line: hold your students accountable to express clearly and correctly what they are attempting to communicate!

Teaching Tip # 8 – Break It Down

Break It Down – When students do not understand a concept during a lesson, break down the material into its parts to focus on the problematic area. Do not simply repeat the question; think about the part of the material that most likely caused the confusion in your students' minds, and ask smaller, simpler questions about this part.

The goal is to provide the smallest hint possible and do it quickly. This is a challenging teaching technique that needs to be thought through ahead of time during planning by considering possible wrong answers and cues to use for those errors.

There are many ways to break down the material, depending upon the subject being taught.

Here is an example:

If you are asking for a definition of an odd number for math, provide an example: "3 is an odd number, but 4 is not."

If you are discussing words that are spelled the same, yet one is a noun and the other is a verb, you could try this: "Some paint has lead in it – but when you take your little brother to the paint store they have to be willing to be what by the hand?" – answer "led."

Eliminate false choices. "If it were a verb, it would be an action. Is owner an action?"

Another example is when your young student is reading a lesson out loud, and they stumble over a word. Remind them of the phonics rule for that rule, i.e. "I see the owl."

If your student is unsure of sounding out the word "owl," you may ask them what the two sounds are that "ow" can make. This reinforces the phonics rule and also helps the student understand how the rule helps them remember how to sound out the word.

There are multiple ways that such an exercise may be utilized in your education program. The main thing is to think it through and try to plan ahead of time rather than getting caught unprepared and attempting to come up with an example at the last moment.

Happy Planning!

Teaching Tip # 9 – Get Organized!

Get Organized! The golden rule of any endeavor is to get and stay organized!

As a teacher your schedule can be crushing!

You don't have time to do all that you must do daily as it is – but then the Lord led you to be a teacher of the children He has blessed you with, granted, *in loco parentis* (Psalm 127:3).

Now what?

Get organized by making sure you know what you are going to do for every single student as far as classes.

Every student needs his or her own folder to keep their assignments separate. If possible, a separate file drawer or file box for each child could contain a separate hanging folder or divider for each subject for that child. Classroom space and number of students may make this a little tricky, but there are other creative ways to accomplish the same thing. For instance, you could put the schoolwork for two similar subjects in each box or drawer as long as they are clearly marked.

Each drawer should have multiple dividers that are labeled with the classes that students will be taking that year (math, science, English, history, etc.). Each divider should have folders that contain your assignments that you will give them as well as copies of the actual graded work that your student has completed and turned in for grading. These can be kept for your record of education (either for work verification or just for review for yourself, your student, or their parents at a later date).

You should have either a desk calendar or day planner that contains a calendar that you can use to plan out your school weeks (Sunday evenings are good to spend time planning what you will be doing that week).

It is imperative as a teacher that you realize: if you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always gotten. Simple!

So before you actually begin it is crucial that you get yourself organized with the above method of filing and equipment needed.

That, and have a place for both your books and the students' books.

Everyone must know where the tools of learning can be accessed!

Everyone must know what he or she will be doing and what he or she will need to do it!

This won't solve every problem that you will come across as a teaching professional – but it will make the other problems easier to manage as you focus on your teaching!

Get busy!

Teaching Tip # 10 – Do It Again

Do It Again – When students fail to successfully complete a task, often the best consequence is asking them to **Do It Again**, but this time please do it correctly.

This technique is effective because it gives students immediate and logical feedback, sets a standard of excellence, ends with showing the students what success looks like, does not give the teacher administrative work, and holds the student accountable.

Plus, you can use this technique repeatedly, regardless of what the subject matter is that your student is learning. It is simply a matter of holding them accountable to the standards that you, the teacher, set for them.

Equally, it is a matter of holding them accountable to the standards of the subject matter being taught! After all, $2+3=5$, not 6 in Math. There is no way to get around that!

Nouns are not verbs, and verbs are not nouns, in Grammar.

There are only 7 continents in the world, not 8 in Geography.

The Pilgrims landed in Plymouth in 1620 – not 1619 in American History.

The list, of course, is endless! But you get the point and so will your students!

As we noted earlier in Teaching Tips: **No Opt-Out** and **Right is Right!**

Do It Again until it is Right!

All of these tips are for the purpose of preparing your student for success as an adult.

And that is the purpose of education: preparation for the student to become self-governed individuals!