

Notes



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section *The Presentation*
6.8, 6.9, 6.10, 6.11.

6.6 Mistakes

If you say something or do something that's obviously wrong or inappropriate (and eventually you will) don't say, "Oh no, I goofed!" in a flustered voice. Don't be afraid to admit to the mistake. Everyone makes them so don't make it a big deal. Instead say:

- "Let me say that differently."
- "I want to rephrase my response to you."
- "Here's another way to talk about this issue."

6.7 Move On

Make your point clearly; nail down exactly what you want your students to learn and then move on. Just say what you want to say. Be 100 percent prepared and don't allow yourself to become sidetracked.

6.8 Note Taking

Some people like to be given outline points. Tell people you have specific points for them, and they'll instinctively pick up their pencils and start taking notes.

Some studies indicate that the very act of taking notes helps people remember the material, even if they never review them. When students take notes, it forces them to think about what they're learning, process the information in different parts of their brains, and makes it easier for access later on.

Remember that some students learn better by listening with all of their attention (auditory learners) rather than taking notes, so don't make it an issue. Providing a detailed handout or textbook so note taking isn't essential helps these people completely focus on what you're saying.

6.9 Presentation Structure

Define the scope of the class and share it with your students so they'll know what to expect. Your presentation should have a beginning which includes the objectives for the session, or "what you plan to teach them," a middle which is where you teach them, an ending which includes a summary telling them what you taught them, and then an evaluation or feedback step where you ask them what they learned.

6.10 Questions

Be sure you understand the audience's needs and clearly let your students know you welcome comments and questions.

Acknowledge the Questioner. As you're answering questions, watch for the next question(s), and acknowledge that person so they'll know you saw them and will allow them to ask their question after you've finished answering the current or preceding one(s).

Clear Answer. Be sure you understand the questions and answer them with a short, crisp, and clear response that makes students feel happy they asked. Don't try to impress your students with useless information because most prefer a simple "yes" or "no" rather than a reply that drones on forever.

Convoluting Questions. If you receive a convoluted question, ask the student to repeat it. Quite often these types of questions are about something you haven't yet taught, or aren't within the scope of the class. As the question is repeated, you'll find it becomes shorter and clearer. It might also change in emphasis if not in meaning.



Repeat the question as you understand it and prompt the student to confirm your clarification. This will ensure you have a clear understanding of the question and give you more time to consider your answer as well. In addition, this helps the other students hear the question correctly.

Help the questioner think his or her way through the troubling issue. After you answer the question as you understand it, be sure to ask the student, "Did I answer your question?"

Dissenters. When you hear a dissenting voice, listen to it carefully. Listen to the dissenter with your eyes so that he or she feels you're giving them serious consideration. Don't disagree negatively, just ease into it by saying something such as "That's a good point, but . . .," or "Let me add something to that . . .," or "There's another factor to consider here . . ."

Let students know you can be wrong, and encourage them to present their point of view with substantiation. Let them know that if they can prove their point with the appropriate resource, such as a *Code* reference, you'll accept it. Don't allow them to continue to argue a point based on an opinion or feeling they can't verify.

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Try to keep the discussion moving past their point of contention and stay within the scope of the class. If necessary, let them know that you need to move on but will discuss their point with them during break or after class.

Don't Fake It. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. If a student asks a question you can't answer, you might reply, "I don't know the answer to that, but if you'd like to send me an e-mail after the class, I'll try to find out." When they do send you an e-mail question, keep your reply short and to the point. In some cases, just sending them a *Code* reference that contains the answer is enough. Refer them to the *Code* Forum at www.MikeHolt.com/forum if the question falls into the realm of consulting, especially if you don't provide that service.

Instructor Questions. Whenever possible, ask your students questions and challenge them to participate so you develop a connection (ideas, emotions, and creativity) between you and them. Explore ways for you to hold their interest so they want to learn from you with openness and curiosity.

When you have questions for students to answer, never use a trick question. Don't play games; just teach! It takes effort to get people to understand the material and feel good about themselves, so don't make them feel badly because of difficult-to-understand questions.

Don't become defensive if you're asked a question and you don't know the answer, or if a student challenges the accuracy of an answer you've given. Never intimidate students because, if you do, they'll become afraid to ask any more of them.

Don't ask the class a question about something you haven't already explained. Never single out a particular student to answer a question and put him or her on the spot. There'll be other students in the class confident enough to volunteer answers.

No Questions? Why might students not ask questions about the material you've been covering?

- You've talked too long. They don't want to hear any more about the subject—and they'll strangle the first person that says anything that even sounds like a question.
- They're confused. Bewildered students seldom ask questions. They don't like to admit they didn't understand the material, and they won't struggle to make sense out of it. They just sit there quietly. This can happen when you teach very technical subjects and speak at a rapid rate. If all of the material presented was new, they might still be in the process of absorbing it. When a presentation consists of opinion rather facts (like this one does), there isn't really much room for discussion. If someone disagrees with your opinion, that just means they have a different one—accept it!

- You stepped on their toes. You said something that alienated them—and they're turned off.
- You never reached them. Some students listened attentively but you never connected with them. Did they have no interest in the subject? Was the message clear?
- You talked above their level of interest.
- You talked above their level of knowledge.
- Too much detail. Have you told so much that they're overwhelmed? Was the main point obscured? Did you saturate your students' brains with information they really didn't need?
- They think it's disrespectful to the instructor. Some students may sit in silence because they think it's disrespectful to question the concepts and ideas of the instructor.
- They have something else on their minds. Maybe there's something going on in their personal life that's distracting them from focusing on your presentation. Others might even be there against their will.
- You didn't make it clear you welcome comments and questions.
- You hurried through the program, giving the impression you didn't have time for questions. If you're properly prepared, and in control of your class, you won't need to hurry through your presentation. Be sure to pace yourself so there's sufficient time for a summary and for questions.
- Challenge your students to participate. If you challenge your students to participate, you might find they begin to ask questions. Develop a connection of ideas, emotions, and creativity between you and your audience. Add an element of fun.

Seeking Approval. Some students aren't really seeking answers to their questions. They're seeking approval. A sensitive instructor can detect the difference, and should give confirmation or approval to the student.

Students Answering Student Questions. What do you do if a student attempts to answer a question posed by another student? My response may surprise you, but I encourage students to become part of the process. If a student attempts to answer another student's question, I permit it as long as it has to do with something I already taught and pertains to the current topic.

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Encourage students to answer questions from other students. Facilitate the discussion and interaction. Sometimes they'll explain something better than you did! Encourage everyone to become part of the process. It will help you understand what they learned.

If the student's answer is correct, confirm it. If they're wrong, explain the subject again so everyone has a better opportunity to fully understand it. Don't allow long discussions outside the scope of the class.

Students Asking Questions When They Already Know the Answer. Sometimes a student will ask a question and you know he or she already knows the answer. Don't be annoyed, they might be asking on behalf of a friend who's afraid to speak up in class. Maybe they're asking so they're sure another student hears (or heard) the answer.

Verify You Answered the Question. After you've answered the question, return to the student and ask if you answered it. Sometimes I'll be asked a question and I'll respond. I'll then return to the student only to discover that I didn't understand the question and my response didn't solve their problem. How would you know this if you didn't ask, "Did I answer your question?"

6.11 Survey/Evaluation of Presentation

Have an evaluation of your presentation so you can better understand how effectively you communicated with your students. You'll learn what worked and what areas need improvement.

Your goal is to not receive any of the following comments in your evaluation:

- "The instructor had no energy and read to us like we were idiots."
- "The presentation had no relevance to my problems."
- "The instructor talked endlessly about himself (herself)."
- "I couldn't understand the graphics and the handouts were of poor quality."
- "The instructor fumbled the questions, and contradicted himself."
- "The instructor rambled on with a lot of empty words. Just bull, if you ask me."
- "The instructor didn't seem to enjoy himself (herself) and I never felt comfortable."

Personal Value. Use the evaluation as a tool for self improvement. Don't allow yourself to become devastated by any negative feedback, but use it to better yourself. Look at the

positive remarks and continue to grow in your ability. It might take years of presenting to feel really confident in your teaching ability. The positive comments and the opportunities to see the “lights come on” as your students learn make all the work and effort worthwhile.

Be sure to use feedback and class interaction to update your presentation. Make notes of student comments received in class as well as the outcome of the written evaluation. It can be very beneficial to have an assistant with you to help make notes during the class so you don’t forget the comments. You may be able to use a student volunteer as an assistant, or offer a previous student a free class in return for helping you. Continuous evaluation and updating of your presentation is essential in order to keep your material current and fresh.

Timing. Don’t leave the evaluation until the last few minutes of class because everyone is preparing to leave. A good time to have students fill out the evaluation is during one of the afternoon breaks. Doing so will give your students ample time to complete it and you’ll receive better information because they aren’t feeling rushed.

Make sure your evaluation sheet isn’t too long, or people will just circle numbers in order to avoid spending the time thinking about the questions. An example of an evaluation sheet you can use is on the next page.