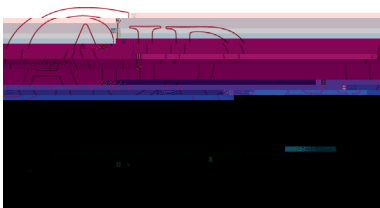


INSTRUCTOR / COURSE  
EVALUATION  
TIPS

IMPROVING ACADEMIC TEACHING

*ICE Factor 7*  
Exams &  
Graded Material





# Improving Academic Teaching

## Exams & Graded Material

The following suggestions for enhancing teaching and learning are keyed to sections of the Instructor/Course Evaluation (ICE), an instrument adopted for the evaluation of teaching at Saint Mary's University and based on the Students' Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ). The ICE factors teaching into nine components, eight of which provide formative information that can be used to improve teaching and learning.

The following suggestions were adapted by Professor Herbert W. Marsh, University of Western Sydney - Macarthur, Australia (developer of the SEEQ) with permission from Davis, B. G., Wood, L., & Wilson, R. (1983). ABC's of Teaching with Excellence. Teaching Innovation and Evaluation Services, University of California. Minor changes in language were made by Professor Beverly Cameron (University Teaching Services, University of Manitoba) to fit the Canadian context. Teaching Tips is reprinted with permission.

*Current resources related to the eight formative ICE factors are available from the Office of Instructional Development, Saint Mary's University. Copies of the ICE questionnaire are available from the Senate Office.*

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## Improving Academic Teaching

# Exams & Graded Material

The following ideas and suggestions have been used by outstanding university instructors

### **1. Give students frequent assignments and make extensive, constructive comments on them**

“Students need to know what they are doing well in addition to what they need to improve,” says one professor of History. “I am always careful to praise their strengths and to be as constructive and helpful as possible in pointing out their weaknesses.”

“I make a point of writing extensively on my students’ papers,” says a professor of Architecture. “I make comments in the margins as I am reading and then append lists of strengths and suggestions for improvement.”

“I write many comments on my students’ papers and essay exams,” says a professor in Ethnic Studies. “In fact, I write just as much on the best papers as on the poorest. On failing papers I write something like, ‘Insufficient . . . come see me Wednesday’ or on a good paper I might write ‘Read such and such over the weekend and come talk to me about it next Tuesday.’ I am also careful to remark on any improvements or progress a student may have made from one writing assignment to another.”

### **2. Discuss the answers to exams, quizzes, or homework assignments at the next class meeting**

One Engineering teacher says that even if he cannot return graded assignments or exams, he always discusses the answers at the next class meeting. “I want to correct any misunderstandings and reinforce their learning as soon as possible. Students are much more receptive to this right after completing an assignment.”

### **3. Include peer-editing of student assignments (papers, computer programs, or design projects) in your course**

“In my upper division courses, I have my students submit two copies of each computer program they write,” one Computer Science faculty member explains. “One copy goes to me and the markers and the other copy is assigned to another student in the class to evaluate and edit.”

This faculty member believes that learning to program is like learning to write short stories; you learn not only by doing it but by reading programs other people have written. He has students read and analyze exemplary programs, much as they might read excellent short stories. He believes that peer-editing also gives students yet another opportunity to demonstrate their understanding.

A professor of Architecture uses the same strategy with student papers. He has students exchange





This technique helps establish good rapport with your students, gives you additional information on their sense of what is important in the course, and becomes an excellent source of future exam, quiz, or discussion questions for the course.

### **11. Hold review sessions before the midterm and the final exam**

Many excellent teachers hold reviews in all of their undergraduate courses, but it is especially important in lower division courses where many students are still unsure about the performance levels expected of them.

able to do (some very easy ones) as well as questions that require more thought and really make my students go beyond the material.”

Questions on midterm and final exams should not take a form radically different from those which you use in quizzes, homework assignments, lecture or discussion.

Several faculty members stress the importance of showing exam questions to TAs and markers before the tests are administered. “TAs are very helpful in identifying test questions which may be too difficult for students. They often see things that I don’t when I make up the exams”

**15 Give two midterms, and after the first exam, distribute copies of five different answers to one of your essay questions**

A Political Science professor who does this tells students that one of the five answers received an “A”, one a “B”, response, etc. “Finally, I explain what I am looking for in a response to my essay exams and why I assigned the response to the grade, I expect the same for exams? /?”

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are having real problems understanding the material and spend more time with them in my office or in the departmental study centre.”

**18 Provide self-instructional materials or “modules” which relate to basic principles and skills needed to succeed in your course**

A faculty member in Biochemistry had a graduate student develop computer-assisted instructional units for review by students whose science and math backgrounds were weak. “I give a short diagnostic test at the beginning of the course to help identify students who need this kind of review in order to keep up with my

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