

Chapter 2

Polish Your Presentation Skills



Let's begin with a little Quiz (the answers are scattered throughout the article which begins this Chapter):

1. At the start of an "Intro to Relational Database" class, you ask the group "What do you think a relational database is?" You're standing by the flipchart, pen in hand, ready to write, and...dead silence. What do you do?
2. For how long can the average person listen to someone lecture without his or her mind wandering?
3. If you use an overhead projector when, if ever, should you turn it off during the session?
4. When should you speak faster? When should you slow down?
5. Name one type of movement or gesture that can enhance a presentation. When does it pay to stand perfectly still?
6. **True or False:** It is sufficient to practice a presentation by rehearsing it mentally.
7. **True or False:** If you're faced with an unusually subdued group of students, you should tone down your presentation style and skip some planned group discussions so as to not put them under too much pressure.

The article below provides many practical ideas for sharpening your presentation skills. Following it, the rest of this chapter offers a host of presentation Tips from your colleagues. I hope you'll try out at least one new idea immediately!

The quality of your presentation skills can make or break a class. A course may be well designed, you may know the subject thoroughly, but unless the material is well presented people are likely to rate both the instructor and the content as poor.

"Being a good instructor is a learnable skill," says Dr. Susan Weinschenk, president of Weinschenk Training and Consulting (Edgar, Wisconsin). "It's not art, intuition or having a 'magic touch.' It's as mundane as how you work with an LCD display and how much you rehearse."

What it takes to lead a successful class is quite similar, in certain regards, to the effort it takes to star in a "hit" play. Let's take a look at each performance element you need to master.

Set Your Stage

You need to think of the front of your classroom as a stage and view your equipment and training aids as props.

Exactly where, for instance, should the flipchart, LCD panel, or data/video projector go? If you're using a PC, how should it be placed? Your physical set up should provide the following:

Maximum freedom of movement. For instance, when you want to initiate a class discussion, can you easily walk around to the front of your equipment table and out into the group, or are you trapped behind a desk?

The ability to face your audience at all times. One of the cardinal rules for any performer or

instructor is *never* turn your back to the audience. Place your PC so that you can type on the keyboard while still facing the attendees. Form a triangle between you, your students, and the display screen so you can look at it and at them simultaneously.

Easy access to training aids. Before each session, make sure your “props” (e.g., flipchart pens, books, diskettes) are all present, logically laid out, and within easy reach.

If you use an overhead or digital projector, arrange the training room so that the light switch is near you.

If that’s not possible, either clear a path between you and it, or, for a multi-day class, alternate the student who sits next to the switch so that the same person isn’t constantly stuck with “light” duty.

Also, be sure to perform an *equipment walkthrough*, both to confirm that everything is working, and to uncover any problems in your setup. (For more on creating the ideal training room, see chapter 10.)

Rehearse!

Whether you’re a newcomer or have several years of teaching experience, practicing out loud and in front of at least one other person is guaranteed to help you improve your technique.

Practice sessions with an audience give new instructors the chance to deal with stage fright, get comfortable with their “lines,” and become proficient with equipment and props.



But veteran trainers can also benefit from such sessions. In fact, they should consider *videotaping* their sessions. “We all develop bad habits we’re not aware of. Videotaping brings them to your attention in a powerful way,” Dr. Weinschenk points out.

“For example, I’ve been teaching for more than fourteen years but the first time I was videotaped I discovered that I unconsciously move my hands back and forth while speaking.

“I’ve had to consciously break myself of this tendency.”

Rehearsing with an audience can also improve your use of training aids.

“I saw one experienced computer trainer stand in front of a glowing LCD panel, so that the words were projected onto his forehead. Until I told him, he had no idea how funny it looked.”

Besides allowing you to gain mastery over course content, equipment, stage fright, and bad habits, “live” practice sessions give you the opportunity to sharpen two of your most important presentation tools: *voice* and *movement*.

Speak Up!

Imagine you’re attending a “Windows 2000 Active Directory” class. The trainer is talking in a soothing, hypnotic monotone about *domains*, *trees*, *organizational units*...and you’re not sure what else because you’re half asleep.

Now imagine that a new instructor has taken over. She’s speaking, with increasing speed and energy, about (the apparently exciting) prospect of building one domain for an entire global enterprise!



In fact, not only can you create just one domain for a worldwide corporation, but... guess what???...she pauses for a long moment... and you’re at the edge of your seat waiting to hear her next words.

Your voice is one of your most powerful teaching tools. The two aspects of your voice presentation to work on are *volume* and *speed*.

When you want to **build excitement and enthusiasm** (e.g., You’re telling a dramatic story with a great punch line! or You’re introducing an exciting new application feature!), speed up, speak with extra energy, and gradually build up your volume so that by the time you reach your main point, you’re speaking noticeably louder.

When you want to **make an especially important point**, s l o w i t d o w n . . . speak more slowly, deliberately and softly than usual. It will give your words special emphasis.

When you want them **hanging on your very next words**.....*pause*.....and don’t be afraid to extend the silence.

Four Presentation Ideas

1. Perform this crucial ice-breaker early on. Within the first half hour of the session, ask the class a question to which at least one student *must* respond before you move on (e.g., “What do you think a database is?”). Depending on the group, it may be deathly quiet for several minutes.

But keep silent, looking at them expectantly. Both you and the students may find it agonizing, but you *must not rescue them* or you’ll never get any interaction from that group. Eventually, someone will venture an answer. When they do, be as warm and encouraging as possible (“That’s a good point, Sarah!”). Once the ice is broken, every time you pose a question, people will speak up.

2. How to avoid shocking the class. If you use an LCD display or overhead projector, warn students when you’re about to turn the lights back up. It reduces the shock of sudden brightness. Also practice switching overhead illustrations in a manner which avoids blinding people with the glare of a momentarily empty projector screen. Finally, turn off the projector or LCD panel whenever you’re not using it.

3. Remember what it’s like to be a student. Seasoned instructors tend to forget what it’s like to be on the other side. This tendency can lead to forgetting

to explain the “obvious,” or failing to take into account such factors as fear and exhaustion.

Be a student in someone else’s class. I do it regularly, and it really makes a difference in my attitude towards my own students. I also pick up some great new instructional ideas from other trainers.

4. Keep your material from going stale. Teaching on “automatic pilot” is a common pitfall among experienced trainers. Veteran instructors sometimes have trouble keeping the material fresh and alive for themselves. When you’ve demonstrated the same application concept in the same manner 100 times, or told the same story for three years, it’s understandably difficult to convey enthusiasm.

What to do? Change your anecdotes, demonstrations, and even topic sequence frequently. For instance, if you’ve used the same sample spreadsheet for the same demos for six months, it’s probably time to come up with a new one. Add new twists to a favorite anecdote or move it to a different class segment. The bottom line: Unless the material lives for you, it won’t live for your students.

*The above four tips were contributed by
Dr. Susan Weinschenk
Weinschenk Training and Consulting
Edgar, Wisconsin*

Tape record yourself during practice sessions or “live” classes, and then listen objectively to the results, noting changes you’d like to make (e.g., “Speed up at this point”, “Pause here,”).

Taping “live” classes can alert you to bad habits. “When I was first taped, I noticed that I would suddenly drop the volume of my voice for no apparent reason.

“I realized that I was thinking ahead to the next topic, rather than staying focused on the current subject.”

Practice out loud as often as possible. “I even rehearse out loud on airplanes,” say Dr. Weinschenk. What about rehearsing silently, in your head? “It just isn’t sufficient.”

Move!

Movement adds a visual element which can significantly increase student interest and attention during your lectures and demonstrations.

“Teaching is very visual. Yet many trainers simply stand at the front of the room, planted in one spot.”

Here are six ways to enhance your presentations with movement:

1. Use certain gestures consistently as visual clues. Example: “My students quickly learn that whenever I walk over to the flipchart and take the cap off a pen, I’m signaling that we’re about to begin a group discussion,” says Dr. Weinschenk.



2. Point. When you’re talking about something displayed on your LCD panel, flipchart, or overhead projection screen, walk over to it and point at the items under discussion.



3. Scribble and draw. Flipcharts or whiteboards are essential training aids. If you’re working with an overhead projector, be sure you have room to write on the overheads.

4. When you mention a job aid, student manual, or other item, hold it up. For example, when you say “Please turn to page 32 of your workbook...” pick up your copy and display it prominently.

5. Walk out into the group. Do it during discussions and lectures, not just when you’re checking their work. To make matters easier, consider arranging the students’ PCs in a horseshoe configuration.

6. Stand still at select moments. If you’re animated throughout most of your presentation, you can emphasize a particularly important point by standing perfectly motionless for a moment, without speaking.

It will catch everyone’s attention and alert them that something important is about to happen.

Be sure to avoid unconscious, distracting movements such as pacing, scratching your head, or rocking back and forth on your feet.

Set the Tone

The expectations you create during the first 30 minutes of class will affect the outcome of your entire presentation. It’s therefore your job to signal, early on, that the class mode is *active* and that it’s *safe and rewarding* to participate.

“One of my main goals during the first segment is to set up the expectation that the students are going to interact,” says Dr. Weinschenk.

“First I introduce myself and tell a story. People love stories and telling the right one can perk up their interest and help them relax.” She likes to relate this tale to computer novices:

Many years ago, when automatic teller machines were still new, I was standing on an ATM line. The man at the machine was trying to make a deposit. When the display screen told him to “put the money into the slot” he frantically looked around. The only slot he could find was the built-in trash receptacle. So he slipped his envelope into it and calmly walked away.

“I tell this anecdote for a couple of reasons. First, it helps point out that everyone can make ‘stupid’ mistakes when they don’t know the technology. Second, some people react with a kind of relief: ‘Gee, I’m not that dumb!’

“Next, I announce, sounding as serious as possible, that I’m about to go over the Class Rules.

“I walk over to the list, which has been posted and covered up. Once I’m sure I have everyone’s attention, I slowly reveal the first rule: ‘You must have fun!’

“When students see that, they usually burst into relieved laughter. Then we review the entire list:

1. You must have fun. Many adult learners associate the classroom with boredom and misery. This “rule” instantly lets people know that *this* course will be different.

2. Cheat. People should seek assistance from classmates, the course manual, the Online Help, and the instructor.

3. Ask “dumb” questions. Make mistakes. “These ideas seem almost revolutionary to many people. So I point out that *the learning is in the wobbles*. I ask them to think about how a child learns to walk. Babies don’t just



Three Presentation Pitfalls to Avoid



1. Reading your outline to the class.

I know one instructor who did nothing but read the bullet-points on his overheads for three days. It was sheer torture for the students.



Although this was an extreme case, many inexperienced trainers fall back on the practice. Use outlines strictly as an aid for organizing discussions.



2. Taking too few breaks.

Maybe you're enthusiastic about your material and time seems to fly by. Or maybe you have so much information to cover that you're hesitant to stop.



Whatever the reason, if you don't take enough breaks, you'll *reduce* learning and retention. How often should you break? At least every 60-75 minutes.

3. Relying too heavily on one instructional method.

Most people prefer to receive new information in one of three ways: sight (visual), sound (auditory), or touch (kinesthetic).



Unless they make a conscious effort to do otherwise, most instructors pick instructional techniques which match their own information intake style.



Be sure to design presentations which meet the needs of all three types of learners. For example, when you're introducing a new skill, include a good verbal explanation, a visual demonstration or drawing, and a hands-on practice exercise.

— Dr. Susan Weinschenk



watch other people walk and then, when they're sure they know how to do it perfectly, stand up and march across the room. They get up and fall down, over and over, learning through their mistakes.

4. Be here mentally. On average, adults can listen to a lecture for *between three and seven minutes* before their minds begin to wander. "I explain this fact to the group and ask them to do whatever it takes to remain mentally present." For instance, people are free to get coffee, go to the bathroom, and make phone calls at any time, not just during breaks.

"Once students are at ease, it's time for their first interaction. I start out by asking 'What are your top objectives for this course?'"

"But instead of calling on someone for an answer, I tell the group to stand up, walk over to *another participant* — preferably someone they don't know — and share their objectives with each other.

This brief exercise sends the message that they'll be interacting throughout the day."

Finally, Dr. Weinschenk has this advice for dealing with particularly quiet groups: "Sometimes a class is extremely subdued, for no apparent reason. Try to determine the cause.

"Are they unusually fearful of computers? Is it that they don't know each other and you haven't sufficiently broken the ice? No matter how quiet they remain, don't reduce your level of excitement, your enthusiasm, or pace. Be patient.

"When you ask a question, it's going to take them longer to answer but they *will* respond if you wait it out.

"In the past, I've adjusted my classroom style based on the group dynamics. Whenever I've toned down the volume, or skipped planned group exercises, *it's always been a mistake.*

"If nothing extraordinary is going on, such as a new company layoff, stick to your guns.

"Whenever I've done that, the classes have always worked much better, and students have come around to participating more fully." ■

Quick Training Tips

✓ How to postpone off-topic questions without raining on your students' parade.



I enjoy instructing curious learners who pose lots of questions, but sometimes participants ask about concepts and skills I intend to cover later in a course.

Whenever this situation occurs, I hand that student a "rain check" which she posts right next to her workstation.

When we eventually arrive at the related topic, the questioner "cashes in" the rain check in exchange for the answer.



This technique keeps the questions coming, while giving me the necessary control to deliver my course content in its intended sequence.

*Nanci Zink
CBS Personnel Services*

✓ Six ways to smooth the transition to a new topic.

Whenever I change subjects or advance to a more difficult level, I try to ensure that the class mentally changes topics with me. Here are several of my favorite techniques:

1. Briefly summarize what you taught. Explain why it was important and how it is connected to the next topic.
2. Ask for questions.
3. Assign an individual or group task.
4. Ask students to list factual information, describe why they are doing a certain operation, or how they might apply their new skills to a real-life problem.
5. Communicate your intent to change topics by using such phrases as "Before we move on...", "To summarize...", and "If there are no

other questions, the next thing we will do is...."

6. Take a break. This lets the students begin the new topic feeling refreshed.

*Edward Zeiser
Micro Service Group
West Hartford, CT*

✓ This instructor has a good point!

I tell student teachers that a laser pointer is one of the best pieces of "technology" they can invest in. Many of them suffer from chronic lower back pain brought on by constantly bending over to point to screens, keyboards and documentation in front of students.

With the laser pointer, you can stand erect and simply light up the screen, key or words you want to focus on. It is also great when you want to get a student's attention. Just flash the pointer across his/her screen or desk area and they know you're looking at them.

Another neat thing about using a laser pointer is that some students don't like the instructor to stand right next to them (they feel like their personal space is being invaded). You can still point to things on their screen or keyboard without creating a confrontation, by standing a little farther away.

*Edward J Gowen, Jr
Georgia Department of Education
Macon, GA*

✓ How to make learners exclaim "Aha!"

Before each class, we take 5 x 7 cards and print "Aha!" at the top of each.

When the session begins we tell participants "This is where you write down things that make you go 'Aha!'"

Throughout the day, we remind people to write down shortcuts and hints on their “Aha!” cards, even if that material is also in the reference guide. This small act really helps students “own” the material.

When things are slow, the instructor looks around the room and says, “Sally, what did you just write down on your ‘Aha!’ card — what’s important to you?”

This question often gets a lively discussion going. In addition, we hang a giant-sized “Aha!” card on the back wall.

Periodically, the trainers post their own “Aha!” contributions: little shortcuts they don’t have time to teach in class. Students visit the display during breaks and copy down tips that interest them.

*Mary Kay Giunta
Hyattsville, MD*

So on the second day of training with the same group, I didn’t bring the chocolate. You should have heard the uproar from these guys. “Where’s our candy?!?!?”

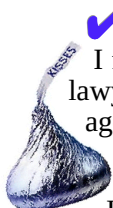
Funny enough, they didn’t retain as much learning from the non-chocolate day as from the chocolate day, either.

Recently, a colleague of mine taught another application to this same group, and I attended the session to help her over any stumbling blocks.

About 30 minutes into the course, one of the lawyer-students did something creative and then complained when the trainer didn’t give him candy!

They pointed out to her that I did, and wondered why she didn’t. And they were perfectly serious. I’m now known as the “Trainer with the Candy.”

*Cheryl Evans
Chandler, Arizona*

 **One Trainer’s Sweet Success.**
I frequently teach computer applications to lawyers and paralegals. About six months ago, I began taking a bowl of candy into my application training sessions.

It always contains Hershey’s Kisses™ and Hugs™, along with peppermints, and other candy.

As we go through exercises, the first one to finish or to come up with a new way of doing something gets a Kiss.

Someone who has trouble with something or gets a little discouraged or crashes their system gets a Hug. We end up joking about sugar highs for the over-achiever who garnered a large stockpile of chocolate.

At the beginning, I was sure the paralegals would love receiving candy, but I was hesitant about the lawyers — they’re typically not as playful.

But I still decided to try the Kisses and Hugs on them. Sure enough, as I half expected, they teased me about using Pavlovian responses in training. (One even barked, as I recall.)

TRUE TRAINING TALE

A small reminder of why semi-annual stress tests should be part of every computer trainer’s employment contract. During a break in a recent *Corel Draw* class, a middle-aged attendee pulled about five floppy disks out of her purse and started putting them in the computers.

When I asked what she was doing, she innocently replied, “Well they all have viruses on them, and I don’t have any anti-virus software, but your computers here do, so I thought that opening them on these PCs would get rid of the viruses.”

This is possibly the only time I’ve actually yelled at a student. Fortunately, no damage was done.

Tracy Marks

The Adult Learning Quiz



f you teach adults, whether in “live” classes, over the Internet, or with self-paced multimedia courseware, your grasp of how they learn and retain new skills can make or break the success of your training efforts.

How well do you understand your audience? Take this little quiz (reprinted with the permission of Padgett Thompson). Read the following statements and decide whether each is *True* or *False*. Answers are listed on the next page.

	<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
1. Adults have shorter attention spans than younger learners.	_____	_____
2. Most adults prefer to learn about theories and concepts that allow them to “see the big picture” rather than direct application to specific tasks.	_____	_____
3. Adults need more time than youths to perform learning activities.	_____	_____
4. Adults are more sensitive to learning failure than youths.	_____	_____
5. Adults who have been recently promoted or appointed to a new work position are not as receptive to training as other professionals.	_____	_____
6. It’s usually a good idea to relate the material you’re presenting to an adult’s past experience in high school or college.	_____	_____
7. In the adult training environment, instructors should ask to be called by their first names and should use the first names of attendees whenever possible.	_____	_____

✓ **Energize students by letting them lead.** When I see that my students’ eyes have that glazed look (a common problem in afternoon sessions), I turn the segment over to the group.

I might say “We’re going to set up a database. What’s my first step?” The participants guide me through the entire exercise. If *they* do it wrong, I

do it wrong. I let them catch the errors and correct me.

This technique really wakes up the class, and helps them absorb the concepts I’ve been trying to impart.

*Cheryl Knoner
Clark Oil
St. Louis, MO*

✓ **Teach the least they need to know.**
Some users initially feel overwhelmed when faced with learning a new application.

I find what works best is to start with the smallest amount of training possible, and begin with familiar skills.

For example, we send and receive faxes via computer. One staff member used a fax machine, but realized it would be more practical to fax documents directly from her PC.

Our fax software lets you either fax an existing document (basically, print to the fax driver) or send a cover page with the message right on it.

I taught this user the latter method (it is not harder or easier than the other method, but I had to choose one to start).

She called up a few days later asking if she could take an email message she had received and fax it to someone else.

I decided that instead of teaching her the second method (before she is comfortable with the first) I would advise her to use her current cut and paste skills to copy the message into her fax cover sheet.

When she had sufficient practice with one-page faxes I showed her how to fax entire documents.

This approach significantly decreased the likelihood of her becoming confused between the two sets of steps.

*Michele Marques
York University*

✓ **Want to wake up your students? Give'em the bird!** I am an onsite computer instructor who teaches employees after they have been working an 8 to 10 hour shift.

Some people are quite exhausted when they come in for their two-hour class.



It is always a challenge to keep their attention. If I have them doing something active right away it isn't too bad but sometimes I *have* to lecture.



For the computer hardware class, we cover such topics as formatting the hard drive and I teach them about sectors, clusters and FAT. In itself, this stuff is not too exciting. So I decided to get everyone's blood pumping with a little pre-class "laff-a-thon."

I use a little game I learned a long time ago. It takes about five minutes and sure does perk up the group!

Answers to The Adult Learning Quiz

1. **True.** Adults typically have a more difficult time staying focused on learning tasks than do youths.
2. **False.** About 80% of adults prefer straightforward "how to" instruction over theory.
3. **True.** As learners age, their psychomotor skills, such as handwriting ability, deteriorate.
4. **True.** Adults are prone to taking errors personally. In fact, many adults view training situations as a proving ground where their professional reputation and personal image are on the line.
5. **False.** Studies show that work related adult training is most effective when it takes place within two or three weeks of a promotion or other change in position.
6. **False.** You should avoid associating your training programs with an adult's formal education experience. Many adults carry bad memories and negative attitudes towards traditional schooling.
7. **True.** By using first names, instructors make themselves seem more accessible to learners, which is of paramount importance to the success of training adults.

REFLECT ENTHUSIASM

- ✓ Right at the start, express your pleasure that the group is present, and that you are with them.
- ✓ Identify parts of the training which you find especially helpful, and let participants know when you come to these segments.
- ✓ When you say that something is important, explain *why*.
- ✓ Highlight positive comments on a flipchart.
- ✓ Praise participants for the *little* things they do well. Don't wait for the big successes. People need to know they're moving in the right direction.
- ✓ Show your enjoyment of the class and enthusiasm for the subject.
- ✓ Encourage participants to try out new behaviors they may feel tentative about.
- ✓ Always end by expressing confidence that the process will work well and that everyone can use it effectively.

Jan Nunes
Bryan LGH Medical Center
Lincoln Nebraska

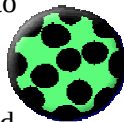
Here's what to do:



First you need some equipment: several soft items which can be thrown. Dog and cat toys are wonderful. So are nerf balls.

My toy box has two soft balls, a soft hedgehog, a squeaky frog, a furry mouse, two rubber snakes and a floppy rubber chicken. (You can wad up paper and make paper snowballs if you don't have any soft toys.)

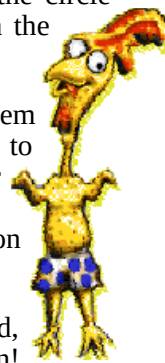
Have everybody stand in a circle and hand one person a ball. Ask him to gently toss it to the person to his right while saying that person's name.



Let this go a couple of rounds then add another ball and do the same thing. After a couple more rounds collect the balls (or whatever it is being tossed around).

Have everybody change positions in the circle so that everyone has a new person on the right.

Then give someone a ball and have them gently toss it to the person who used to be on their right....then add another ball....and another toy....and so on. (How many toys you add depends on how many people are in your circle.)



When the laughter gets really good, surprise them with the rubber chicken! You won't have to stop the game. It will end by itself when everybody is laughing so hard they have to stop! And they will stay awake for a lot longer!

Cyndee Collins,
ETOP
Shreveport, LA

✓ **One trainer learned what not to do by taking a class.** I am a computer instructor at our local community college. Recently I attended a free computer seminar in our area.

The morning session was for people without any PC background, the afternoon was geared for experienced users.



We passed the information along to all eligible students, and my husband and I went to the afternoon session.

The young woman giving the class had some immediate problems with a few of the approximately 200 attendees. They got off on a tangent that really had nothing to do with her presentation.

She was nice enough to continue answering questions, until it finally got out of her scope of knowledge. By this time we had wasted about forty five minutes (out of two hours). She quickly gave us a break (I think to stop the questions).

When we returned from break she went into some application, using a computer hooked up to an overhead screen. Then she went on the Internet.

While she was demonstrating various searching techniques and application features she used her mouse to point things out on screen.

She jumped all over the screen, up and down, back and forth. In the audience, everyone's head kept bobbing and weaving, attempting to keep up with her!

As funny as it sounds now, it was so extremely annoying to me I vowed to learn from her errors, and

- 1) Find diplomatic ways to keep presentations on target.
- 2) Avoid using the mouse in such an unproductive manner.

I hope my experience can help someone else too!

*Alison G. Earl
Sandhills Community College
Pinehurst, NC*

✓ **Students have mid-afternoon "blahs"? Here's one "up to date" answer.** As a way to liven up the group, I use a "Joke of the Day" calendar which I purchased on sale for only \$2.00 (because it was April at the time — it originally cost \$10.95).

I pass the calendar to the first student and ask her to read aloud the joke which corresponds to her birthday (which keeps people from looking through the entire calendar for the "right" joke).

Then she passes it onto the next learner. I have the class do two or three jokes and then go on with the course, repeating this procedure when I see things beginning to drag again.

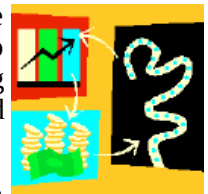
It's a nice way to give students a mental "break" without stopping to take a more traditional "coffee" break.

*Wanda Carricato
WEC Consulting*

✓ **Do you teach several applications to the same people? Boost interest with an integrated "story."** When we began teaching several off-the-shelf software products to the sales reps at an important client, the instructors noted that student enthusiasm seemed minimal.

So we created a business case study which called upon all their new application skills. First we had folks search their database for information on a specific (actual) client.

Then we asked them to write a letter to that customer, using the new word processor, and to create a spreadsheet illustrating the projected sales of a proposed marketing program.



Finally, we had them paste that spreadsheet into a presentation document.

We found that wrapping a little story around the same skill set did the trick: it consistently increased student evaluation ratings throughout the balance of our assignment.

*David Ferguson
GE Information Systems*

✓This tip is like a day at the beach!

I use a multi-color beach ball to “warm up” groups and help them get a little more creative. Two examples:

1. Participants introduce themselves by choosing one of the colors on the beach ball and describing how it fits a quality or characteristic of their own. And when an individual tosses the ball to the next person, he/she must use that person’s name. (“Here comes the ball, Sally!”) That helps us all learn names and nobody is surprised by the ball coming at them!

2. If my audience is managers and we’re discussing management skills (or qualities), they choose a skill/quality and a color, and describe why that skill/quality is important for a manager to have, and how it relates to the color.

The metaphors people come up with are wonderful! I learn a lot from students with this approach.

Julie Ray
Partners in Learning
Training and Consulting Company

✓How one instructor copes with post-break stragglers. It’s challenging to get learners to return to class promptly at the end of breaks, especially busy corporate folks who sometimes get “stuck” at their desks during breaks. So I’ve learned to accommodate my students.

Our courseware includes follow-up exercises at the end of each chapter. Whenever possible, I start the break at the end of a chapter and ask people to return in 15 minutes and perform those exercises.

The less experienced students tend to return early, to avail themselves of my assistance. The more experienced students decide whether or not they need to do the exercises. Thus, when folks choose to come back late from breaks it doesn’t affect the class rhythm.

Students sometimes get into “break mode” and forget about their assignment. As they trickle back into class, I say things like, “If you need help with your follow-up exercises, please don’t hesitate to ask.” This gentle reminder works like a charm.

Michelle C. Minard
COMP USA

✓Add fun to class exercises with clipart. I add clipart to sample documents, giving each student a different picture.



For example, when I teach how to fax documents from the PC, before class I fax each guest account a memo containing a picture of a dragon, animal, or flower. Students like working with these much better than with plain “business-like” documents.



Michele Marques
Schulich School of Business
York University, Canada

✓Learners too embarrassed to ask for help? Get them on track with this technique. I teach in a high school, but I frequently lead computer-skills training sessions for the teachers, as well.

When I notice a participant who seems “lost” during an exercise, and suspect that he doesn’t want to be singled out, I give the *entire group* the instructions which will help that specific learner get back “on track.”

I’ve often noticed that when one student gets needed help on a particular point, it turns out that other students have the same difficulty, so several people usually benefit from this “face-saving” technique.



Brian Gray
Greenon High School

✓Ten tips from a veteran instructor. I’ve learned, mostly through trial and error, the following presentation techniques. I hope you find them useful!

1. Avoid “reaching” while writing. Instead, move your body and walk across while writing on the board. This will reduce the chances of your handwriting slanting

Down or Up

2. Use various color markers to reduce visual boredom.

TRUE TRAINING TALES

I teach computer science in a high school. One day our tech person said he actually heard the following conversation in the hallway:

One student said to another, “My teacher counted off points on my paper for not double spacing. But I did! See, I put two spaces after every word!”

*Faye Ward
Lynn Haven, FL*

In the middle of class a student’s computer seemed to lock up. He called me over and as I worked on his PC to

determine the problem, quiet “side bar” conversations started in the back of the room.

I realized that only his mouse had frozen, not the entire system, so I stood up holding the cord as the mouse dangled down and said, “Here’s the problem, you’ve got a dead mouse!”

The entire back row emptied out as the women ran screaming from the room.

*Suzette Farrar
Draughn Conclusions, Inc.
New Haven, CT*

3. Make sure your board is *very clean* before beginning. Smudgy marks are not attractive.
4. Make your letters the same height as much as possible when writing on the board. Even lettering reduces confusing visual clutter.
5. Write concepts or steps on the board before doing your “demo” and then check them off as they are completed.
6. Ask students for suggestions about where to go for assistance when they’re “stuck,” and write their answers on the board. At the end of this exercise, add your own email address and phone number as their “last resort” for post-class “help.”
7. If you have a flipchart, take time before the session to create pages listing course objectives, class “rules,” the break schedule, and similar items.
8. Do *not* talk to the board while writing. Always face the audience when speaking. If you need to speak while writing, turn your head towards the group. And silent pauses (while you write) are okay.
9. Don’t clutter up the board with multiple topics. Erase your notes at the end of each segment before moving on.

10. Don’t lean against the marker tray on the “dry erase board.” The marker dust can and will stain your clothing. Trust me.

*Debra S. Higginbotham
Senior Applications Instructor
PPI, Richmond, VA*

✓ **Learn from Liberace!** In my train-the-trainer classes, I advise instructors to use “the Liberace approach.”

Liberace once said “The people who come to my concerts aren’t sophisticated music lovers. So when I plan a complex piece of music, I keep the melody out front.”

That’s exactly what trainers need to do: keep the “melody” out front by letting students know exactly what you plan to teach and why you’re teaching it to them.



It’s not sufficient to tell them what a command does. Explain how to make real-life use of each application feature.

*Roger Sperberg
Electronic Directions, Inc.
New York, New York*