



Teaching Concerns

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Teaching Tip: Revolutionizing Handouts

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Handouts provide a means to seize the student's attention, focus the student on the key thematic issues for the class, and outline the lecture and discussion. With the use of a word processor, scanner, and laser printer, educators can create more interesting handouts, slides, and presentations in only a short time. As a TA in UVa's History Department, I used handouts/worksheets as the central tool for organizing my thoughts, preparing for class, and guiding discussion. They also served as auxiliary notes and an instant study guide for my students.

To gain the student's attention, I designed my handouts to be as aesthetically pleasing as possible, creating something on the lines of the user-friendly *USA Today* style. As in a newspaper, each handout displayed the same heading, complete with course title and graphics. For example, for the Soviet history course each handout included a picture of the hammer and sickle as a "signature" image. Within the title block, I identified the main theme of the handout and dated them to allow the student to keep track of his/her handouts - very helpful when a student asks for a replacement copy.

Below the title block, each sheet was comprised of three sections: the body, listing of key words, and a "Quote of the Day" box. The

body focused on the main thematic issue for discussion. I used a variety of styles to present the issues in an innovative way, using matrixes, outlines, lines, and boxes. Additionally, I used graphic images, scanned from books or photographs, to catch the student's eye. The ease of varying font type and size provided by the PC allowed me to distinguish between major points and secondary issues. This method of formatting gave me options for leading discussion; I could either "build up" from the subordinate issues or "work down" from the major points.

Each sheet included a list of 12-20 key words or phrases, usually compiled from the week's readings and lectures. I picked those terms that would best serve as building blocks for the larger, thematic issues. The students used these lists to prepare for discussion and to guide their readings. Most defined each term on the sheet itself and later used them as study aids. To differentiate the "key words" list from the main body, I formatted it in a different, somewhat smaller font.

To add a taste of humor, each sheet had a "Quote of the Day" box, filled with a witticism, comment or saying from various people across history. They were intended to tie historical issues to the present day. I used quotes from a wide range of characters, from Nicholas II to Mick Jagger, as well as cartoons, pictures, and other graphics.

By arranging the three sections, I could alter the appearance of each sheet to add variety and to emphasize certain aspects. At least once, I printed the sheet length-wise, creating a wider

space for information and a totally different "perspective" for the students. The ultimate purpose of arrangement was to grab the student's attention and focus it on the discussion topics.

Perhaps the most surprising factor in creating more innovative handouts is the ease in which it can be done. Teachers at UVa have access to scanners at a variety of locations (including the Multimedia Resource Center in Wilson Hall and the Medical School Library) that can capture images from page to screen in just a few minutes. Word processing programs, such as Microsoft Word™ or Word Perfect™, can import images, create graphs or charts, and allow a wide variety of printing format options. After a few test runs, I found that I could convert my notes into a well-organized handout in about 30 minutes. In an environment of many distractions, a more interesting handout can pull in a student and direct her/his attention to learning.