

Making the Third Section of English Composition as Interesting as the First

When many of us were students, a common joke that circulated was that professors would have old notes, with the yellowing of their paper being visible proof that they gave the same lecture year-in and year-out. These days we hear this joke less often, either because we are no longer graduate students or because printing and photocopying create instant documents with a 90-plus brightness factor of paper.

However, even the most conscientious faculty member will repeat some things over the years, as he or she should, because not everything needs to be made new for the sake of making it new. Many of us face other forms of repetition in our professional lives, such as teaching several sections of freshman composition, often in the same day.

In my case, I teach freshman composition 8:00-8:50 a.m., 9:00-9:50 a.m., and 11:00-11:50 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I have this schedule because I love to teach English 101, I am at my best in the morning, and because most state colleges do not offer a large variety of courses.

I by no means think that my circumstances are unique; I am certain other faculty members teach five sections of the same class, all in one day. The question is, "How do I maintain the same level of energy and excitement for students in each of my sections taught throughout the day?" A comparison can be made with a hairstylist's first and last customer of the day. In other words, does the stylist have the same kind of acute vision, dexterity, and energy at 6:00 p.m. that will contribute to the same kind of quality he or she produced at 10:00 a.m. that same day?

Like many faculty members, I plan the entire semester at its beginning so I know the purpose of and activities for each class. For years, I have kept the classes synchronized so that students in all sections work on the same topics. Imagine lecturing about the same editorial three times, in almost back-to-back-to-back classes. The experience and results will depend on the composition of the class, temperature of the room, what students have on their minds, and so on. No matter how enthusiastic a faculty member is or how much energy he or she has, by

the second or third time that editorial is covered in class, some amount of monotony will set in for the instructor. Some days this will not be the case, but chances are, some factor will affect the presentation and discussion of the second or third class to differentiate the quality from the first class.

In order to improve the teaching and learning experience of my multiple freshman composition classes, I have begun to switch editorial columns. For example, one class will go over an editorial that deals with Apple's Bendgate and Brickgate, while another class will discuss whether soccer is going mainstream in the United States. The sense of discovery and newness for me as an instructor makes the three back-to-back composition classes more interesting than they would be if I went over the same material in each class.

Another method I have used is to adjust the schedule so that each class covers different information. For instance, one class may be on the description unit while another covers the persuasion unit. This strategy adds variety and also provides an opportunity for me to reflect on those topics that worked well and those that did not.

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