Extracts from Making Learning Happen (2014 edition) Phil Race
Chapter 9: what can I do when….?

 **Frequently-occurring problems and suggested solutions**

This chapter contains a selection of answers to frequently occurring problems. A few of these are adapted from suggestions which proved popular in editions of *In at the Deep End* which I wrote for Leeds Metropolitan University in 2006, and revised in 2009, but most are entirely new. I sought ‘difficult questions’ from a number of web lists, including those of the National Teaching Fellows in the UK, the members of the All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE), the mailing list of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), and the members of the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA). Additional useful questions came from reviewers of the 2nd edition. From over 200 questions, I’ve chosen here to try to provide some answers to the most commonly occurring ones.

# What can I do when I’m feeling very nervous?

You’re not alone. Even many very experienced lecturers are quite nervous, especially with a new group, or with a subject they don’t know particularly well. Some tactics that can help include:

* Smile! You’ll notice that at least some of the students will smile back – this immediately makes you feel better.
* Have good prompts available. It’s reassuring to have (for example) a list of your slides, so that you won’t be nervous about losing your place in the lecture.
* If they all have copies of a handout, ask them to study a short section of it for two minutes. For a while, just about all eyes are off you.
* Ad-lib an explanation of the importance of a point you’ve just recently been making. Sometimes the very fact that you’re making a spontaneous addition is relaxing in its own right.
* Bring in your students. For example, ask them a question along the lines: ‘How many of you have already come across...?’ or ‘How many of you have never yet heard of …?’
* Don’t be afraid to pause for a short while, and take a deep (quiet) breath.
* Act courageous even when you feel ghastly. Stage performers do this all the time, and it works.

# What can I do when I forget where I am in my lecture?

This happens to most lecturers now and then, so don’t feel that there’s something wrong with you if it happens to you. Your choices include:

* Give your students something to do for a couple of minutes. For example, have a slide or overhead already prepared for such an eventuality. Make the activity seem a perfectly natural step for your students, for example by saying: ‘Now would be a really good time for you to think for a minute or two about…’ and then put up your task briefing. While the students are doing the task, you’ve got time to sort out where *you* are and get ready to resume your lecture after debriefing students’ work on the short task.
* Minimize the chance of losing where you are by having a print-out of your slides so that you can quickly *see* what you’ve done and what you were talking about.
* Ask students to jot down the two most important things they’ve learned so far from your lecture. Then ask them to compare with those sitting close to them. Then ask for volunteers to tell you what they chose as these things. This often helps you to regain a feel for exactly what had been happening in *their* minds up to the point at which you lost your way.
* If you’re very confident, you could say: ‘Oops, I’ve lost it! Anyone like to remind me what I was going to say next?’ At least then, you’ll have the full attention of your students for a moment – and they normally respond well to you just being human.

# What can I do when I don’t know the answer to a student’s question?

A common nightmare. You’ll feel less concerned about this as you gain experience, but the following tactics can take away some of the worries you may have about this.

* Give yourself time to think. Repeat the question to everyone, as other students may not have heard the question. Sometimes this extra time is enough to give you a chance to think of how you may respond.
* Don’t try to make an answer up! If it turns out to be wrong, or if you get stuck in the process, you will soon have the full attention of all the students – not what you really want at this stage!
* Say: ‘This is a really good question. How many of *you* can respond to this?’ and look for volunteers. Quite often, there will be someone there who is willing answer it.
* Break it down into smaller bits. Then start by responding to one of the bits where you *do* have something to say. If it’s a question that your students don’t actually *need* to know an answer to, say so. ‘Interesting, but not actually needed for your course’, and so on.
* Admit that at this point you don’t have an answer to the question, but you will find one by the time of the next lecture. Invite the student who asked the question to jot it down on a post-it, with their email address, so that you know *exactly* what the question was and can respond to the questioner directly as soon as you’ve located an answer. But don’t forget to share the answer with the whole group at the next lecture too.

# What can I do when students repeatedly come in late and disrupt my lecture?

This is a balancing act. There will usually be *some* students who arrive late, but sometimes the problem becomes more significant in certain time slots and at particular times in a module.

* Don’t keep the punctual students waiting until they’re fed up. Start the session with something that will be useful or interesting to them.
* Don’t gradually get more and more annoyed with latecomers! The *next* student to arrive may have a very good reason for being late.
* Resist the temptation to be sarcastic (e.g. ‘How good of you to join us today’). Mostly, students who come in late don’t actually enjoy being late, and if they get a rough ride from you, next time they’re late they may well decide not to risk coming in at all.
* If the late-coming is noisy (loud doors, shoes on floors, and so on), pause until it will be possible for everyone to hear you properly again. The students themselves will get tired of having to wait for latecomers, and will often show their own disapproval, sparing you the need to do so.
* If necessary, agree some ground rules with the whole group. For example, if quite a lot of the students have had to come from another session at the other end of the campus, negotiate to start promptly five minutes *after* the normal time.
* Build in a little ‘warm-up’ time at the start of each lecture. In other words, start doing something useful with the students (for example reminding them of three important points from last week, or quizzing them gently).

# What can I do when the technology lets me down?

For example, your PowerPoint slides disappear, or freeze! The thing *not* to do is to struggle for ages, with a mouse, a remote control, a keyboard, or any other piece of technology – *with the undivided attention of the whole group!* Alternatives include:

* Smile, rather than sweat! Even if inside you’re quite tense about it, it’s best to give the impression of being cool about it.
* Give your students a discussion task to do – something to talk about to those sitting next to them, for example a decision to reach, a problem to solve, and so on. It’s a good idea *always* to have such a task ready and waiting. Then when they’re all busy and eyes are off you, you can try to rescue the technology.
* Ask for help. ‘Anyone know how to fix this please?’ quite often brings a competent volunteer from the floor. Sometimes, you can ring up technical support, but it remains advisable to give the students something else to do until help materializes.
* Recognize when the problem is terminal – for example, when the bulb has failed in a ceiling-mounted data projector.
* Improvise a quiz. This can be good revision, particularly if you are really on top of the subject matter (but don’t try this if you don’t know the material well).
* If it’s towards the end of a session, wind up. Remind your students of the intended learning outcomes, and promise to cover anything important that remains outstanding on a future occasion or to put the relevant slides on to the web. Your students won’t mind you stopping early!

# What can I do when attendance drops off during a series of lectures?

It could be, of course, that your students are getting bored – or tired – or are busy trying to catch up ready for someone else’s assignment deadline. Whatever the cause of absenteeism, one or more of the following tactics may help:

* Don’t wait an inordinate time for more students to appear. Those who came punctually deserve to be getting some value, so get started even if the audience is sparse.
* Don’t take it out on the students who *do* attend. Make it well worth their while coming to the lectures.
* Probe the causes. For example, if students are taking handouts for their absent friends, only bring enough handouts for those who do attend, and send a message to those who have missed the handout to come and collect it from you at a given time, and ask them why they missed the session.
* Find ways outside the lecture room to ask a few students why they missed a particular session. However, don’t rail on them and tell them how unwise they are being – keep to fact-finding until you know more about what’s going on.
* Link each and every lecture firmly to the assessment agenda. Students don’t like to miss (for example) clarification of what a typical exam question could reasonably ask of them.
* Include some activities for students in groups in some lectures, with a small proportion of the coursework marks allocated to participation in the lectures. Students don’t like to miss any opportunity to gain marks.
* Try for added value. Make sure that the students who do turn up feel that it’s been well worth doing so. Give them a useful and enjoyable learning experience – and things they would have missed if they had not turned up.

# What can I do when students do not attend lectures but get the notes from the VLE?

This is a problem which is increasing rapidly in scale. The following tactics may help:

* Remind the students that what is on the VLE is essentially *information* not knowledge, and is only part of the story. Explain to the class that the purposes of the lectures include to help them to *navigate* all of that information, so that they can make sense of it all much faster and more efficiently.
* Include in every lecture some details relating to how students’ mastery of what’s on the VLE will in due course be assessed. Ensure that students know that they need to come to lectures to find out what they are going to be expected to show for their studies using the information on the VLE.
* Include things for students to *do* in lectures, which get them making sense of concepts and ideas, and making judgements to deepen their learning. Make it clear to students that coming to lectures will help them to get their heads round topics much faster than just reading all about it on the VLE.

# What can I do if I get very critical comments from students in the annual feedback?

We *all* get very critical comments sometimes, and often we’ve earned them! But it’s easy to get things out of perspective when it comes to critical comments, and one or more of the following tactics may help you in such a position.

* Don’t let one or two savage comments prey on your mind unduly. If the overall comments are much more favourable on the whole, it could be the case that a few students really didn’t like you very much, and much as we all wish to be liked, we can’t achieve that all the time with everyone.
* Work out whether the criticism is justified. If it is, think of what you could do next time round to address the criticism and the issue behind it.
* Balance the picture by searching out the favourable comments you attracted at the same time. Think of how you can build on these, and get more of these next time.
* Take opportunities to find out more about the teaching of any colleagues who attracted more favourable comments than you did. Watching others teach regularly is an excellent opportunity to learn from others. There may be things you can emulate.

# What can I do if I’m near the end but have only got through half my material?

This can happen to any of us. Any number of good things can cause this, not least going into detail answering important questions which arose during the session. It’s only really a problem if you’ve got no more lectures coming up. General tactics which may help include the following.

* Don’t overrun. That would annoy whoever is booked into the room next, and many of the students may have other places to go at the scheduled close of your session.
* Come to a sensible stopping place at the scheduled time, and re-plan your next session to pick up the ground which wasn’t covered, and if necessary to delete something less important from that session.
* Alternatively, set the students a task which gets *them* to explore some of the ground you are not able to cover, and pick this up next time.
* In any case, it’s probably only *you* who knows that you’ve only got through half of your material – the students only know what *was* covered.
* If it *was* your only lecture with the group, spend the last few minutes explaining that you will issue a self-study resource package on paper or on the web in a week or two, to enable your students to find out even more about the topic than you were able to cover in just one lecture with them. There’s no need to tell them that you only got through half of your stuff!

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# What can I do if students are sitting like puddings and not responding?

One distinguished and experienced teacher recalls how he explained to the class that he was bored with their lack of response, and was going to have a short sleep, and lay down at the front of the room for half-a-minute, after which the class continued with much more gusto! Less risky tactics include:

* Remind yourself that this is human nature – it’s easier to sit like a pudding and not respond than to think about something or actually do something. Think of what *you* do in a lecture, if you’re not enthralled by it? It’s probably time to give your students something to do, for example...
* Ask all of the students to jot something down. For example, ‘See if you can jot down three things that could cause...’. Then get them to compare notes with their neighbours, and ask for some of the things thought of by students who you can see have something to say about it.
* Amuse them for a moment or two. It’s useful to have a hidden action button at the bottom of each slide which can link you to a ‘fun’ menu – little video clips, cartoons, witty puns, and so on. Students (and staff) are often easier to engage after a little light heartedness.
* Look for links between the topic of the lecture and contemporary issues, and cross-refer your material, inviting discussion.

# What can I do if students are texting or checking Facebook online in my lecture?

This is just about the most common ‘What can I do when…?’ question posed nowadays. We can’t turn the clock back – students *will* *have* laptops and smart phones with them in lectures, and they *will* have them turned on, even when requested not to do so. Many students live life with one eye on the laptop or smart phone screen, and one ear with an earpiece in it, and the other eye/ear on the rest of the world, whether watching TV, or in pubs and clubs. We’re not going to succeed in getting them all to switch these things off in our lectures. Tactics at dealing with this situation include:

* Set out your own ground rules and ask your students to abide by them.
* Don’t threaten them that you’ll ask them to leave unless they stop doing these things. It would just take one student to *refuse* to leave to give you a much more serious problem with the class.
* As best as you can, ignore those students you notice doing these things. If they’re totally captivated by your lecture, they’ll stop doing such things. Try to be more captivating.
* Now and then, give them something to *do* with these devices. For example, in groups see what the most important three things you can find on the web about ‘x’ is. Then quiz the class about what they’ve found. This can get the ‘using gadgets’ to a more productive activity. Or ask them to Tweet questions to a #classdate list, which you can respond to if there’s time, or save to answer at later sessions.

# What can I do when students have not done the necessary preparation before their small-group sessions?

This is a really common ‘What can I do when…?’ question! Here are some thoughts.

* Don’t give those who have not prepared a hard time. If you do, next time they haven’t prepared, they will probably choose not to come at all – that is worse in the long run.
* Try to capitalize on the work of those who *have* prepared. For example, divide the small group into threes, and ask each trio to find answers to half-a-dozen questions based on their preparation, if you think that each trio is likely to have at least one member who has done some preparation. It will actually do the students who did prepare some good, explaining what they found to the others.
* Where possible, have handout material available so that the small group can do some further preparation at the start of the session (including those who have and have not done the advance work) and build on this.
* Next time, try to make the prepared work more engaging?

# What can I do to encourage online participation in a discussion?

This is a common question. Here are some thoughts.

* Make participation count. For example, tell the class that some of their coursework marks will arise from the extent and quality of contributions to the discussion. In practice, this is not actually difficult to estimate (albeit rather roughly), for example, all 5 marks for really good contribution, exactly zero for no contribution, and somewhere between for at least some contribution. Students don’t like to risk losing even the odd mark or two.
* Use email to give positive, short, encouraging responses to those who do participate. Help them to feel that their efforts are worthwhile.
* In the nicest possible way, cool off the odd student who contributes too much, in case they put others off joining in. ‘Great stuff, Tasmin, but could you ease off now and let some of the others catch up?’
* Report some of the main findings of those who did participate to the whole group at a lecture. Gently allow those who didn’t participate to feel that they missed something useful.
* Make the discussion irresistible! Choose something suitable, and get a real debate going in a lecture, then say ‘we’ll continue this online’.

# What can I do to ensure all the students in the group feel confident to ask questions or join in the discussion?

It’s not surprising that some students are shy, especially in their first year, and in large groups. They don’t want to say anything that may make them look or feel stupid. Some international students may also feel uncomfortable about ‘putting themselves forward’ as they may see it, or about the level of their spoken English. The following ways of helping them join in with more confidence may help you to get them all contributing.

* Use the old adage ‘better to look silly for a moment than to remain ignorant for a lifetime’ – please do ask me questions.
* Never make a student who does ask a question feel silly.
* Accept that at least some students will remain very shy, and will be unlikely to feel confident enough to ask questions. Sometimes it may be because they are learning in a second language, and are embarrassed that they aren’t yet as fluent as students around them.
* Get them all to jot down a question or two, for example on post-its, and then share their questions with their near neighbours, then invite students to ask *someone else’s* question.
* For greater ‘comfort of anonymity’ in a big group, ask students to write questions on post-its and send the post-its down to you.
* Use a ‘question box’ to collect queries, and reply via the course web page.
* Suggest that students email you with *short* questions, and then answer some of them in the next whole-class session.

# What can I do to inspire students (and myself) when I’m getting bored with delivering the same content year after year?

Boredom is as infectious as enthusiasm. If we radiate boredom with a topic, students will catch it. The following tactics may help you increase your enthusiasm for the content which is currently beginning to bore you.

* Remind yourself that the content may be the same, but the students are different. They will already know different things this year, and will have at least some different problems with the content.
* Avoid just turning up with the same notes and slides as you used last time. Give yourself some time to do some editing of your materials, getting rid of the most boring bits and putting new ideas in. Perhaps even frighten yourself by deleting the old material and starting again from scratch.
* Try doing things differently yourself. Invent new in-lecture tasks for the students to do to get their heads around the content.
* Do a bit of web searching looking for two or three recent sources you hadn’t known about, and build them into your lecture. There is always new stuff out there!
* Try to make sure that you’ve got at least some different content to work with, rather than just the same old workload.
* Start some team teaching going with the bits you’re getting bored with – you may find that watching someone else handling these bits gives you new ideas and increases your own enthusiasm.

# What can I do to stop the mobile phones that keep going off in my lecture?

The short answer is probably ‘You can’t!’ However, the following tactics may reduce the occurrence of the problem.

* Say to the class at the start of a lecture ‘Please leave your mobile phones *on* if you really need to be contacted, for example if you’ve got a seriously ill relative, or child, or a crisis in the family, and so on. I want you all the be relaxed enough to give your attention to the lecture, so remain possible to be contacted if needed. If your phone *does* go off, please slip out quietly and deal with the emergency’. Alternatively, ‘Please set your phone to “silent” and do not answer it in class’. One result of this is that when someone’s phone does go off, everyone wants to know what the emergency is, and students whose phones ring for no important reason are now quite embarrassed.
* Make sure *your* mobile phone doesn’t go off! (Sadly, this is an occasion when I don’t practise what I preach – I never remember to switch mine off, and when it does go off several members of my audience switch theirs off!).
* Alternatively, arrange that your mobile phone *does* go off, and pretend to have a seemingly long discussion with the (non-existent) caller, explaining that you’re actually in the middle of giving a lecture just now, and so on! Sometimes, this makes the point you’re wanting to get across.
* Stop the whole session and allow the student concerned to answer the call. It’s quite uncomfortable answering a call with a large number of people listening in!

# What can I do when a student asks ‘will this be in the exam?’

A natural enough request. The following tactics can help.

* Always say ‘Yes, it certainly could be’ – if the answer was to have been ‘no’, students might well ask why they should be bothering to learn it.
* Expand a little on what exactly students should expect to become able to do, to illustrate the evidence of their achievement of the learning outcomes which will relate to the topic.
* Avoid students having to ask the question by regularly reminding the class of the sort of things that you are expecting from them in the exam and any other modes of assessment.
* When something is not suitable to be in the exam, for example when a student asks a question about the topic which is off-target, it’s sometimes worth responding along the lines ‘This is very interesting, but you don’t need this in the context of this particular course’.
* If the question arises *too* frequently, you might reply ‘Ah yes, that would be a *good* idea’ and be seen to make a note to yourself.

# What can I do when a student challenges my mark for an assignment?

This is sometimes a tricky situation, and one which needs to be handled sensitively, especially if the challenge occurs in a public context, such as in a large group session. The following tactics can help.

* Provide detailed explanations of how marks are awarded from the outset, ideally during the briefing for the assignment.
* Don’t take offence. There might have been a problem with your marking of the assignment. More likely, the student may have a blind spot, and not yet see why marks had been lost in the answer submitted to you.
* Publish the marking scheme and assessment criteria in any case, written in language where students can see exactly how the marking has been done, so that it’s less likely that any student will challenge your mark.
* Don’t give the impression to all present that marks are not negotiable. Arrange a one-to-one session with the student concerned.
* At the one-to-one session, work through the marking scheme and assessment criteria with the student concerned, and (usually) show that the original mark was justified.
* Allow it to gradually become apparent to the whole group that you remain willing to renegotiate marks if there is a genuine case to be made, but that in practice it’s extremely rare for a student to emerge with a better mark as a result of the process, and that sometimes they emerge with lower marks, if anything.

# What can I do when all the students sit at the back and the front half of the room is empty?

This is a very common occurrence. It is human nature! Just watch lecturers themselves at conferences! But most human beings do not at all like being told where to go. One or more of the following tactics may be useful.

* Sometimes you can nip this in the bud by placing ‘reserved’ cards on back seats or using ‘do not cross this line’ ribbon for the back rows.
* Encourage students to sit in the central block rather than at the sides so you can at least see them all.
* Don’t try to make the students move forwards. They actually resent quite strongly being made to sit anywhere, and it just takes one or more to refuse to move, and you’ve lost some authority.
* There could be some students who really do feel most comfortable at the back – not least anyone who might have to leave the room relatively suddenly, for example due to a panic attack which could be triggered by them being hemmed in, in the middle of a row.
* Put out any handouts only on the seats you wish them to use.
* Offer a few ‘prizes’ for the first half-dozen students to come and sit in the front row – an extra handout, for example.
* Show a start-up slide with very small print on it, for example a shot of a newspaper cutting about the topic. This can cause students entering the room to move to where they can see the screen rather better (but don’t continue to show small print to the class thereafter).
* Just continue as though you don’t mind at all where they sit. If the atmosphere of the class becomes warmer and friendlier, they may well gravitate towards you on future occasions.
* Set a group activity for the students, and indicate that group ‘A’ is here, group ‘B’ here, etc., including locations at the front and back of the room. This can get at least some of them nearer to you.
* See if you can rearrange the session to a smaller room. The chances are that there will be a colleague with a large class who would like the larger room.

# What can I do when asked at the last minute ‘to cover a session’ for a colleague who has not turned up?

Just about anything is better than simply cancelling a session – some students may have travelled a long way for it, and students remember cancellations when evaluation comes round. Being asked to cover a session is in fact sometimes a useful opportunity for you to illustrate how professional you are. It’s worth always finding a way to meet the request, not least to enhance your reputation of being dependable and flexible. It also makes it more likely that someone will return the favour if you need to miss one of your sessions due to illness or an emergency.

One or more of the following tactics may help.

* Don’t berate your absent colleague in front of the students (or to anyone else). It could be the case that the absence was quite unavoidable.
* Don’t apologise for being there. It’s better to say ‘I’m really pleased to have the chance to see you all today, but I’m sorry Dr Jones can’t be here today’.
* If you have teaching sessions with the class concerned, you may be able to substitute one of your own sessions for the last-minute session, and make one of your future classes available to the colleague who did not turn up.
* If you really do need to try to cover your colleague’s topic, you could run a revision session based on what the class had already covered, for example getting the class to generate questions about the topic on post-its, then facilitating a quiz of two or three teams of students, with a prize for the winning team.
* If it’s a topic you know something about, you could give a session putting your own slant on the topic, keeping notes to pass on to your colleague to indicate what you had covered.

# What can I do when I don’t have a powerful voice, but don’t like to be stuck behind the lectern near a microphone?

Lecturers need to be seen and heard. Ways of ensuring the latter include the following:

* See if you can get a radio mike. This normally allows you to walk around the room quite a lot, so long as you don’t cause feedback loops by getting into the path of the linked loudspeakers. Using a microphone is good inclusive practice anyway, as hearing-impaired students will benefit if there is an audio loop in the room (and you may well not know that anyone has hearing difficulties, if they haven’t declared them). Do, however, remember to switch the radio mike off as soon as you’ve finished. Few things are more amusing to audiences than to hear the private discussions (and worse!) of someone who’s forgotten to switch one off).
* Encourage the students to sit close enough to hear you. Admit that your voice is relatively quiet.
* Get some voice projection training. You may be amazed how much better you can project by due attention to breathing and stance.
* If you use a particular room often, find out more about its acoustics. Sometimes there are places from which a quiet voice projects better.
* Don’t try to be ‘louder’ than is comfortable for you – you may injure your voice, making the problem worse.
* Don’t try to compete with students talking. Wait until it is quiet enough for you to be heard. Students’ peer pressure usually causes them to stop talking if it is clear you are waiting for silence.

# What can I do when I realize that I no longer understand the next point I’m about to teach?

This can be rather scary. Here are some thoughts.

* Celebrate! ‘Understanding’ dawns a little at a time, and we never stop deepening our understanding of something.
* As soon as you’ve done your best to explain the point to the students, get them explaining it to each other. Ask them ‘What was the thing that helped you most to make sense of this idea?’ and find out whether they’ve come up with better ways of explaining it than yours turned out to be.
* Point out to students that ‘this is a tricky concept. One day you’ve got it, and then it can slip away. Keep regaining it for the next few days until it’s less likely to slip’.
* Take time before your next session with the group to have a good ‘rethink’ about the point concerned, and see if there’s another better way you can get the point across to them.

# What can I do when no one seems to be taking any notes?

Nowadays, lots of students may arrive without pens or paper, but with their laptops and smart phones. It’s useful to have spare pens and paper (a good supply of post-its will do) to give out. Perhaps the question should be ‘Is it important that students take notes, or are there better things I can get my students to do during the lecture?’ There are plenty of *other* things that are *good* for students during lectures. These include the following:

* Jotting down their own thoughts and ideas in response to a question posed orally or on-screen.
* Comparing their ideas with those sitting next to them.
* Making a mind-map about what they’ve been hearing about for the last ten minutes.
* Writing down questions they need answered about the topic.

# What can I do when nobody seems to listen at the end of my lecture because they are busy packing up?

A very common problem. It only takes one student to make ‘packing up’ noises and it spreads like wildfire. Try one or more of the following.

* End with something really important, such as a short explanation of the sort of exam question which could be based on what has been covered in the lecture.
* Make the close of the lecture so interesting that no one thinks of packing up.
* Avoid saying ‘and finally...’ too early, which is often the cue students take to start packing up.
* Avoid saying ‘Right now, are there any questions?’ This is widely interpreted by students as time to pack up. In any case, it’s much better to seek questions in the middle of the lecture, or even at the very beginning.
* Some lecturers get away with ending each lecture with a joke or anecdote, and if this is engaging enough it prevents students from starting to pack up, or at least means those who do pack up are not missing anything important.
* Prepare yourself to close the lecture a few minutes before the students will begin to pack up. Continuing while they are packing up won’t be of value to them in any case, so you may as well make the lecture that bit shorter.

# What can I do when someone responds to my question with a totally wrong answer?

This is bound to happen from time to time, especially if you’re successful at getting most students to contribute to answering your questions. The following tactics may help.

* Don’t make the student giving the wrong answer look foolish. Thank them for their contribution, try to find something positive in what was said, then say ‘Anyone got a different answer for this question?’ and make it clear gently that the next answer is better (if, of course, it is better).
* Try to avoid picking the student who gave the totally wrong answer, when several students are offering to answer your next question.
* When a student gives a really good answer, be generous with your praise, for example ‘Well done, that’s great’.

# What can I do if students are talking in my lecture?

Many lecturers get upset by this, and clearly if students can’t hear you over each other’s chatter, the situation becomes untenable.

* Don’t just carry on trying to ignore it. That often makes the problem get worse. Pause, looking at the people who are talking until they stop – or until the other students shut them up for you.
* Don’t necessarily assume they’re just being rude. Sometimes, one will have asked another to explain or repeat something that has been missed. Sometimes they could be translating what you say into another language for each other.
* Acknowledge that you may have been talking for too long yourself, and give them something to talk about with near neighbours. In other words, *legitimize* their talking for a few minutes, and let them get the need to talk out of their system.
* Note any persistent ‘talkers’ but resist the temptation to confront them in front of the whole group. Instead, find a time to talk to them on their own, and explore how they’re finding your lectures.
* Don’t ask an ‘offender’ to leave! If they actually *refuse* to leave, you’ll have a much more difficult problem to deal with. Never issue a threat that you would not be able to implement in practice.

# What can I do when I come to the end and there are still 15 minutes to go?

Possibilities include:

* Say: ‘This is a good place to stop this particular session’ and revisit the intended learning outcomes for a moment or two, then wind up. Your students will not be terminally disappointed!
* Have with you a revision activity, for example a set of short, sharp quiz questions on your lectures to date with the group, and give them a quick-fire quiz until the time has been used up.
* Give out post-its and ask students to write any questions they would like to ask about the subject on them, and pass the post-its down to you. Choose which questions to answer to the whole group until the time is used up.
* Put up a slide of a past exam question on the topic you’ve been covering, and explain to students a little about what was expected in answers to that question.
* Ask the students to write down the two most important things they now know, that they didn’t know when the lecture started. Then get them to compare with their neighbours, and invite volunteers to read out a few such things.
* Give a brief overview of what’s coming next – for example, showing the students the intended learning outcomes for the next couple of lectures.

# What can I do when students don’t turn up for my small-group sessions?

In practice, there’s little mileage in trying to ‘force’ students to turn up to any element in their programmes, and when students don’t regard small-group teaching as particularly important, the problem of absenteeism increases. However, a combination of one or more of the following tactics can improve things sometimes.

* When the students who *are* present come away with something they would not have wanted to miss (be it handouts, the light dawning, tasks they found valuable doing, and so on), the word can get around and attendance can improve.
* If your institution has student liaison officers, or other staff who support the student experience, ask them to help you check up on absentees.
* Track down some regular absentees and ask them ‘What’s wrong?’ Sometimes there could be a timetable clash you didn’t know about, or travel difficulties relating to a particular time slot. Sometimes, of course, the answer can be ‘I didn’t find the sessions helpful’ and we may need to probe gently into ‘Why not exactly?’ and remain ready to listen to the responses.
* Keep the assessment agenda on the table. When students can see that each small-group session has a bearing on helping them become ready for future exam questions, or helps them see what’s being looked for in coursework assignments, students are less likely to miss them.
* Include at least *some* coursework mark for ‘participation’.Don’t just include it for *attendance*,however, or the odd student may come along but not join in!

# What can I do when students refuse to do a task?

This is an awkward one. If *all* the students won’t start your task, it’s worse. The following tactics can help.

* Make sure the task briefing is really clear. Explain again exactly what you want them to do. It can be useful to say ‘What it really means is…’ and then put it into straightforward language.
* Show the task on a slide or overhead, or give it out as a handout. Sometimes, students can get the gist of a task rather better if they can see it and hear it at the same time.
* Try to find the block. For example, ask students ‘Which part of the task are you having problems with?’ and see if clarifying that part helps them to get started.
* Break the task into smaller bits. Ask students to just do the first bit now, and then explain the later stages one by one when they’re properly under way.
* Ask them to work in twos or threes to start with. You can then go round any pairs who still seem reluctant to start the task, and find out more about what could be stopping them.
* Set a precise deadline for the first part of the task. Sometimes this is enough to get them started.
* Resist the temptation to keep talking. Give them some time when there’s really nothing more going on, and it’s clear that you expect them to get stuck into the task. A few seconds of solemn silence may seem interminable to you, but the resistance to getting started with the task may be fading away.

# What can I do when one student dominates a group?

This is a frequent occurrence. Sometimes the causes are innocent enough – enthusiasm, knowing a lot about the topic, and so on. One or more of the following tactics may help you to balance things out.

* Set appropriate ground rules at the start of small-group work. It can be useful to say a little about leadership and followership – making the point that in many small-group situations in real life, too many leaders can militate against success and that everyone needs to be able to be a good follower for at least some of the time.
* Rearrange group membership regularly. This means that the domineering student moves on and doesn’t dominate other students for too long.
* Intervene gently. For example, after the domineering student comes to a pause, ask: ‘Would someone else now like to add to this please?’
* Have a quiet word. Do this with the domineering student outside the group context, for example giving suggestions about ‘air time’ and allowing everyone’s views to be heard.
* Change the dynamic. Appoint the domineering student as chairperson for a particular activity, with the brief not to make any input on that task, but to co-ordinate everyone else’s thinking.
* Don’t fight it too hard. Recognize that domineering is a common human trait, and that domineering people often reach distinguished positions in the world around us and may be developing relevant skills in small-group contexts.

# What can I do when a new colleague asks for suggestions regarding how long it should take to prepare a lecture?

How long does it take to prepare a lecture? ‘All my life so far’ is one answer! The problem boils down to what exactly are the most important things to do to prepare for a lecture. The following tactics may help you give good advice to a colleague asking this question.

* Remember that a one-hour lecture is really only about 40 minutes in terms of the real teaching/learning time. Five minutes are needed for settling in, explaining the intended outcomes and so on. At least five minutes at the end are needed for summarising, pointing the way forward to the next lecture, reminding students about what *they* need to be able to do in due course with the topic in exams or coursework assignments, and so on.
* Don’t try to find all the information in the world on the topic of each lecture! Your students can only get their heads around a relatively small amount in 40 minutes.
* Work out at least two things that the students will *do* during the lecture. For example, what decisions can they be given to make? What can you get them to do in buzz groups? What can you get them arguing about?
* If you will have easy and reliable internet access, it’s worth finding two of three relevant sites to dip into, for example with a couple of minutes of video to illustrate an important point, and so on.
* Point out that any class will already know some things about the topic, and that it’s useful to build students confidence by valuing what they already know, and giving them the chance to show what they know.
* Suggest to your colleague that if everything had been covered ten minutes ahead of schedule, it won’t be the greatest disappointment in the lives of the students present if it is announced “that’s about all for today, thank you”.
* Remind your new colleague that the same lecture next time round will feel a lot more comfortable on the basis of experience of that first one, and that it’s better to get the student activity side of the lecture going well rather than over-preparing topic-related content.

# What can I do when senior colleagues ignore procedures relating to deadlines for submission of work, allowing their students to make late submissions, and painting me in a bad light in student’s eyes when I’m firm with deadlines?

This is a tricky one. Ideally, procedures (good or bad) should be adhered to uniformly. One way out of this dilemma is suggested below.

* Explain to your students that you want to make sure they get quick and useful feedback on their submitted work, and that you have prepared a discussion sheet which you will issue immediately after the deadline has passed, so that they get quick feedback on submission, to keep them going until they get their marked work back. Remind the class that this of course will make any late submissions invalid.
* Point out to students that you’ve got their best interests in mind. You don’t want them to be struggling with backlogs in your subject when the time comes for them to be getting their act together ready for important assessments such as exams, and that firm deadlines for coursework will help them to keep to schedule.
* Try not to give any impression that you’re critical of those colleagues who aren’t following agreed procedures. Students are very quick to pick up on disagreements or conflicts among teaching staff! Simply explain if necessary that you’re responsible for your bits of their curriculum, and you want to make it all go smoothly for them.

# What can I do when a student has absolutely no interest and continues to sidetrack me during the lecture?

This is relatively rare – the students with no interest aren’t usually present! When it does happen, however, here are some things to try – and some to avoid.

* Don’t ask the student to leave. What if he or she refused to leave? That would turn the situation into a drama – much more interesting for the class than the lecture!
* Continue to respond politely, but very briefly, to each sidetracking episode.
* Allow peer pressure to come to bear. If the other students get irritated by the constant sidetracking, they will usually cause the sidetracker to desist.
* Consider the possibility that this student is reflecting a wider boredom with what’s happening. Bring in more activity into the session – or some fun.
* It can be useful to have a quiet word with the student concerned, but not in the lecture. You may sometimes be able to find out more about what the student is interested in, and sometimes steer the content a tiny bit in that particular direction, smiling encouragingly at the person concerned.

# What can I do when a student who has missed a necessary previous lecture continues to interrupt my continuation lecture?

This happens quite often. One or more of the following tactics can help.

* Politely remind the student that so-and-so was addressed in the previous lecture, and that the resources referred to are indeed on the VLE (or in the handout used on that occasion, and so on).
* Sometimes you will be able to respond to the whole group along the lines that “this is a very important question. How many of you remember the answer to this?” and illustrate to the student who posed the question that fellow-students have already ‘got it’.
* Allow peer pressure to work. Other students who were there will quite quickly lose patience with someone who is holding them up.
* Suggest to the class that ‘question time’ will be held in the last ten minutes of the lecture, and it would be really helpful for all questions to be held over till then.

# What can I do if I am running late for a lecture?

With the best will in the world, we’re sometimes unavoidably late for a lecture we’re giving. This goes against all of our efforts to help the students be punctual and avoid the disruption of late-comers. When you know you’re going to be late, one or more of the following tactics may help – but try to avoid this situation altogether – it’s a bad example for students.

* Think of something you’re going to get the class to do, once you get there, so that you can catch your breath and calm yourself down. A buzz-group task, for example a choice to make between options, can give you a couple of minutes to recover.
* See if there’s any way you can get a message to the lecture venue so that (for example) an announcement can be made ‘Dr Jones’ lecture this morning will begin at 1020’ and a slide can be projected onto the screen to the same effect. This gives students the chance to go for a break themselves, or at least sit chatting without getting increasingly annoyed at you.
* Remember to apologise to the students you’ve kept waiting. Don’t feel you have to tell them exactly why you’re late (unless they will find it amusing or very human).

# What can I do if students who haven’t bothered to attend revision sessions ask me for extra help to catch up?

This can be very irritating. It can also make us feel that we should put ourselves out to help any student in need of help. It is probably best to try to avoid this sort of situation occurring, for example as follows.

* Explain well in advance that there will be revision classes, and that in these all sorts of things will be discussed and explained relating to the standard and nature of forthcoming exams.
* Further explain that things to do with assessment will *only* be explained in whole-class meetings, and will not be discussed with individuals or small groups at other times. Explain that this is to make it fair for all students, and to ensure that no students get ‘advantaged’ by separate discussions about revision or assessment.
* Keep reminding the whole class to bring all questions and issues for discussion to the scheduled revision sessions, and if they wish to email you in advance about things they would like to ask, or explanations they would like from you.
* Explain that you will indeed continue to be willing to see the occasional student individually, if they still can’t make sense of something after trying their best during the appropriate ‘questions and revision’ session, but that you have not the time to do so for students who didn’t participate in that session, and that it would in any case be at a time when you had very little time left due to all the other commitments in your job.

# What can I do when several students ask to leave early?

There will often be the occasional student who apologises in advance for needing to leave a particular lecture early, but is becomes a problem if too many students are doing this. The danger is setting a precedent, so that more and more students ask to leave early, especially if you’re saddled with a lecture at an unpopular time, for example Friday afternoons. Ways of handling the situation, but avoiding escalation, include the following.

* Never refuse. If some students want to leave early for whatever reason, and you said ‘no’, you would not have much of their attention towards the end of the session anyway.
* Find out whether the timing of the session needs to be adjusted in the long term. For example, if there’s something regular that several students want to get away for, it could be worth shortening the session each time, or finding a better time slot altogether.
* Always make it worthwhile for the students who don’t leave early to stay. For example, towards the end of each lecture give some useful revision advice, or illustrate what would get students good marks for an old exam question on the topic of the session.
* Have something for students to follow up at the very end of the session, for example explanations or tasks based on material on the web.

# What can I do when a student says my material has no possible relevance to their future jobs?

A tricky one. Here are some possibilities.

* Try to increase, broadly, the sense of ‘relevance to future jobs’ regarding the material you’re covering, so that students become aware of a wide range of real-world contexts where the material will prove helpful.
* Answer the student concerned along the lines that “the material is relevant to many of the group” and accept that there will be exceptions.
* Find other answers to the question ‘what’s in it for me?’ regarding this particular material, for example – “well, this could indeed come up in your exam, and you want a good qualification to get that job, don’t you?”
* Check out honestly, whether that particular bit of material may be best missed out altogether in future.

# What can I do when some students have finished making notes on something I've shown but other students are still copying it down slowly?

This begs the question ‘do you really want them to be spending valuable time in your lecturer copying things down from what you show them?’ Ways of avoiding the problem include the following.

* Explain that your slides will be available on the VLE after the lecture, and that you will often move on relatively quickly from one slide to another, and students should aim to make quick headline notes only.
* Get your students to do plenty of *other* things during the lecture other than merely copying down information from your slides. Get them thinking of causes of things, making decisions, explaining things to each other – anything but routine copying.
* Suggest to students that they should *make* notes, not just *take* notes. In other words, they should be writing down their own individual thoughts and ideas, rather than just copying down things you show them.

# What can I do when students ignore regulations and eat in class?

This can be disconcerting, but is probably not serious enough to make an issue of. One or more of the following tactics may help.

* Remember that the occasional student may be diabetic, and may *need* to eat. It is best just to continue the class as if nothing was amiss, then have a quiet word with the student later, for example to see if there is a reason for them contravening the regulations.
* Try not to take it as a personal affront or sign of disrespect. There may well be other students who find it irritating, and you can often leave this sort of problem to sort itself out without any intervention.
* See if colleagues are experiencing the same problem. If it’s a common problem, it could be raised at a departmental meeting, and agreement reached on a policy.

# What can I do if I'm double booked for a room and have nowhere to take my class?

This is the sort of occasion when students will remember what you did. It’s important to be seen to behave really professionally.

* If there’s someone else preparing to teach in the room, check with them calmly that you have in fact been double booked. Don’t argue with them, especially if their students are already in place.
* If you’re already in place, avoid becoming territorial. Neither of you may be to blame, and their need may be greater than yours – for example if they’ve got a larger group of students to accommodate.
* Take your students to somewhere not in the way, i.e. not blocking a corridor, putting a post-it or paper note on the door of the original room saying for example ‘class moved to lobby on ground floor’. Wait there till all of your students have gathered, then try for a short while to find an alternative venue.
* If nowhere can be found, brief the students carefully for a reading or research task to do between now and the next session. Make sure that the next session isn’t double booked too, and remember to spend a few minutes quizzing the students about the reading they did, so that they feel their efforts are valued.

# What do I do when I see on my slide that I have made a mistake?

This is, of course, exactly when most of us *do* see out mistakes – up there on the big screen, with dozens of other pairs of eyes looking at it. When we checked through it previously, we saw what we meant – not what we wrote. The following tactics could help.

* Routinely say to students “there’s £1 for the first person to alert me to mistakes on my slides – spelling, factual, whatever” Always have a few £1 coins ready! Students then tell us our mistakes with some enthusiasm, but we also increase their concentration levels regarding what’s on our slides.
* Alternatively, quickly say to the class “What’s wrong with this slide?” Let them find the mistake, as if it were a deliberate ploy.
* Alternately, when they spot the mistake before you do, thank them, and move on.

# What can I do when students don’t get on with each other?

This is more likely to be a problem in small group contexts than in lectures. The following tactics can help.

* Re-arrange group membership now and then. This can be done randomly, but check that particular pairs of students who didn’t seem to be getting on are then moved apart into different groups.
* Give them all a task to start on their own. Sometimes if all of the students have already invested some energy in thinking through the topic before the actual group work begins, differences between students are pushed further into the background.
* Make the first part an individual written task. For example, give out post-its, and ask everyone to jot down a single idea relevant to the task. Then when everyone is armed with at least one idea, the chances of students not getting on with each other can be reduced.
* Go closer to the people who don’t seem to be getting on. Sometimes, your proximity will cause them to bury any differences – for the moment at least. You may also then get the chance to work out what exactly has been causing the confrontation between the students concerned.
* Watch out for the occasional ‘difficult student’.When the same person doesn’t get on in group work contexts with different individuals, it can be worth having a quiet word. Just sometimes, you’ll find the odd student who really doesn’t function well in group contexts.

# What can I do when I have a ‘senior moment’ during a lecture?

This happens at any age, at any time, and in any place. Don’t worry about it! You can pick and choose from the following options, and you probably have even better tactics of your own for this occurrence.

* Probably the only person who knows you’re having a ‘senior moment’ is you – that is, unless you do things which make it clear to everyone that this is happening. So at least at first, try not to show that anything is wrong.
* Often, going on to your next slide will mean you can carry on as normal, without anyone noticing that your concentration had lapsed. Usually within a short while, whatever it was that ‘escaped you’ temporarily will filter back into your mind, and when necessary you can go back and cover the missing point if it was important enough to do so.
* Give the students something to do – for example “Right now. Think back over the last few minutes, and jot down in a few words what you think is the most important point we’ve covered”. Then “OK, spend a minute comparing what you reckon the most important point was with your neighbours”. Then “OK”, (pointing to someone who’s clearly being discussing with neighbours) what did *you* think it was?” More often than not, this will remind you of whatever was going on before your ‘senior moment’ (but probably it will have come back to you anyway while the students were chatting to each other).

# What can I do if I have lost my energy for teaching and have become overly self-critical?

This can be quite frightening. It can happen if your job has moved on to other things (managing, researching, committee work, you name it) and you’ve not got so much time for teaching. It can also happen if you’ve been teaching the same part of the curriculum for a long time, and have perhaps got bored yourself with the content. It can also feel worse if there are dynamic new colleagues around who seem to be getting all the best feedback from students. One or more of the following suggestions may help. However, just about all of us lose our energy now and then.

* Being self-critical can be useful, but not when one is *too* self-critical. There will always be ‘better’ ways to do anything (lectures, small-group sessions, designing assessment and so on) but what we need to do is to do *good* things as often as possible, not *perfect* things.
* Ask yourself whether perhaps you’re trying to do too much. In a lecture, for example, we can gradually drift into trying to go deeper and deeper every time we repeat a topic, and end up going too deep, or too fast for the students. The main thing is that they are getting what they need to achieve the related intended learning outcomes – it’s not good for them to exceed this too much.
* Sometimes, moving to a new topic helps. When one has taught something many times, the challenge can fade, and a new challenge inspires us more.
* A bit of peer-observing can help. For a start, it gives you some time just to think, and you can often notice something in your colleague’s teaching that inspires you to try out something a bit different in your own work. You may also soon be less critical of your own teaching too.

# What can I do if my mentor is not helpful?

Mentors can be brilliant and inspiring. They can be life-saving, especially when we’re new to teaching. But some of them are much better than others. If you’re not getting the most from your mentor, try the following.

* You may be able to change your mentor – but that’s probably not the best thing to do (hurt feelings, awkward silences, and so on). It’s a bit like when students want to change their personal tutor – neither side comes out well if this becomes an issue.
* It is often possible to get at least some support from someone else. After all, there’s no reason why an appointed mentor should be the only human being to give helpful advice. In practice, it’s often really useful to find people in other disciplines or in other parts of the institution to talk to. Fellow-participants on a staff development programme are often ideal. It’s sometimes much easier to talk to someone you only see now and then, than to someone who has a prescribed role such as a mentor.
* Fellow-mentees can be really helpful. Most people new to teaching are all too happy to share their experiences – good ones and bad ones.
* Support and advice does not have to come from a particular person. Loads of literature has helpful tips. Use online discussion lists. Work out what you’re really needing help with, and find ‘frequently asked questions’ online.
* Above all, try not to resent the great support other colleagues seem to be getting from their super mentors. We all have to grow out of dependence on mentoring – you may just have to do this rather sooner than you would have preferred.

# What can I do to improve and vary my questioning skills so that students provide more detailed and sustained responses?

Questioning skills are important, and are learned by practice. It is indeed useful if we’re able to get students to make sustained and detailed responses. The following tactics may help you to achieve this.

* It can make quite a difference when students can both *see* and *hear* a question. It’s useful to have important questions on a slide (or whiteboard, or whatever) so they can see them, but also to *speak* the question so they can *hear* which words may be most important.
* In lectures or small-groups, try getting students to individually jot down responses to questions, rather than answer orally straightaway. Also, give them time to jot, time to think. Giving out post-its helps – a small, non-threatening space to jot down an answer. You can soon judge when to move on, just by watching students faces and pens. Then get students to share responses informally for a minute or so, before asking someone to share their response with the whole group. They are more prepared to do so by now, and usually more confident to go into depth.
* ‘Elsify’. Ask students (for example) the question ‘why.....?’. Then take answers orally. When the first respondent gives an answer, thank them for it, then ‘anyone know why *else* ...? And so on. Keep using ‘else’, for example ‘what *else..*?’, ‘when *else...*?’, ‘who *else...*?’, ‘where *else...*’, ‘how *else...*?’ and so on.
* Ask students to note down *three* factors causing a particular phenomenon. Then ask different students for just one of these. Turn it into a game to see how many good answers the group has come up with. If you’d just asked for *one* factor in the first place, the responses would have been much more limited.
* Where appropriate, try case-study type questions. On a slide, for example, have a short scenario, then add questions such as “what do you think would be the *best* thing to do?” and also “what do you think would be the *worst* thing to do?”, giving students time to think about both before starting to draw out answers from them.
* Get students themselves to nominate the next respondent. For example, start with a volunteer, then thank them for their response, and suggest “now pick someone else”, and so on. Students then don’t feel it’s *you* who is picking them, and most students don’t want *not* to have anything to say if one of their fellow-students picks them, so most get more-ready to answer, and so on.

# What can I do about one or more difficult, uncooperative colleagues?

This question must have perplexed just about everyone who has ever taught in post-compulsory education (and every other field of human endeavour). Whole books and websites abound with responses. But just sometimes, such a question can dominate one’s whole life – if we let it. In such circumstances, one or more of the following responses might be helpful.

* This may be largely about feelings. You’re in charge of your feelings, and no-one can *make* you feel anything.
* Is this person making you *do* something you don’t want to, or *stopping* you doing something you do want to? If not, just stay out of their way and get on with your job
* Identify what exactly is it about them that really bugs you. This could be a multiple-choice question with hundreds of options, including ‘they’re paid more than me and do their job much less well’, ‘they get in the way of me doing my job well’, ‘they won’t even listen to me’, ‘they’re just *wrong’*.
* Next, identify what exactly you’d like to do about it, *but can’t*. Your response might be a long and gruesome one, but at least that’s now out of the way. We can now move on.
* Think now of *your* students in *your* classes. The most important thing is to be doing as good a job as *you* can with your students.

# What can I do when teaching isn’t my main job?

“What can I do to make a reasonable job of the teaching I’m given to do, alongside all the other things on my plate? Have I got to keep up to date with all that’s happening in teaching, learning and assessment as well?” you may be asking. Lots of people do *some* teaching alongside research. Even more people do *some* teaching alongside other jobs, or partial retirement. The following suggestions may help you make a *good* job of those curriculum elements you happen to teach.

* Remind yourself that your teaching is important for students. Remember that though teaching may only be a small part of your agenda, the learning which your students do with you counts a lot for them. It will no doubt be assessed, and may influence the qualifications they’re heading towards.
* Do everything you can to link your part of the curriculum to things students will need in the overall picture of their studies. Make things as relevant as possible to the other things your students are learning from other people.
* Talk to your students, and find out how they are finding ‘your’ bits. They will often have useful suggestions for ways you can tune in further to their perspectives on learning.
* Take every chance to observe other people teaching the same kinds of students. Even if you only do a small amount of teaching, you can always pick up useful things to try out while watching others teach – and also things to avoid in your own teaching!
* Even if you’re under pressure in other parts of your life (research, other jobs, and so on), use teaching as a chance to relax from all these other things. Just focus on the task in hand when you’re teaching – that is to help make learning happen for your students.
* Don’t over-prepare. It’s dangerously easy to prepare so much that you can’t get through it all on the day. It is much better to leave yourself room to manoeuvre, so that when you’re teaching you have time to respond to students’ questions, and to find out what they already know and move ahead from that position.

**Postscript**

The scenarios depicted in this chapter are just some of the things that can happen to us when teaching in universities and colleges. I hope they give you ideas for how to tackle any problems you find – there is never just one way.