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## Building Structure in Your Lectures

*The following teaching tip is provided by Dr. Timothy Graeff, Professor in Management and Marketing.*

The most important thing in undergraduate education is **structure!** Students need structure in order to learn new material.

Structure can be provided in the form of oral summaries of previous lectures and upcoming lectures. Take a few minutes at the beginning of each class to review the previous topics. Let students know where they are in the course. Let them know how the topics you are currently discussing fit into the larger picture (structure) of the overall course.

Written outlines of lectures are also very helpful, as are outlines of the entire course. An outline lets students see the structure of various topics showing the relationship to each one. An outline shows major topics, sub topics and the general “flow” of a topic or lecture. Multiple bits of information that are not connected together in some way are almost impossible to learn.

Diagrams or flowcharts of the entire class and individual lectures are also very helpful. Show the entire diagram/flow chart at the beginning of the semester so students can see where they will be going in the class. Show the diagram/flow chart again at the beginning of each class with a brief summary, “Here is what we have already talked about, here is what we will talk about today, here is where we are going, and here is how all of this fits together into the entire course.” Whatever form it takes, it is helpful if this structure is provided at the beginning of every class session, and again at the end of every class session so that each class is “bracketed” with structure.

One useful exercise is to have students develop their own diagram or flowchart of the course. This forces students to structure the material and begin to see how topics are related to each other. Providing structure is sometimes less important for graduate level classes where students are better able to form and see the structure on their own.

Some teachers may consider it wasteful to take class time to present structure and discuss the organization of a course. However, not providing structure can actually lead to wasted class time. Five minutes at the beginning of the class, and five minutes at the end of class reviewing how the topics fit together, reviewing the general flow of the course, reviewing the structure of the topics, and even allowing some “quiet time” for students to organize the material in their own minds can greatly enhance student learning of the material that is presented during the remainder of the class session.

If you would like more information, or have a question on *Structure: The Key to Learning*, you can e-mail [Dr. Tim Graeff](mailto:Dr. Tim Graeff)