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## 50 Ways to Lure Your Learner\*

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*“Hop on the bus, Gus. Make a new plan, Stan.”\* What are some techniques to hook or ‘lure’ learners and to keep them motivated? Knowing the diversity of students, their interests, backgrounds, and preferred learning styles, no single technique will be successful all of the time. This paper describes a large number of ways teachers can engage students with course material and objectives, citing examples from the author, participants in a 2008 Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) conference session, and web resources. After reading this paper and checking out some of the many hotlinks, readers will have ‘more spice’ to add to their teaching repertoire. We all want to help students learn. Let’s see if we can add 50 ways to do just that. “The answer is easy if you take it logically.”\**

### Introduction

Welcome to an essay in the form of a numbered list. It is organized into five basic topics in teaching and learning. Each numbered item is a suggestion of something you might do in your teaching. You will also find examples from my own teaching or from participants in the 2008 STLHE session at the University of Windsor, as well as references for future exploration, in the form of web links or related tips. Ready to get on the bus?

### Starting and Ending

1. Get to know your students in your first class. For example, ask “who are you?” By show of hands, we found that instructors in charge of a course or as part of a team, undergraduate students, graduate students, administrators, educational developers, and librarians attended the STLHE session.
2. Break the ice. Do a web search for ‘icebreakers’ (or the related ‘energizers’) for examples,

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\* Adapted from Paul Simon lyrics.

or visit <http://www.kimskorner4teachertalk.com/classmanagement/icebreakers.html>

3. Play bingo – human bingo that is. This is a great way for students to get to know each other early in the term. I can send you a word template I have used in the past.
4. Connect learning objectives to assignments in your course outline/syllabus; see <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/templates/objectivetool.html> for an example.
5. Show your students what they have to look forward to in the course.
6. Invite your students to start some classes. Example 1: Schedule student presentations for the start of class, followed by your presentation. Example 2: For informal ‘show and tell’ in my ecology course for non-science majors, I asked students to sign up on particular dates to do presentations or interactive lessons. On these days, when I arrived to class, I went to the side or back of the room to be one of the participants; the students knew the order in which they would speak. I let them run things until the session was over.
7. Ask students “what’s news?” to link current events/issues with the course. For example, in an international business course, an instructor asks students to collect news items that relate to the topic and bring them to class to share and discuss.
8. End the course the way you started – motivate students to keep active in the discipline. Example 1: On the last day of a course related to the environment, a media article from that day was read to the students, informing them of a new, controversial road development that could threaten a special habitat. By simply bringing this news to their attention, you can bet that many students will follow the story, and maybe even get involved locally! Example 2: In an English course, you could ask students to write at the start and again at the end of the course about the value of the course topic.
9. Form an advisory team of course alumni. For

example, I have invited any and all students to be part of this group, sending them drafts of next year’s new or adapted assignments and related course plans for input. I found that they really appreciated being asked, and always gave good advice that I made sure to incorporate.

10. Build on projects completed by the previous year’s students. This approach is well-suited to community service-learning projects and can show students that such initiatives are not only academically challenging, but worthwhile over the long term. Examples and resources can be found at the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning website at: <http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/>

## Goals of the Projects

11. Model how creativity and learning go hand in hand. See *Teaching for Creativity: Two Dozen Tips* by Sternberg and Williams at [http://www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/teaching\\_creativity.php](http://www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/teaching_creativity.php)
12. Hear your students’ ‘voices’ in every class, through informal discussion or other oral formats, brief writings, drawings, or other contributions shared with the rest of the class, or just with you, in a variety of formats and frequencies. For example, ask students to share a story or narrative that relates to the topic of the class or course.
13. Try out a cubing writing exercise. For example, I first heard about and practised this activity in a session on teaching portfolios led by Barbara Cambridge. Check out this Humboldt State University example: <http://www.humboldt.edu/~tdd2/Cubing.htm>
14. Include opportunities for students to do reflective writing, even if it is not shared.
15. Include ‘fill-in-the-blanks’ in your PowerPoint slides.
16. Require a ‘ticket to class’ to ensure pre-reading or class preparation is done. For ex-

ample, I have used this technique to prepare students for a computer lab led by a librarian to help students find scholarly material in the discipline. During the class before the lab, I gave students a brief newspaper article to read, and a coloured slip of paper (three different colours). Those with the blue slip were asked to do the first question (e.g., after reading this article, what questions does it raise for you about further research?), and so on. Each colour corresponds to a unique question that students have to answer and bring to the computer lab. Some years, I have given a small mark, such as 1%. Either way, I find this technique ensures that all students have read the material, and prepared for the session. What they write is also helpful to the librarian so that she could allude to some of their responses as she worked through the lesson.

17. Design certain assignments that students can submit by email (to you or to the whole class) or via the web (such as an online discussion room posting) – you may see another side to your students. For example, in a class on psycho-medications, an instructor asked students to write 10 things they know for sure; then, they went away to prove or disprove, using text references and evidence for their views. This was done with up to 30 students.
18. Invite total participation through ‘think-pair-square-share,’ where each person first talks to someone next to them (to answer a question or issue you pose); after a couple of minutes, each pair finds another nearby to share what they talked about. The instructor can then do a number of things as follow-up, such as ask for one or two examples, invite a show of hands about how similar (within each group) contributions were, or have them take part in another activity based on their group work.
19. Start a jigsaw: each student is an ‘expert’ on one part, and all students must work collaboratively to get the full picture. Have experts in the area get together first, so they become more knowledgeable, then return to the broader group where each one is the expert. Research has shown that we learn by teaching. For an assessment, individuals or small groups do the work. The instructor asks them questions – any member. Higher marks often result. For example, this technique was used in a theatre class to learn multiple responsibilities of each person in a production.
20. Ask students to “think of a time” that relates to today’s topic, and draw, write, talk, or think. For example, during the STLHE conference session, I asked for a show of hands of how many people used each technique; there were some for each category.
21. Create lots of time on task during class time, one of Chickering and Gamson’s *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*: <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/7princip.htm>
22. Throw a snowball! Pose a question to students (it can be factual, but this activity is better suited to open-ended questions about their own experiences or views). Ask them to write their answer on a half-sheet of paper that they will not be keeping, something they are comfortable sharing with others. Then ask them to crumple their paper and toss it (gently) into the crowd. Now, everyone picks one up. Ask students to read what is on the snowball they un-crumpled (to themselves, or share with another, or ask for some examples to be read aloud). For example, when teaching psychology statistics, I find that many students are math-phobic. So, I ask them all, at the start of the course, to “write all your feelings about the topic, then crumple it up and throw it away, because it does not have to be that way. In this course that is just what we will show.”
23. Take a hike or a walk outside, in the field (the field can be just outside the classroom), or you can bring ‘the field’ to your class, through the use of objects, videos, and pictures. Your course has a connection to the real world – show it to your students.

## How's It Going?

24. Conduct mid-term feedback (also called concurrent feedback). Check out this article on benefits and challenges from the Science Centre for Learning and Teaching (Skylight) website at the University of British Columbia: <http://www.skylight.science.ubc.ca/node/473>
  25. Respond to the mid-term feedback!
  26. Give out a one-minute paper or other brief feedback form more often. *Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Angelo and Cross describes this and many other wonderful techniques: <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/assess-1.htm>
  27. "I'm just wondering..." Find a way to allow your students to ponder, pose, ask, and discuss, by allowing for this very open-ended inquiry from time to time – this could be written on a piece of paper with no name, or done in small groups and reported back, or done using the snowball technique described above.
  28. Ask your students to "be a statue." It takes 30 seconds and can be done 'on the fly,' when interest seems to be waning. This was as far as we got in the STLHE session, and in my view was a really nice way to end. Some examples were "thinker," "thank you for these gifts," or "I am receptive to these ideas," "with both arms extended," smiling, both hands up (in happiness? or having 'seen the light?').
  29. Talk with your colleagues about teaching and learning. This is becoming more common, and can be very helpful to glean tips, to know you are not alone, to receive input on how you are thinking of responding to a particular situation, or?
- ect in ecology. Some of the chunks include things like a proposal, update, research paper, and brochure. The percentage of marks has ranged as low as 3% and as high as 35% for each chunk. What I like, and I think my students do too, is that they cannot "blow it" on one big overall project assignment and they receive feedback all the way through, which encourages them to do better and learn throughout the course.
31. Offer flexible assignments where students can choose from a variety. This is something I have been recently experimenting with, and my students really like it.
  32. Think about group vs. individual marks. Can you let them choose, even if the work is done in a group? Maybe give them a range and let them choose the specifics; they will appreciate it.
  33. Join a team: Team-Based Learning (TBL), that is. I have seen this specific approach used in disciplines as diverse as poetry and engineering; see <http://www.ou.edu/pii/teamlearning/listserv.htm>
  34. Invite students to provide some test questions. You can give them a small mark for this, or not. You will want to use or adapt some of them, but can augment with your own to round out the test.
  35. Consider use of a learning portfolio – the students' version of a teaching portfolio. Learning portfolios are an excellent way to invite students to show how they met the course objectives, to tie it all together, and to do so in a creative way.
  36. Show connections using concept maps. You can use these visual tools to teach, or ask your students to show their learning, and these can be assessed. My colleagues and I have led seminars on this subject and wrote this article, which has references at the end related to assessing concept maps; see <http://www.tag.ubc.ca/resources/tapestry/archive/01/mapping.html>
  37. Give credit for helping others. Are there one or

## Assessing Student Learning

30. Divide big assignments worth many marks into smaller chunks worth fewer marks each. I have done this for many years in a group proj-

more ways in your course where you can give students a few marks for contributing to another student's assignment? It is a great way to encourage reciprocal support and show how it can be valued and valuable.

38. Just ask, at any point in your lesson: "What is a related thought, idea, caveat, suggestion or question?" It is a great way to change the pace and turn things back to the students.

## Ongoing Professional Development and Scholarship

39. Share your successes and challenges with a colleague.
40. Pass it on... This is an activity that can work very well in a large lecture room with fixed seats. Ask each student to take out a half-sheet of paper that they can pass around the room. Ask them to note something that relates to what you have been doing in your class or lecture; let them know that whatever they write will be shared. It can be something that they do, think, or believe, or it can be a fact from the lecture or textbook. Give them five minutes, then ask them to fold it in half, and pass it along X number of spaces (enough that it is not obvious who wrote what). They then open it, and either add a comment, a question, or edit it (depends on what you asked them to do). You can vary the number of passes, depending on time; in the end, it has to come back to the person who wrote it. You can then either move on, or ask people to say what they got out of the edits. It has a nice component of quiet writing and reflection, but is also very active, and can link to small group or whole class discussions.
41. Attend a teaching and learning seminar. There is always something new to learn.
42. Read and apply *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*, by Chickering and Gamson (1987). See Point 21 for a related idea and the web link.
43. Use google scholar or databases to find published literature related to your teaching techniques.
44. Ask a question about student learning and conduct research on it – the scholarship of teaching and learning is gaining momentum and is an excellent way to connect teaching, learning, and research. See our Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISoTL) at UBC: <http://tag.ubc.ca/about/institute/ISoTL.php>
45. Inquire! Model this approach with your students. For example, I might show them some data, or other findings from a study then ask them to pose "a question I have asked or could ask" that relates.
46. Write an article. There is a growing number of hard-copy and electronic peer-reviewed journals that focus on teaching and learning and that invite articles in a variety of forms. For example, *Transformative Dialogues* includes reflections, articles and essays.
47. Join a service that sends out free regular e-mailings of ideas and examples. A few are: WorksheetLibrary.com Weekly Printable Worksheets: <http://www.worksheetlibrary.com/> and Training-Games.com by Gary Trotta: <http://www.training-games.com/>
48. Join a listserv that is general to teaching and learning, or more specific to a particular technique. Some examples: STLHE: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/stlhe/>; Educational Developers Caucus (EDC): <http://www.mcmaster.ca/stlhe/edc.html>; and the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL): <http://www.issotl.org/>
49. When at a conference, make notes that you can use to enhance your own practice; in fact, why not organize all your notes this way?
50. 'Think of a time' when your students were learning optimally; how did you help them? How can you have this take place more often? I hope that 1, 5, or all 50 of the ideas in the list will inspire you.

## Concluding Note

More contributions are welcome; email <alice.cassidy@ubc.ca>. I will add as many as you send, and hope to create a wiki or blog soon. I also welcome you to include your contact information so that future explorers can contact you to start conversations. I would appreciate it if you could ask my permission to use this document in full or in part in professional development sessions you lead; I am keen to track all the ways it is being used (the list is growing!).

## Biography

Alice Cassidy is the Associate Director in the Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth at the University of British Columbia (UBC). She has taught biology courses at UBC for 15 years and leads educational development workshops in the community. Her areas of focus include active and participatory learning, use of real-world problems and cases, narrative and visual tools in teaching and learning, and involving students as active collaborators in the scholarship of teaching and learning.