

Making Chalk Talk

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Many teachers use visual presentations on the chalkboard during class to support their oral presentation while most students rely heavily on the chalkboard presentation to identify important concepts presented in the lecture. Teachers who use their chalkboard presentations to enhance their oral presentations facilitate both student note taking and student learning.

Research on student learning has shown that congruent visual and verbal messages reinforce retention of the content matter and help keep the message in memory for a longer period of time. Research has also demonstrated that while professors assume that their students take notes on the entire lecture, in actuality students copy down whatever the teacher writes on the board.

With careful planning, practice, and the mastery of several simple techniques, beginning instructors can quickly improve their use of the chalkboard while at the same time maximizing students' mastery of the material. Experienced professors have often discovered the following basic principles of directive chalkboard presentations.

Planning Your Chalkboard Presentation

1. When planning each day's lesson plan, include a board plan. Determine what aspects of the lesson would be enhanced with visuals. Identify those terms, abbreviations, symbols, charts, and graphs you plan to introduce and explain. Map out the visual presentation on paper before class.
2. Keep your presentation simple: introduce only four or five concepts during the lesson, as research in learning has shown that that is all students can successfully handle in one period.

Making Your Visual Presentation

1. Write an outline of the day's lesson on the board, so students can use it for reference.
2. Explain and write out abbreviations and the meaning of symbols the first couple of times you use them.
3. Write neatly and horizontally, labeling items carefully. Your attention to detail will encourage students to develop good habits and write carefully.
4. Use railroad chalk, especially in large lecture rooms.
5. If you make a mistake, start over while checking to make sure your students are keeping up. Remember they are writing with pens and may have to start again.
6. Use a yardstick to help you make straight lines.

7. Keep one panel of the chalkboard free for key ideas and formulas.
8. Decide how to emphasize various points--underline, draw boxes or circles, use colored chalk to highlight differences.

Communication With Students While Using The Chalkboard

1. The cardinal rule is "Talk to the students, not to the chalkboard."
2. Maintain good eye contact and allow time for questions and explanations of what you are writing.
3. If you want to warn students about a likely mistake, do it verbally. Never write incorrect examples on the board, as the visual impact may cause students to remember the mistake.
4. If you develop helpful visual explanations when working with students individually during office hours, develop them into classroom presentations that will aid the whole class.

Be sure to introduce concepts, then explain them. Allow students to pose questions before asking them to apply a new concept, always summarize the material that has been covered during the lesson, and end with a short reference to how the material leads into the next lesson.