Why is clarity important?

Instructor clarity and organization influence student learning and performance by supporting student motivation and information processing, and by decreasing student anxiety about the course.

Making course and content organization obvious to students helps them navigate the learning process and access the right information at the right times, for the right purposes.

STUDENTS THINK INSTRUCTORS ARE BEING CLEAR WHEN THEY…

• Use examples and illustrations to explain difficult points.
• Provide clear and carefully planned explanations for abstract ideas and theories.
• Present class materials in a well-organized manner, with outlines, headings, and other cues to help students follow along.
• Use questions and other techniques to check for student understanding.

STUDENTS THINK INSTRUCTORS ARE BEING UNCLEAR WHEN THEY…

• Fail to align assignments with course materials and objectives.
• Use class time inefficiently, or assign activities that do not support learning.
• Appear to be disorganized or unprepared.
• Do not draw sufficient attention to key points.
• Rarely provide opportunities to check for understanding.

"You have the uncanny ability to teach dense material in a way that is easy to understand, and the analogies you drew between the mechanisms and abstractions of operating systems to the functions of a toy making shop provided an avenue that helped me recall information during exams.”

— from a “Thank-a-Teacher” note to Ada Gavrilovska, CoC
How Can I Enhance Clarity for Students?

- **Articulate well-formed learning objectives** and use them to drive your course design decisions. See http://www.ctl.gatech.edu/resources/syllabus for learning objective examples.
- **Incorporate lower stakes assessments** prior to major assignments or tests, so that students can see what is expected of them early in the course.
- **Link current concepts and content** with both previous and future concepts and content. Build in time to make specific connections between previous course content and current material.
- **“Chunk” information into sizes that students can understand.** Arrange chunks logically and sequentially to help students see how various concepts connect.
- **Prioritize material** that supports progress toward mastery of learning objectives, and reduce superfluous content.
- **Use verbal cues** (e.g., first, next, important) to signal transitions on the board, in slides, and in handouts.
- **Provide a list of conceptual questions** students should be able to answer (or tasks they should be able to complete) by the end of the class or unit.
- **Explain concepts** with examples, models, and stories.
- **Use Classroom Assessment Techniques** to check student comprehension while you teach. When needed, take time to revisit areas of confusion and misunderstanding.

REFERENCES


