



## **Tactics for the Lawyer Turned Teacher: 8 Ways to Step Up Your Classroom Game**

**Skills and Professional Development**



Once you've considered the [nine teaching basics outlined in our previous article](#), you'll likely be excited to provide the best possible learning experience for your students. Taking on the role of a teacher, lecturer, or adjunct professor is a great opportunity to shape the next generation of lawyers,

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businesspeople, and other professionals. With so many different possibilities for stepping up your classroom game, it may be difficult to know where to start. We've narrowed the field down to eight advanced teaching tactics for lawyers to consider.

## **Create a good place to learn**

There has been a fair amount of controversy over the creation of “safe spaces” in schools. Without commenting on the efficacy — or lack thereof — of that pedagogical experiment, we are strong advocates for educators to focus on the learning environment for their students. You need to create a good educational environment that is universally respectful but encourages an active dialogue.

Students should feel comfortable discussing their perspectives in order to learn effectively; this is particularly true where they are being trained to discuss complex legal issues for a living. Encourage students to speak up during class and challenge each other's ideas while steering the conversation in a way that keeps it on topic for your teaching goals. Ensure that students feel free to ask questions and express their views in a classroom setting. Show that you are open to addressing students' concerns, both academic and personal. This way you are more likely to reach your learning objectives.

## **Create objectives and outcomes**

Think about your goals for your course, and then work back to how you will teach them. This goal-oriented curriculum focuses on outcomes that will increase your chance of attaining your teaching objectives. This will also help you determine whether your class should include guest speakers, books, articles, videos, mock negotiations, mock arguments, field trips, or any other add-ons. Each of these decisions should be evaluated through a lens of whether its inclusion advances the learning objectives and outcomes of the curriculum.

## **Technology-charged teaching**

Technology has forever altered many landscapes, including education. If you are teaching at a law school or university, chances are that your students grew up with computers and the internet. They learn differently from previous generations and expect quicker results. These so-called “digital natives” expect multiple forms of media and may have more difficulty with extended reading assignments.

Considering that most information is readily available on the internet, the educational mission involves conveying points that students cannot find on their own, including nuance and subtleties that do not come through from a cold reading. For example, students can learn the basic elements of a business plan by reading about them online. However, they will benefit from your teaching if you explain or demonstrate how to apply the elements to real-life situations. They'll benefit even more if you give them a hands-on learning exercise where they can apply the elements themselves. Another way to engage students is to create a short summary of key lessons at the end of each class.

## **Take advantage of classroom technology**

Many law schools and universities have modernized in the last decade and offer numerous technology solutions, including pre-recorded classes, virtual participation, and fancy displays. There is definitely a lot of useful technology available to design a dynamic, engaging class. As a new

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teacher, you should work with your university or institution to ensure that you know your options and how to use them. You would be foolish to not take advantage of your school's investment in new technology.

## **Meet adjunct professor needs**

Adjunct professors are not regular professors. They have day jobs — often unpredictable day jobs. Consequently, they have special needs. For example, you may need to work around a busy schedule, a long commute, or business trips. You must work with your school to make sure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to your schedule. To avoid confusion or miscommunication, create an understanding with school leadership that you may need to change plans at some point in the semester. It's a realistic trade-off for providing the school with an industry professional in the classroom.

For example, if you have an unpredictable travel schedule, consider pre-recording your class so students can watch online. Alternatively, you can use a make-up period at the end of the semester to complete all required course hours. It's critical to manage this expectation with students and administration from the beginning. Team teaching or co-teaching is another way to mitigate travel and emergency risks.

## **Mid-course evaluations**

Consider asking students for simple mid-course evaluations. Ask what contributed to their learning the most and the least. Be sure to ask what activities you should start, stop, or keep doing in the classroom. Then make sure to follow up — address the comments and describe how the feedback will change your course either now or in the future. It may be a good idea to do a brief presentation so students are assured that their feedback truly matters.

## **Stay adaptable**

It is important to stay adaptable. You may get attached to your curriculum and become very comfortable teaching it as time goes on. However, every class is unique and students change each semester. You may need to change your curriculum annually to meet the current expectations of the classroom. This way, your curriculum will be directly tailored to the needs of your students.

## **Reflect and learn**

After each class, take five minutes to write down what you would have done differently. This will help you to be a better and more effective teacher the next time you teach. Acknowledge that by becoming a teacher, you are also becoming a learner. Teaching is a skill that, like all other skills, must be learned and honed over the years.

By mastering these eight advanced teaching tactics, you'll certainly rise to the top of the class in your students' eyes. After spending some time in the classroom and keeping an open, adaptable attitude, you'll be able to identify and take advantage of new teaching tactics as they come up. Soon enough, you'll be teaching not just your students, but other new teachers as well.

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Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

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