Teaching with the Whiteboard

Whiteboards can serve as a powerful learning tool, providing shared documentation of a discussion, emphasizing key takeaways, visually organizing complex content, and modeling a productive intersection of writing and speaking.

Precisely how you use the whiteboard will of course be shaped by the learning activity at hand and its goals. Whether you're **lecturing**, facilitating a student-led discussion, or guiding your class through a specific mapping of content, you'll start by asking yourself what supportive function boardwork will play.

Some ways to use the whiteboard to support learning:
Whenever you use the whiteboard:
- Structure content visually just as you would in a typed text. For example, use all capital letters, a second color, boxes, or indents to "format" headings, sections, or takeaways. Bulleted lists also help students both distinguish and group information.
- Penmanship isn't as important as you might think. The text you create is supplemental, not the primary communication tool in the room.
- When documenting student comments, validate their language by avoiding the temptation to regularly paraphrase. When paraphrasing is necessary, mark that you're doing it and why ("I'm going to paraphrase that a bit, because…")
- Interact with the text on the board by, for example, pausing to read aloud from it or allowing students to read silently at key junctures.
- Consider reserving a small space each day to document the session's **learning goals** or create a "parking lot" where you can record comments and questions you'd like to return to another time.

To use the whiteboard for specific purposes:
- **When brainstorming collectively,** take time afterward to visually mark patterns in the responses. You can use asterisks, underlining, and circles (or better yet, color coding) to help students see clusters and trends.
- **When employing a specific graphic organizer,** such as a T-chart, plan the available space at the outset.
- **When facilitating a whole-class discussion,** identify in advance the content you hope to elicit, and sketch a visual organization for it so that you can document conversation logically rather than merely chronologically.
- **When sharing out after group work,** consider engaging students in informal writing (and saving time) by asking group representatives to document findings simultaneously in different areas of the board.

References
Anderson, Espen, and Bill Schiano. *Teaching with Cases: A Practical Guide.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2014.

Davis, Barbara Gross. "Chalkboards and Whiteboards." *Tools for Teaching.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009, pp. 436-440.

See also
Designing Documents for Students
Establishing Learning Goals
Teaching with Lecture

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