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

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

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