



Looking for ‘Flippable’ Moments in Your Class

📅 March 25, 2013 ✍️ Barbi Honeycutt, PhD(<https://www.facultyfocus.com/author/barbi-honeycutt-phd/>)

“How do you determine what can be flipped?”

With all of this discussion around flipped classrooms, more instructors are asking this question and wondering when and where flipped strategies are best integrated into the learning environment. Certainly, some topics lend themselves more easily to flipped strategies than others, but every lesson plan has the opportunity for at least one “flippable moment.” This is the moment during class when you stop talking at your students and “flip” the work to them instead. This is the moment when you allow your students to struggle, ask questions, solve problems, and do the “heavy lifting” required to learn the material.

The Internet, online textbooks, online lectures, MOOCs, and other resources provide access to endless amounts of content, much of it free. Students can discover information on their own and find the answer to a question within a matter of seconds. What they can’t always do on their own is analyze, synthesize, and experience the process of engaging in higher levels of critical thinking. This is when they need to do the messy work of learning, evaluating, and critiquing. This also is when they need your structure and guidance, but not your answers. They have to make meaning for themselves. This is a “flippable moment.”

So, back to the original question: How do you determine what can be flipped? Here are four locations in your lesson where flipped strategies might be needed:

Flippable Moment #1: Look for confusion.

Ask yourself, “What’s the most difficult or challenging part of this lesson?” “Where do I anticipate students’ having problems or encountering difficulty?” These are the places in your lesson that would benefit from flipped strategies. Re-think this section of your lesson and design an activity for students to engage in. Maybe they need a video to watch and re-watch several times before and after class to reinforce the main points. Maybe they need a group activity to discuss the material with their peers. Maybe they need more time to practice and test their skills.

If this is a lesson you’ve taught before, then you probably know where confusion is likely to occur. If you’ve never taught this lesson before, consider adding a classroom assessment technique to the middle or end of your lesson. This will allow both you and your students to determine where additional work is needed to achieve the learning outcomes.

Flippable Moment #2: Look for the fundamentals.

Ask yourself, “What’s the most fundamental, most essential, and most critical part of today’s lesson?” “What MUST students know before they can move forward?” Some may argue fundamental knowledge isn’t what needs to be flipped, but if this is an essential skill your students need to develop before moving on, then it might be the perfect place to flip your approach. Your challenge is to design multiple learning opportunities and create a variety of opportunities where students can practice, test, and reinforce their knowledge to ensure mastery.

Flippable Moment #3: Look at your extra credit question.

Ask yourself, “What makes this an extra credit question?” “How could I turn this extra credit question into an activity or project for all of the students?” Extra credit questions are often designed to test the next level of thinking by moving students beyond memorization or comprehension, and therefore they can provide the perfect opportunity to flip your lesson. An extra credit question might encourage students to analyze, synthesize, and create alternative models or hypotheses. Students who think they know the answer will go for it just to show you how much they know (and to get a few bonus points, of course). That’s the moment when your students are motivated and curious. Motivation and curiosity are cornerstones for learning, and you can leverage that energy by using the extra credit question as a place to flip your lesson.

Flippable Moment #4: Look for boredom.

Ask yourself, “Are the students bored?” “Am I bored?” Boredom will destroy a learning environment. When you come to a point in your lesson or course when boredom strikes, it’s time to flip your approach. Design a task for your students to DO. Instead of continuing to lecture to them, take an [actively passive approach](http://www.flipitconsulting.com/2013/01/26/be-actively-passive-3-strategies-to-be-successful-in-flipped-learning-environments/) (<http://www.flipitconsulting.com/2013/01/26/be-actively-passive-3-strategies-to-be-successful-in-flipped-learning-environments/>) and step to the side. Put them in pairs or groups. Pose a challenge. Allow them to design or evaluate something. Give them the space to struggle, practice, and imagine “what if?” so they are challenged and inspired. That’s the power of the flip.

When you sit down to plan your lesson, always begin by asking yourself, “What should students DO to achieve the learning outcomes for this lesson?” To learn what you know now as an instructor, you had to do the “heavy lifting” yourself. You had to analyze, reflect, and evaluate. You had to make meaning for yourself. Now it’s your students’ turn. Flip it to them.

Dr. Barbi Honeycutt is the founder of Flip It Consulting and the director of graduate professional development and teaching programs at North Carolina State University.