



Teaching toolkits

Large group teaching

With the general trend across higher education for bigger cohort sizes, many of the classes you'll teach at UCL will be likely to involve large groups of students.

Teaching large groups poses several challenges, such as:

- keeping students interested and engaged (and knowing whether they're all paying attention)
- ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to learn (see the Inclusive teaching toolkit)
- ensuring that students' work is marked consistently, if several members of staff jointly teach a group.
- answering students' questions and giving them feedback outside teaching time.

What large-group teaching means

Large-group teaching involves class sizes of 25 or more students, often in a big lecture hall setting.

However, one teacher's definition of a 'large' group may be very different from another's.

It also depends on the subject. For example, in some programmes such as medicine, large groups could include several hundred students.

Putting it into practice

Planning your sessions

When teaching large groups, planning is essential. Think in advance about how each session is going to work.

At the module design stage, ensure you include a range of learning activities and assessments that enable all students to engage with the subject matter.

Check that each session allows your students to move towards achieving the learning outcomes for the module.

Put all your teaching materials on Moodle (UCL's online learning environment) well before your teaching sessions so that all your students can access these and prepare themselves.

If you have time, look at your students' profiles on Moodle before your first session. Knowing at least some of their names beforehand can help you establish a good rapport with the class.

Keeping students engaged

In large classes it can be difficult to know whether the students are learning.

Tips to keep students engaged include:

- not lecturing for more than 20 minutes at a time
- breaking sessions up into smaller parts, each with a different activity
- allowing time for students to reflect on lecture material, for example by asking them to discuss a question in pairs or groups and then report back to the class
- doing things differently from time to time, such as using props (e.g. a soft 'question ball' that moves around the class – when students have the ball, they must answer) or lecturing from different places in the hall.

Adding spontaneity to lectures

Incorporate spontaneity into your lectures by encouraging students to answer questions on the spot or by allowing five minutes of 'think-pair-share' – when students think about the answer to a question and then get into pairs to discuss it.

Have a plan for bringing the room back to order through a timer or loud noise embedded in your lecture slides.

A combination of planning, willingness to experiment and a sense of humour will help students to engage with the lecture.

Encouraging active learning

When breaking up lectures into different parts, try to include segments that get students actively engaged in the learning process. See the Active learning toolkit for activities you could try.

Technology, such as 'clickers' or free apps like Socrative, can help get students actively engaged with the subject. See the digital education toolkit for more ways to include technology in your teaching.

Invest time in developing a repertoire of active learning techniques to support student learning in large groups.

It might not happen all in one term, but over time you'll find the best strategies to support your module goals.

Exams and assessments

Two-stage exams and exam wrappers are simple and effective ways to encourage engagement and active learning in large groups.

In a two-stage exam, students spend the first three quarters of the session taking a traditional exam (i.e. on their own).

Once they hand in this exam, students then get into small groups for the remaining time and take a second exam.

This requires students to work together to solve one of the hardest problems from the first exam. Students can see how other people tried to solve the problem and learn from any mistakes they made.

You could also try adding an 'exam wrapper' to your exam. Ask students three to four short questions on how well prepared they felt and which topics they found most challenging. This can help you determine if your teaching sessions addressed your learning outcomes.

When teaching a large group jointly with colleagues, check with one another that you are all marking consistently.

There are various guides about assessment and feedback on UCL's Teaching and Learning Portal, including tips on how to give quicker feedback.

Managing feedback workload

Be clear with your students at the start of a module about how often you will be able to check and answer their questions via email or Moodle.

Set a cut-off time for questions in the run-up to exams.

Also be clear about when and for how long students can come and see you outside of class, for example by publishing your office hours on Moodle.

As well as giving feedback to students, you can also ask students for feedback as a way of evaluating your teaching at the mid-point and end of term.

Where to find help and support

arena@ucl.ac.uk: contact the UCL Arena Centre

Find out how UCL colleagues approach teaching large groups. You could:

- contact your faculty's or department's teaching committee
- speak to your teaching lead
- attend an Arena event, see the events calendar on the Teaching and Learning Portal.

Once you've researched a list of possible learning activities, choose at least three to try during one term. If students respond positively, add more.

Take time to reflect on what worked well and what could improve at the middle and end of your module. How could you enhance the three learning activities you implemented?

UCL also encourages colleagues to give one another feedback, for example through the UCL Peer Dialogue scheme - you can find details on the Teaching and Learning Portal.

bit.ly/LargeGroupTeachingToolkit: to access this full online guide, including links and further resources.

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