by Jay Olson

As educators, we all must come to terms with the power of the clock. “Tick, tick, tick” places a tremendous limit on what we can accomplish and/or how much material can be covered in a class.

If you are serious about trying to cover more material without adding more time to the class, then try using this page as a starting point when planning your next class.

1. **Eliminate overlap:** Some material must be reinforced and stressed more than once in a class. Muzzle control is a good example. However, there are some items that only need to be mentioned once.

Get together with your fellow instructors several weeks before the next class and identify areas of overlap. Go through your manual looking for items duplicated by different instructors. It could be that one instructor does not realize that another instructor is also covering the same topic, such as sight alignment or the steps of cartridge ignition. In addition to burning up class time, unnecessary duplication is boring for the students.

2. **Prepare a syllabus:** As long as you are getting together with your fellow instructors to compare notes, you can also assemble a syllabus for your class. Use this handout to reduce the amount of time spent on minor “housekeeping” details. The handout can list the names and phone numbers of instructors, meeting times and locations, reading assignments to be completed for each meeting, any necessary maps, range instructions, etc.

Students can read this while waiting for the first class to begin. Explain the importance of the handout but do not waste precious class time reading the syllabus to the students. When appropriate, refer students directly to the handout instead of giving an answer that is already in their hand. A syllabus will also greatly reduce the amount of misinformation that gets passed from one student to another regarding what is to be read for next week or what time they are to be at the range.

3. **Assign homework:** Design homework to save you time. We cover important items more than once in class because we want to reinforce them. You can still reinforce those items but do it through homework instead of actual class time. While students are at home, they can fill in the blanks on diagrams of firearm and ammunition components.

Another homework strategy is to help students be better prepared for a presentation. If the students already have the state hunting regulations, then assigning them 10 or 15 items to look up in advance is a good use of their time at home. Some can be easy such as looking up bag limits. Others can be more challenging such as calculating hunting times with sunrise/sunset charts. The students will be better prepared to learn about a topic and the presenter can usually squeeze in a little more material without taking more time.

4. **Eliminate dead time:** Dead time is usually the result of an instructor being late or having an activity that involves only a few students. Try to have at least two emergency 20 minute lesson plans ready to be implemented on the spot. Be prepared for a late instructor or when an instructor finishes early before the next instructor arrives. You might be tempted to just give the class and extra break, but you are not really doing them any favors by wasting their class time.

Also, when a specific activity will only involve a few students, make sure you have planned meaningful events for the rest of the class. While waiting for their turn to go out on the field test or safety trail, set up a series of stations for the other students to complete. Students who finish their written exam first can go outside and learn a few extra things about tree stands or archery. In that example, remember that those who finish the test last will not be exposed to that event so the material covered should involve “extras” and not essential material.

5. **Multi-tasking:** Try your best to kill two birds with one stone when planning your class. Instead of dismissing your Saturday class at noon and telling them to return after lunch, get a local grocery store to donate enough food to provide an on site lunch for all students and instructors. While students are eating lunch, you can then give a couple quick demonstrations of material that is important but will not be on the test such as hand loading, gun cleaning, or optics.

6. **Get to the point:** Scrutinize how much time you and your fellow instructors are spending on various items. Look to see if you are allowing too much time for certain parts of the course. For example, you might check to see if you really need to devote a full hour to handgun.

In addition, the instructor who is poorly organized and is burning up class time with a slow delivery needs to be helped in a constructive manner.

7. **Paperwork:** Do not waste precious class time on paperwork. Have students show up early for these tasks and try to get them completed before class starts. Another option is to assemble a set of instructions with examples showing how the forms are to be completed and then have the students bring the completed forms to the second class. You might also give a careful look at how much time is actually spent on the administration and grading of tests and then allow for a realistic and appropriate amount of time.

8. **Attitude:** A crucial message that you must get across to students at the very beginning of class is that you consider class time so important that you and your fellow instructors will not waste a single second of it. Generally speaking, respect is a two-way street. If we respect the students’ time enough to not waste it, they will in turn put forth a full effort and not waste our time with horseplay, tardiness, etc.

Delivering a class that makes full use of the allotted time is one of the marks of a professional program. However, as you use these suggestions to improve the quality of your teaching, don’t go overboard. Use common sense and as much time as is needed to ensure that key components are thoroughly covered. Learning is an individual process and occurs within many different time frames. Strict adherence to a stopwatch could damage that delicate process.

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