

A Typical Week in the IF Classroom

*Content v. Process:
How can I fit in everything I need to cover?*

There are many ways by which to engage the IF process in your classroom. Most faculty, however, use a model that combines content-coverage with student-facilitated discussion. In many cases, faculty are nervous that they will not be able to cover all the content they feel they need to cover during the class. In nearly all cases, faculty start off by spending 1/2 - 2/3 of class meeting time presenting content and the other 1/2 - 1/3 of class time having students work in small, student-facilitated groups. It seems notable, however, that the more confident faculty become in using the IF method, the more class time they tend to devote to it. For this document, let's call the days devoted to student-centered discussions "project days." We'll call the other days "off-days," just to indicate that the students won't necessarily be working in their small teams.



Rule #1: Aim Low and Achieve More when it comes to covering content via lecture during class. Give students more space for discussion so that they can discover on their own the content you want them to learn.

For instance, a faculty member teaching a Tuesday/Thursday schedule might begin by spending Tuesdays presenting course concepts using a traditional lecture format. Some faculty will incorporate professor-led discussion into the Tuesday classes. Then, on Thursdays, students will be given time to explore a course-related content area in small, student-facilitated groups. For instance, on Thursdays in, say, a juvenile justice course, one student group might spend the class time developing their project developing conceptual policy possibilities for addressing families and delinquency. Another group might develop policy possibilities for addressing the intersection of schools and delinquency.

"I definitely covered less material during class, but I also felt that students really engaged the ideas we did cover." -Faculty Member Using the IF Method

Tuesday	Thursday
Content Coverage: traditional lecture, faculty-led discussion, and eventually more student-led discussion (of readings and course themes)	Student-facilitated discussion: in small groups for most of the class period, with faculty observing and providing feedback

Eventually, many faculty will expand the use of student discussion groups to the non-project day(s) of the class. They might have the students work in small groups to discuss broad themes in a reading or to discuss the policy possibilities related a day's planned lecture. What most faculty members realize is that, by allowing students to explore content on their own in small groups, the students themselves will stumble upon most of the themes planned for coverage in the lecture. And those insights that students discover on their own tend to be better retained than those they are told in lecture. The faculty member can then tailor the "lecture" for the last part of class in response to what the students had to say in class. Sometimes, faculty will find it necessary to present a basic concept at the start of class before putting students into small groups.

On these "off" days, days not already set aside for student-centered discussions, the students might still end up working in their small discussion groups, or they might work in different groups (assigned or self-selected). Faculty may want to evaluate student facilitation on these days too, while also making notes regarding material to cover in the summary mini-lecture. Faculty might think of these days as similar to the "lightning rounds" demonstrated at Summer Institute. Early in the semester, these discussions will also help to identify students who are having trouble with different aspects of the discussion process.

Rule #2: *Make it your own!* We *strongly* encourage faculty to take the basic model IF provides of a student-centered classroom and adapt it to your own class, content, and campus.

Project Management by Students

When students meet in their small groups on project-designated days, it is probably easiest to plan to devote those entire days to small-group work. On those days, it is the students' responsibility to put themselves into groups and get started. Whoever took notes the previous week is the facilitator this week. Notes should be provided in advance to all students, perhaps via a forum such as Blackboard (using the discussion section in which a professor can set up small groups that can then share documents and communicate with one another). Some student groups will want to use email or Facebook to communicate. All that matters is that the notes are being distributed. Each student should bring a printed copy of the notes from the previous discussion to this week's class meeting.

Rule #3: *Let your students struggle* so that they can learn to work out how to successfully work

Students in the IF classroom will learn to:

- **facilitate** directed discussions that engage and inspire their peers
- **manage** "bad apples" who are disrupting discussion
- **record** and distribute effective notes
- **overcome** personality conflict so as to get the job done

with peers to manage a project. This is the site at which most learning occurs in the IF classroom.

It is important that the students be made to work these organizational factors out. The student groups need to be self-directed. They're in charge of making sure they stay on task. Some groups will be very good at this, and others will be awful. The better students, academically speaking, will often want to take over and manage the group. Other students will resist this, sometimes by disengaging and becoming slackers. It may be helpful to meet with students individually when you sense that they are either trying to dominate the group or to evade responsibility in the group. Some professors will take all "slackers" from each group and put them in their own group. But a word of caution: don't jump in too soon. You don't want to be drawn into micromanaging the groups. Students will learn a lot as they figure out how to work with one another. It may be, for example, that an academically talented student needs to develop the social and communication skills to work with the group.

It may be helpful to remind students at the start of class as to where they should be in the discussion process by referring them to the support guidebook that IF provides. Not all groups will work at the same pace, but most students appreciate having some sense of where they should be. You may also want to refer students to different discussion tactics, presented in IF's publication *Teaching Tips*. Also, if you see that several groups are having difficulty with a particular part of the process, you might address this at the beginning or end of one of the discussion days or, briefly, during one of the "off" days. Many students will have trouble with the ambiguous and long-term nature of the process, but just reassure them to stick with it.



Your Role: *A wise coach rather than font of knowledge*

During the project meeting days, you, as the faculty member, will want to come equipped with a quick rubric form by which you can evaluate the facilitator and/or the group as a whole. You may want to develop a "ticket" form with which to give warning to students who are not trying to engage or who are otherwise misbehaving in the group meetings. You want something short and easy to complete, which is why a pre-made form might be helpful. Such behavior is relatively rare, and the IF materials contain other ideas for addressing such behavior (see the "Paint Ball" exercise in the *Teaching Tips*). You should create rubrics that allow you to duplicate your notes to the student for your own records. Finally, you will want to leave about 5-10 minutes at the end of class to meet with facilitators. You could also meet with students at the start of the following class or during separate office hours. Just make sure to provide feedback fairly soon after the discussion experience—the sooner the better.