Taking on someone else's course at short notice:
Guidelines for beginners, experienced instructors, and everyone in between
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Have you just agreed to teach a course at short notice? Sessional instructors do this all the time! How should you get started? What are the priorities? Who can help keep the process both efficient for you and effective for students? Everyone has different priorities. This page aims to give some pointers that may help. One priority is knowing **where to get help**. Don't waste time struggling to figure stuff out yourself, unless there really is no one around!

- Ask whoever taught the class before, even if they taught it one or two (or more) terms ago.
- Consider asking if they would "mentor" your first encounter with this course, or at least be available to talk or answer emails throughout the term.
- Ask a current or past TA. They often have excellent insight about the course and the students taking it.
- Ask a Science Teaching and Learning person: Francis Jones or Brett Gilley with contact information below[1].
- Ask the undergraduate program coordinator which faculty member, or other person, would be best to ask.

Many ideas here are either "questions to ask yourself" or "suggested practices".   ALSO - watch for a new two (or maybe three) page summary in February 2013 entitled "**What Not To Do - Practices that should be avoided when implementing active learning**". This will be an awesome summary of good advice based on experiences all around the UBC Faculty of Science! Look for it as an EOS-SEI Times, and on http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/index.html .

1. First things to ask yourself …
What kind of expertise are students trying to gain? Think in terms of …
- "Skills"; i.e. they will be able to do this… ,
- "Knowledge"; i.e. they will know that … , and
- "Habits"; i.e. they will tend to think or act in this way… (eg they will exhibit good observation or problem solving strategies, etc).
- How do you know those objectives are the important ones for this course? Past exams? Known needs for jobs they will take? Your own hunches may not align with students' real needs, so ask around!

Logistics: DO YOU NEED HELP WITH ANY OF THESE?
- Do you have to manage a website? Ask <webmaster@eos.ubc.ca>
- Is the course using UBC's "Connect" online system? Ask for an introduction or help with details.
- Have you seen the class list at the Faculty Service Centre? https://ssc.adm.ubc.ca/fsc/servlets/SRVFSCFramework Note that student pictures are on the Faculty Service Centre? Choose to "add a column", or select "Download" and choose one of the PDF options that have pictures included (e.g. a "head shots" page).
- Are you expected to use clickers? If so, do you need help either setting them up, or using them in class?

2. Assessment and feedback
How often do you "*close the learning feedback loop*"? And are students learning what you hope?
- Do you or the TA comment on student work at least every week?   OR - only at the midterm?
- Are there both "low stakes" and "high stakes" assessments? Students need opportunities to help them decide if their effort is sufficient and appropriate.

- Students themselves can contribute significantly towards closing the learning feedback loop. Consider group work, group tests, and peer assessment – BUT see "getting help" above; there are some known best practices.
- Do you and TAs have clear guidelines for judging student work? Are there rubrics? Again, ask for help because there are many examples in use within our Department.   No one wants to reinvent the wheel!

3. Delivering content
- What will students read? A text book? Journal articles? Background provided with lab exercises?
- How will you deliver content? Copyright protected stuff should be NOT visible to the public. Use the Connect system, or a protected website, and review http://copyright.ubc.ca/ .
- How much will you "tell"? Will you be spending all your time generating "stories" for lectures? OR – will students be expected to do basic reading so that you spend some class time "Doing" interesting things?
- Students will only "pre-read" if the benefits to them are visible. Therefore, make explicit use of readings in class. And / or consider quizzing pre-readings, either in class or online.
- Reading content that was written for experts is itself an "expert" capability. Even senior students benefit from structuring the reading process. But how much, and what type of guidance to give? Discuss ideas and experiences with a colleague!

4. Activating learning
- Whatever you do in the course, try to make it habitual.
- Explain WHY teaching strategies are being used, even if it's just lecturing. Students are more likely to buy into anything that works once they know why you have chosen the strategy and the benefits are clear to them.
- Are you lecturing from start to end of every class? That can work – if clickers or other strategies are used to keep students motivated and thinking. Our Department has many examples of ways to keep classes lively, so ask around and visit a colleague's class.   It helps to have (and help) students think, not just watch YOU think.
- Can you have students working with each other during class? Thinking in pairs or groups is well known to cause more productive thinking than sitting alone for long periods of time.
- Do students have opportunities to demonstrate their thinking both alone and with colleagues?
- How often do you ask students for feedback about their experiences with your course? It is very easy to circulate one or two questions at the end of a class. You could even have a TA collect and summarize feedback so you can be distanced from student comments.
- STLFs are eager to help you include active learning strategies, or to help you obtain student feedback– just send an email (contacts below).

5. Resources – some very short!   Why not spend 5 minutes browsing a few of these occasionally!
- 42 two-pagers from the EOAS science ed. folks: http://www.eos.ubc.ca/research/cwsei/eossei-times.html .
- CWSEI resources, including pages about Instructor Guidance, Student Guidance, Clickers, Video, Learning Goals, Workshops, Papers, and Other Resources.
- EOS-South Room 361. Drop in, or contact by email (below). We look forward to planned or casual consulting!
- See http://www.colorado.edu/sei/fac-resources/ at the U. of Colorado Science Ed. Initiative for more excellent resources. Especially relevant for anyone new to a course are: (1) Course materials archives (with clicker questions, slides, activities, and more, for six disciplines including geosciences), and (2) "Framing" materials for the first day (and beyond), to increase student buy-in with your choices about strategies.

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[1] **Contact EOS-SEI:** Talk about your course(s) or teaching and learning in general! Visit EOS-South 361, or contact Francis (fjones@eos.ubc.ca), Brett (bgilley@eos.ubc.ca) or Sara (sharris@eos.ubc.ca). See also http://www.eos.ubc.ca/research/cwsei/.