

HARVARD CIVICS

A Program of the
Institute of Politics
and the Phillips Brooks House Association

Teacher's Handbook
2006 Fall Edition

Table of Contents

Basic Information

- pg. 3 -

Preparing for Class

- pg. 4 -

Good Teaching Practices

- pg. 6 -

Leading Small Groups

- pg. 8 -

Discipline

- pg. 9 -

CIVICS Tips

- pg. 10 -

More Information

- pg. 11 -

Basic Information

- MISSION -

The mission of CIVICS is to provide students with an understanding of and enthusiasm for American government. Beyond learning about their rights and civic responsibilities, students are encouraged to engage in higher levels of critical thinking so that they may become informed and perceptive citizens. Through the empowerment of CIVICS, young students can explore the infinite exciting possibilities of democratic government.

- ORGANIZATION -

CIVICS is comprised of undergraduate student volunteers who teach in local Boston area schools. CIVICS is funded by the Institute of Politics at the Kennedy School of Government, and is further supported by the Phillips Brooks House Association via their contacts within the community.

- CONTACT -

- IOP Co-Chair, Alan Tabak - tabak@fas.harvard.edu
- PBHA Co-Chair, Michael Love - mlove@fas.harvard.edu

- Project Chair, Jeff Howard - jwhoward@fas.harvard.edu
- National Expansion Chair, Rachel Haurwitz - haurwitz@fas.harvard.edu
- Curriculum Committee:
 - Joe Busa - jbusa@fas.harvard.edu
 - Christina Li - cwli@fas.harvard.edu
 - Emma Melton - emelton@fas.harvard.edu

Preparing for Class

Here are some useful things to do before going to the school to teach your CIVICS class. Pay careful attention to what is suggested to do before your first class.

- BEFORE YOUR FIRST CLASS -

I. First things First:

1. **Contact your co-teachers:** The very first thing is to introduce yourself and get on the same page with your co-teachers. Make sure you have their contact information, including email and cell phone numbers.
2. **Contact the classroom teacher:** After you have gotten in touch with your co-teachers, the next step is to get in touch with your assigned classroom teacher. Email or call them and introduce yourselves, and confirm the time of your arrival/departure. Ask how many students are in the class. See if there is any other important information the teacher feels you should know.
3. **Read the lesson for that day:** A lot of work went into preparing each of the lessons—so take advantage of all the information and activities they have to offer.
4. **Meet with your co-teachers:** Plan a time and place to meet your co-teachers. Once together, you can then plan out your lesson for the first day. It is important that you actually meet, and not simply coordinate over the phone or email. **IMPORTANT:** Decide when and where you will meet them to travel to your assigned school.
5. **Check out the school:** If you have the opportunity, it is a great idea to travel to your school and make sure you know both how long it will take you to get there and exactly where it is.

II. The First Day:

1. **Dress respectably:** You are a teacher, and a role model for these children. You should be professional (but, obviously, don't overdo it either!)
2. **Leave plenty of travel time:** It is good to plan for delays, slow metro trains, busy intersections, and other obstacles. Make sure you have PLENTY of travel time.
3. **Check in at the front desk:** Once you arrive, sign in and follow all the necessary security procedures.
4. **Arrive extra early:** You should always be early, but on the first day be extra early to make a good impression and leave time for introductions.
5. **Introduce yourself to the classroom teacher:** This will be the first time you meet the teacher, so make a good impression. Make sure to exchange contact information, and have them understand that you want to keep an open communication between you and him or her.
6. **Ask for feedback:** After the class is over, make sure to ask for the teacher's feedback to see where you can improve. After all, they are a professional teacher, and know their children well by now.

- FOR EVERY CLASS -

I. Preparation

- a. **Read the lesson:** Again, it is important to read the lesson provided for you before planning with your co-teachers. Go into the meeting with ideas in mind for what you'd like to do.
- b. **Meet with your co-teachers:** Meet before your lesson to plan out what you will be doing, and who will be presenting what. This is the most important part of the preparation!
- c. **Dress Respectably:** Don't forget to dress nicely for class!

II. Afterwards

- a. **Ask for feedback:** It is important to stay close with your classroom teacher. Ask them for feedback every week after your class.
- b. **Stay in contact with your classroom teacher:** If you have questions, updates, or other information that the teacher should know, contact the teacher as soon as possible to let them know ahead of time.
- c. **Submit the response forms:** The way the curriculum committee is able to evaluate and develop the curriculum is through your feedback. It is very important that you send in your feedback sheets!

- IMPORTANT! -

If you **HAVE TO** miss a class, let your co-teachers know as soon as possible. Your attendance is very important, and signing up to teach is a commitment, so please try to be there.

If your group of co-teachers all **HAVE TO** miss a class, let the classroom teacher know **ASAP!** It is unfair to them if they suddenly find that they have to teach a class when they were expecting you to be there.

Good Teaching Practices

It is important to consider the big picture when looking at teaching:

Goal: To encourage students to be enthusiastic and want to learn more about American government.

Strategy: Effective communication. Be clear, confident, and knowledgeable of the subject matter. Make it clear what it is you are teaching, what the students should know, and why they ought to know it.

Method: Inspire interest, and then go deeper. By presenting an effective and interesting big picture, the students will be more excited and capable of fitting the details into place.

- THE STUDENTS -

Remember that you are not simply teaching, but that you are teaching students. There are many effective ways to make sure you accommodate this more human aspect of teaching:

1. **Present yourself as a person.** Don't just be a figure—be a person who is approachable and interested in your students.
 - a. Tell a little about yourself when you first meet the students. Tell what interests you, and what you like about government. **IMPORTANT:** Be careful not to imprint any ideological perspectives you may have on the students. You want to encourage them to think for themselves!
2. **Learn the students' names.**
 - a. When you start your first class, do an activity that will allow you the opportunity to hear a little bit about the students and learn their names.
3. **Remember things about the students.**
 - a. Remember what the students say, and who says it. This will help you connect to them.
4. **Don't allow mean behavior.**
 - a. Don't show any sarcastic or snide remarks, and don't allow students to engage in ad hominem attacks.
5. **Hold yourself to high standards.**
 - a. Be on time, answer questions honestly, don't boast, and show that you respect them and that they are more than worth your time!
6. **Show enthusiasm.**
 - a. Praise good work, and encourage better work when you know students aren't living up to their potential. Be enthusiastic for the material you are teaching.

- YOUR COMMUNICATION -

There are a few important things you should think about before teaching a lesson, so that you communicate the information effectively:

1. **Talk appropriately for your audience.**
 - a. Use words and language that students will understand and are comfortable with.
2. **Use appropriate tone.**
 - a. Change your tone to suite the occasion. There are times to be excited in your tone, and there are times to be serious or grave.
3. **Make sure what you say actually says something.**
 - a. Be clear in the points you're trying to make, and talk about them directly.
4. **Slow Down!**
 - a. Remember no to go too quickly or go into too much detail. Take pauses for emphasis, and to allow things to sink in.
5. **Use the board.**
 - a. Write key words on the board, and feel free to use diagrams or draw pictures where appropriate.
6. **Leave room for the students.**
 - a. Ask questions, encourage participation, and make sure that the students are with you in the lesson. The last thing you want it to stand and lecture all day. Interaction is key!

- OVERALL LESSON PLANNING -

It is important to plan ahead not only what you are going to teach, but also how you are going to teach it.

1. **Activities! Activities! Activities!**
 - a. Younger children learn best when they can connect to the material. Plan for engaging activities, and make sure you leave ample time in your lesson for them. Students would much rather *do* something than simply listen.
2. **Pick a few important concepts.**
 - a. While there is a great deal to cover, don't try to cover everything. Pick a few big ideas that are important, and really hammer them down. Make sure the activity reinforces these big ideas.
3. **Consider incorporating stories.**
 - a. Use interesting historical stories to accent your lessons. Students will remember a story much better than a list of facts!
4. **Use handouts or visuals.**
 - a. These can help the class follow your discussion, but make sure your aids are clear and direct.

Leading Small Groups

- DISCUSSION -

1. Involve everyone and make sure you have the students' attention
2. Ask open-ended questions
3. Ask a 'circle' of questions that lead students to the answer
4. Ask questions related to the students' lives—then tie it in to your main lesson
5. Play off other comments ('What do you think about what Sam said?')
6. Keep order, and make sure that all students have an opportunity to provide input (raise hands, one person talking at a time)
7. Play Devil's Advocate
8. Give feedback on comments

- ISSUES YOU MAY FACE -

1. **Lull in conversation:**
 - a) It's okay if students are thinking—give them time
 - b) Summarize past points
 - c) Suggest a new approach/question to the same topic
2. **One person talks too much:**
 - a) Establish your control—jump in after the comment and slow down the pace for others
 - b) Ask what the others think about the student's comments—redirect the attention to other students
3. **Students do not participate:**
 - c) Ask a directed question that would capture interest
 - d) Ask a particular student a question that doesn't have a wrong answer ('What do you think about...?')
 - e) Find an interesting sub-topic
 - f) Relate the topic to the students lives
 - g) Divide into smaller groups
 - h) **MOST IMPORTANT:** Stay calm and be patient!

- CONCLUDING THE LESSON -

You should make sure that students take away the main points and can make connections.

1. Summarize main points, especially the ones students made
2. Emphasize the interconnectivity—make sure the students know how all the topics you covered are related
3. Explain what any activities showed, and what the students learned
4. Ask the students about the lesson ('Okay, everyone remember back to the beginning of the class. Who can tell me...?')

Discipline

- PREVENTION -

1. **Spacing:**
 - a. Strategically place yourselves around the classroom. While one teacher is talking up front, the other can walk around the room.
2. **Watch the class:**
 - a. Keep your attention on the whole class, and keep trying to get others involved. Don't just teach to the front row, but project and focus across the entire room.
3. **Set ground rules before discussion:**
 - a. If you know a group may be rambunctious, then prepare in advance by going over rules for discussion/class debate early on
4. **Set up rewards/punishment system:**
 - a. If the class is good, offer an incentive. This will be for you and your co-teachers to determine. **WARNING:** Don't let CIVICS become a rewards and game time for the students. We do want them to learn.
5. **Have separate assignments:**
 - a. Have a worksheet or written assignment ahead of time for students who misbehave. Give them the assignment and have them removed from class discussion until they complete it.
6. **Talk to the teacher:**
 - a. Learn what to watch out for before the class begins

- TYPICAL PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS -

1. **Child does not pay attention:**
 - a. Ask the child a specific question, or what he/she thinks about a particular topic
 - b. Give the child a role, or a job to do--give some authority to the child that would entice him/her to pay closer attention
2. **Child talks too much:**
 - a. Try to productively channel the energy--have the child somehow lead a discussion
 - b. Explain that, while you appreciate enthusiasm, he/she needs to give everyone a chance
 - c. Let the child do something active, like recording notes on the board
3. **Child too loud or rowdy:**
 - a. Separate the child from the group, let him/her know that you do not approve of the behavior and that he/she needs to stop
 - b. Give the child a separate written assignment to do
4. **Child too quiet:**
 - a. Try to clarify the situation--the child may not understand (but don't target him or her)
 - b. Ask a positive question directly to the child--gently encourage and help the answer along

Another alternative is to use the help of the classroom teacher. This should be used sparingly, however, and only when individuals go beyond your ability to enforce the rules.

CIVICS TIPS

1. **Be honest** with your students. If you don't know the answer, say so, but make sure to answer the question when you come back.
2. Don't be ashamed that you go to Harvard. **Be positive** about education, answer students' questions about high school and college, and keep them set on obtaining a **good education**.
3. Do not let your beliefs influence your lessons. The students see you as role models, so do not abuse that and teach them what you believe. They should **think for themselves**.
4. Don't be afraid to go **off on a tangent** if the class finds it interesting. Just remember to relate it back to the bigger topic.
5. Try to incorporate **current events**. Pick ones that the students will have heard of and are familiar with.
6. When you ask a question to the class, give everyone **time to think** before calling on students. Make sure your questions are clear.
7. Don't worry about getting through your entire lesson plan. Make what the students are learning interesting, and **don't rush the class**.
8. **Use the space** of the classroom to your advantage. Move around so that not only the front row gets to have your attention.
9. **IMPORTANT:** Make sure you incorporate activities and things to do. **Students don't want to listen to a lecture the whole time**.
10. **HAVE FUN!** The students will too!

More Information

Here are some additional resources for teachers:

CIVICS and U.S. Government Education Links:

The American Promise:

A website with a large number of resources related to American government and education, including several CIVICS teaching activities on many American social studies topics.

<http://www.farmers.com/FarmComm/AmericanPromise/>

CIVICS Online:

An all-inclusive website with historical information and links to primary texts, and a number of resources for teachers and students like classroom activity suggestions and curriculum guides.

<http://www.civics-online.org/>

Classroom and Teaching Links:

Classroom Management: A Positive Approach:

A website that provides teachers with a number of tips and recommendations for active, participatory classroom management.

<http://www.todaysteacher.com/ClassroomManagement.htm>

Teaching Tips Index:

A resource for all teachers with a plethora of advice on creating a good classroom setting, developing lesson plans and syllabi, effective teaching techniques, motivating students, and, best of all, stories that make you feel good to be a teacher.

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm>