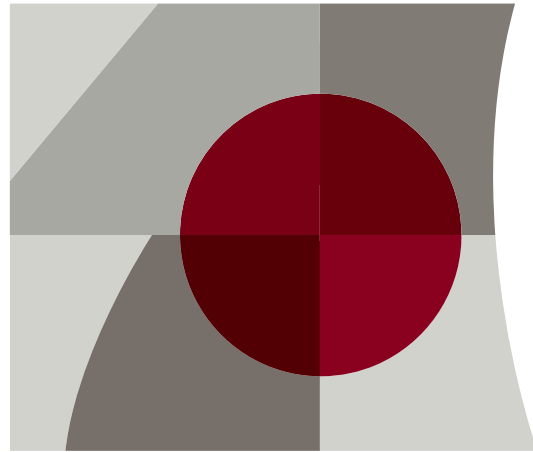


Fine-Tuning Your Course



Chicago
Center for
Teaching

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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Objectives

Discuss syllabus tweaks you can make between now and next week

Answer the question: “what makes my course interesting?”

Reflect on the first day of class and what we want to get out of it

Identify further resources

**READ THE
SYLLABUS**



YOU MUST

memegenerator.net

Fine-Tuning the Syllabus

Think:

What can a syllabus do
to help our students?

Discuss with a partner.

Share:

What are the two most
important functions of a
syllabus?



How can I fine-tune my syllabus
to help motivate students?

Establishing Value: Course Descriptions and Schedule

- What are the *big questions* the course poses?
- Why does this material *matter*?
- What *promises* does the course make to students?
 - *What will they know or be able to do?*
- How is the material organized?
 - Chronologically? Conceptually? According to some process? What's the narrative arc of the course?

Example:

Afro-Latin America: Translating “Black” across Borders

What does it mean to be Black in Latin America? Where do our understandings of race come from and do they translate across borders? Is the term “Afro-Latin America” redundant—could there be a Latin America without the “Afro”? We will tackle these questions and more as we consider the various ways in which countries throughout the Americas and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean have remembered, acknowledged, and treated the contribution Africans and their descendants have given their local and regional cultures. This will constitute analyzing the embodied contribution represented by “Afro-Latinos” and the abstracted contribution found in the way “Africa” is imagined.

As we grapple with the broader questions of the course, students will apply theoretical interpretations to case studies, assess and differentiate between various racial logics, and familiarize themselves with debates in the field of the African Diaspora in Latin America. Alongside class discussion, students will build the analytic toolset required to complete the final paper—a critical review of the documentary series *Black in Latin America*.

Example: What We Talk about When We Talk about Talk

“Are we having a fight?” “Were you flirting with her?” “Who does he think he is, talking to me like that?” We ask these kinds of questions as we try to understand the types of people and events around us. These questions show our implicit understanding of the mediating role of language in our experience and construction of our worlds.

This course will explore the social consequentiality of intersubjective language-in-use---what happens when people talk to each other---by introducing students to various methods of linguistic analysis and having them conduct these analyses on linguistic data provided by instructor.

Students will be introduced to a range theoretical understandings of the role of language in sociocultural contexts through their analytic practice in addition to their readings.

Establishing Value: “Why is my class interesting?”



- Take a minute to think about this.
- Explain to a partner: why is your class interesting?

Who has the most interesting class?

Supporting Positive Expectancies

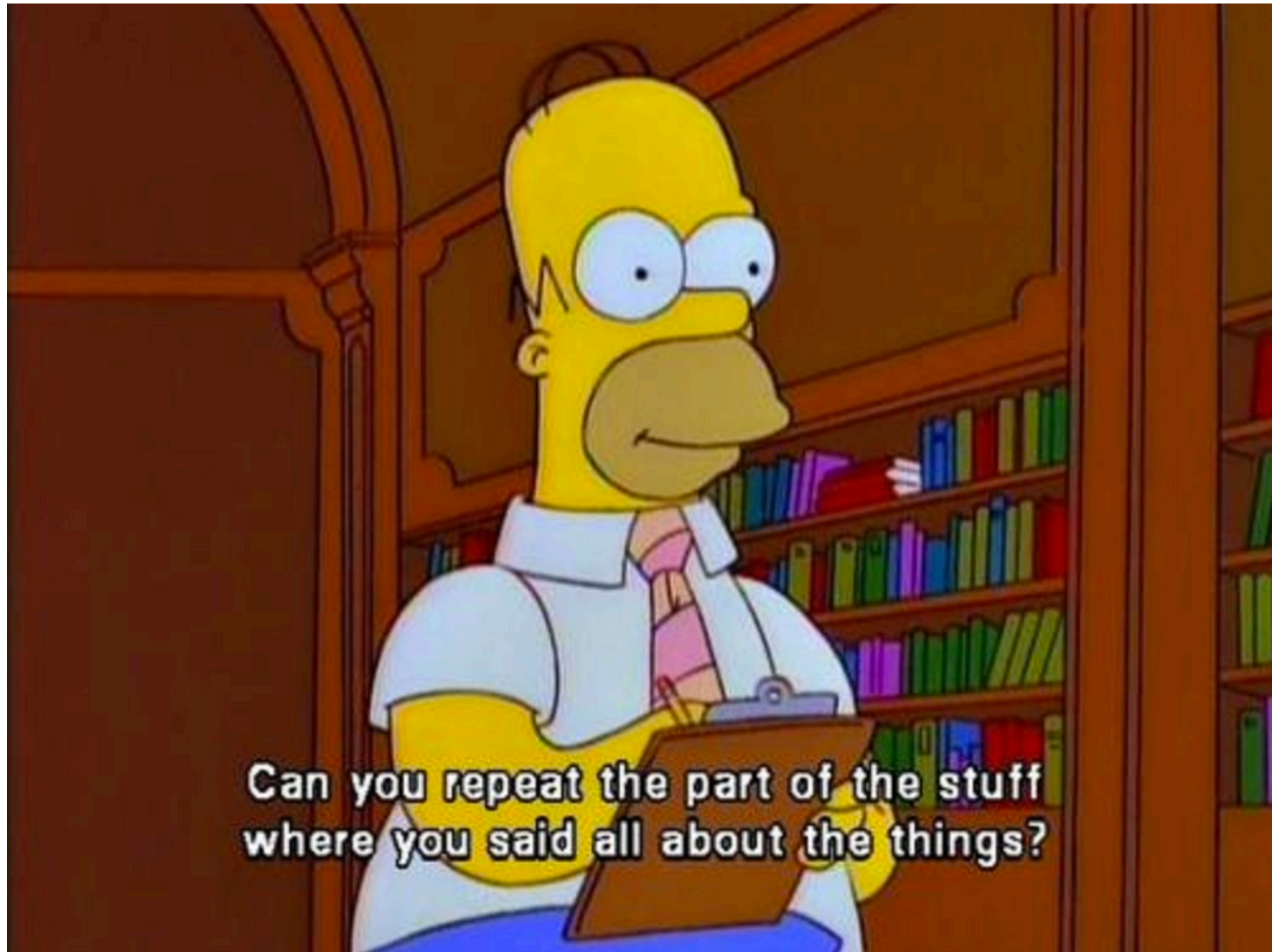
Is it clear what is expected of students?

- Learning objectives?
- Do the assignments align with what they should be learning?
- Is the grading system clear?

Tone and language

- Positive, respectful, and inviting
- Describes content from perspective of student
- Communicates high expectations, and confidence that students can meet them

Fine-Tuning the First Day



What should we aim to accomplish on the first day of class?

1. Create a welcoming classroom environment.

- Introduce yourself
- Let students introduce themselves
- Discuss norms for respectful and inclusive classroom participation

2. Discuss goals and expectations.

- Learning objectives: what are they going to get out of the course?
- Assignments and grades
- Participation
- How will class generally run?
- Policies
 - Late work
 - Students with disabilities
 - Academic integrity
 - Technology and devices

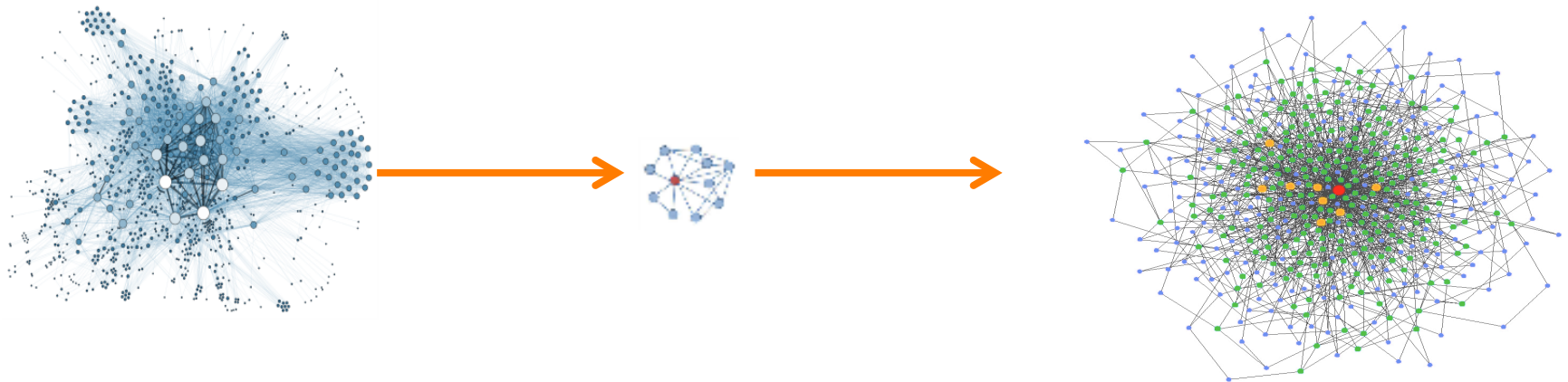
3. Engage with and assess prior knowledge.

Learning = constructing new knowledge

Prior knowledge/skills

New knowledge/skills

Constructed, deep meaning

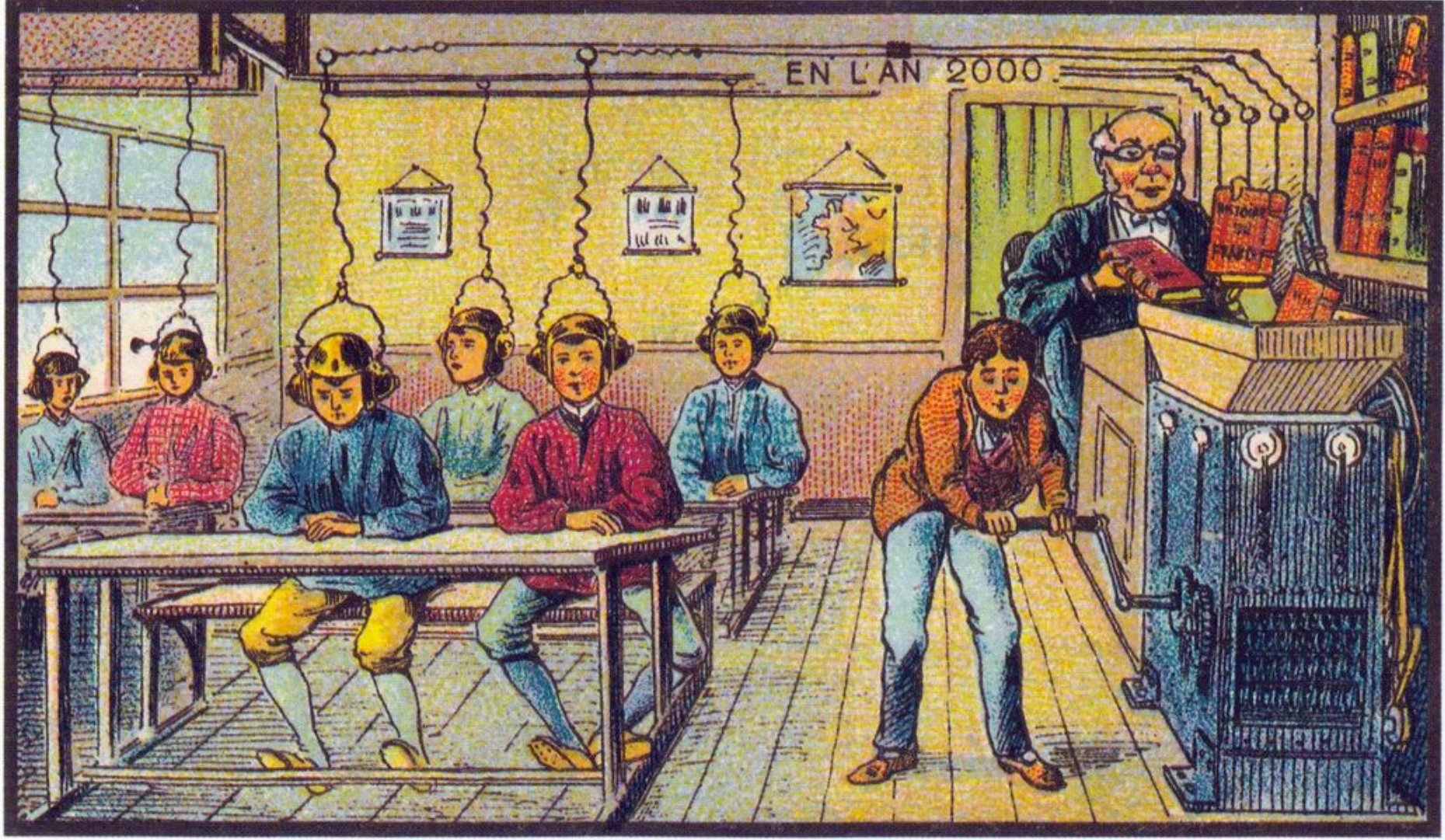


3. Engage with and assess prior knowledge.

- Plan an activity around common misconceptions about the course content
- Concept inventory or diagnostic exam
- Background knowledge probe
- Minute paper

What is a common misconception about your course material?

4. Teach something!



At School

Summary of Tweaks

Syllabus

- Revise course description
- Punch up the course schedule
- Sharpen learning objectives
- Check on alignment of assignments
- Clarify grading system
- Revise tone → inviting, from student perspective

First Day

- Create welcoming classroom environment
- Discuss goals and expectations
- Prior knowledge
- Teach something!

Further Resources

- Website: teaching.uchicago.edu
 - Individual Teaching Consultations
 - Seminar and Workshop on Course Design
 - Oct 6, 1:30-4:00pm
 - Nov 3, 1:30-3:30pm
 - Course Design and College Teaching: Spring
 - College Teaching Certificate
 - One-on-one meeting with CCT staff
- teaching.uchicago.edu/contact/consultations/

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