



Comparing notes

Collection: Small group teaching

Resource: Nightmare scenarios

Approximate duration

1 hour 30 minutes

Learning Outcomes

You can't altogether prepare for the unexpected. But as a result of this activity you should have thought through some ways of handling and responding to common problems of seminar life. You might also learn to shed some of the debilitating dread of things that could go wrong, through gaining confidence in your own ability to cope.

Introduction

This is an individual version of the activity suggested in Facing up to nightmares. It invites you to get out into the open your own fears about what could go wrong. It then invites you to compare your own ideas on how to cope with problems with those suggested by the participants in the video.

The activity

Stage one (approximate duration: half an hour)

As a starting place, we invite you to sit down and think of the worst things that could happen in your seminar. Write down the five worst things now.

Here are some 'worst things' that lecturers commonly come up with. How do they compare with your own list?



1 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

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- They won't have read the book / done the preparation.
- They'll be sulky and unwilling. I'll get terrible evaluations, and anyway most of them won't come back next week.
- No one will talk, and I will end up filling the silence.
- Someone will sit there glowering at me, and refusing to be drawn out.
- My mind will dry up, and I'll hear my own voice getting more and more panic-y.
- They'll be thinking: s/he can't teach, what a waste of time.
- There will be a very troubled person in the room who will insist on having my undivided attention.

Now choose three items (your own or ones from this list) and make notes on how you could deal with them.

Stage two (approximate duration: an hour)

Consider how you would deal with each of the nightmare scenarios listed below before watching the videos. After watching the video, write down a brief description of the differences between your answer and the answers given in the video.

1. How do I deal with a hostile student who tries to catch me out?
2. What if no-one has done the reading?
3. How do I deal with a passive student who does not want to contribute?
4. What do you do with students who have obviously cheated?

A further, related, activity would be to do a short piece of reflective writing, in the form of a vignette. This could either be based upon a real episode, or an imagined episode that you dread. The object would not be simply to indulge in the horrors, but to think calmly about the episode and your own response: why do you respond as you do? Imagine a friend reading your account, and what they might say. This is a variant on the activities suggested in the resource [Writing and the Teacher](http://humbox.ac.uk/2733/) (<http://humbox.ac.uk/2733/>), and you might care to look at those as you devise a form for reflection on teacherly nightmares.

One more variant would be a form of co-counselling. You work with a trusted colleague, and each in turn read each other's vignette. You agree beforehand how much time each gets for you to focus on their piece of writing and the questions it raises. In the time



agreed for each individual you focus on his / her writing and try to avoid getting distracted by the other piece. It will get its turn.

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>

Resources in the Small group teaching collection

- Small group teaching: introduction to the collection
- Seminar design: resource overview
 - Seminar design: individual activity
 - Seminar design: group activity
- Peer reviewing a seminar: Oliver Twist : resource overview
 - Peer review: individual activity
 - Adjusting the level
- Peer reviewing a seminar: The Bonesetter's Daughter : resource overview
 - A complex dialogue
 - Negotiated authority
- Thinking about seminars: resource overview
 - Relevance and red herrings
 - Weighing up the elements
- Nightmare scenarios: resource overview
 - Facing up to nightmares: group activity
 - **Comparing notes (*you are here)**



- Transformative writing: resource overview
 - Transformations: individual activity
 - Transformations: group activity



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