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Three Ways to Energize Your LRW Classroom

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Introduction

I have taught legal writing for a long time. Some things I “got right” early on, and I use those teaching approaches perennially. Some things I have created and improved and tweaked over time. And some things I create in the moment to make class more effective for a specific group of students.¹

¹ For a video on creativity in the classroom, see *Creativity in the Classroom*, AM. PSYCH. ASS’N. (Oct. 2024), <https://www.apa.org/education-career/k12/creativity-module>; see also Catherine Thimmesh, *Creativity in the Classroom (in 5 minutes or less!)* YouTube (Nov. 4, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nASvIgSOCxw> (Thimmesh’s TEDx on creativity—I plan to modify her circles-and-squares exercise for use in the fall semester). These videos focus on helping K-12 students to be more creative through incorporating classroom exercises on creativity, but some of the ideas are easily modified for our LRW classrooms.

What follows are three recent “in the moment” teaching tips that I now share with you.

1. LP-pons²

One day last year, my class was having a very, very low-energy day. They had done the reading. They could summon up answers. They just didn’t want to. And frankly, I wasn’t having much fun dragging the content out of them. Finally, I jokingly told them that I should have an incentive system to encourage engagement.³

That idea perked them right up, and thus was born the “**LP-pon.**” The name was derived from the course name—Legal Practice (“**LP**”) and **cou-pon.**

The LP-pon works like this: I bring a stack of LP-pons to class on days when active participation is crucial, and I reward students who do “more than.” When someone gives a really complete and insightful answer . . . when someone answers when silence has descended like a persistent

² Here is an LP-pon. I offer a variety of point values, include an occasional offer of a Starbucks gift card instead of points, and print the coupons on brightly colored paper. (FWIW, no one has ever selected the gift card. It’s all about the points.)

~~~ LP-pon~~~

You have received this coupon—an LP-pon—for meritorious performance in Soonpaa’s Legal Practice class.

This coupon is worth 1 point added to your Miscellaneous assessment category.

Please SAVE this LP-pon and present it to your LPTF on the last day of class (Thursday, May 1) so it can be added to your score.

This coupon is not transferrable nor assignable and may be redeemed only by the original recipient.

³ For a thorough discussion of effective non-food rewards in grades 2-6, see Mary Montero, *Student Rewards: Beyond the Skittles*, Teaching with a Mountain View, <https://teachingwithamountainview.com/student-rewards-beyond-the-skittles/> (last visited May 26, 2026). For the record, I use a lot of K-12 ideas in my teaching. Good ideas are good ideas. And yes, I also use food. After they submitted their MSJ briefs, they got homemade chocolate-chip and oatmeal-raisin cookies.

cloud upon the group . . . or when someone is on a roll and answers question after question, that student gets to choose from the stack of LP-pons.

What does an LP-pon give them? Bonus points,⁴ usually towards quiz grades or participation. Students are encouraged to save up their LP-pons and turn them in at the end of the semester.

Last year's class loved the LP-pons! Would the LP-pon energizer work every year, for every class? Probably not. I'm not using them this year simply because the right moment never presented itself. But last year's LP-pon students still greet me in the halls with requests for LP-pons.⁵

2. Snowball fights

This next energizer is not my creation,⁶ but I can testify to its positive effects in the law-school classroom.

All snowball fights follow a similar process:

Give each student a white sheet of paper and a prompt. The prompt can be about stress and collective temperature-taking ("How are you feeling today and why?"), about subject matter ("What questions do you have about the reading?"), or anything else that you want them to be able to put out anonymously for discussion ("Share your thoughts about what happened in the hallway yesterday."). Each student writes a response (1) with the assurance of anonymity and (2) with the knowledge that the responses will be shared.

⁴ They are so excited when they choose an LP-pon and the class asks, "How many points did you get?"

⁵ In fact, here's to you, Blake, the most enthusiastic LP-pon acquirer in the entire class!

⁶ See, e.g., *Snowball Toss Activity to Relieve Stress for Students in the Classroom*, RIPPLE KINDNESS PROJECT, <https://ripplekindness.org/snowball-toss-a-fun-activity-to-help-students-learn-about-release-stress/> (last visited May 26, 2026) (stress-relief snowball fights); *Snowball*, UNIV. WYO. SCI. INITIATIVE <https://www.uwyo.edu/science-initiative/lamp/active-learning-spectrum/snowball.html> (last visited May 26, 2026) (snowball fights for learning); *Inspirational Snowball Fight*, EVERYDAY MENTAL HEALTH CLASSROOM RES. <https://smho-smso.ca/emhc/positive-motivation-and-perseverance/practising-optimism/inspirational-snowball-fight/> (last visited May 26, 2026) (snowball fights with affirmations).

After the students have responded to the prompt, tell them to crumple up their sheet of paper and get ready for a SNOWBALL FIGHT! Tell the students to really throw those snowballs around the room—let loose of that stress or energy or confusion! Go!

Next, tell the students that they should each pick up one snowball, sit down, uncrumple it, and share what is written with the class.⁷

Depending on your prompt and responses thereto, the next minutes will vary. You might explore stressors, answer questions, or just allow venting. When you need to move on, your students will be happier, more relaxed, and ready to learn more. (And so will you, if you tossed in a snowball, too.)

3. Serial storytelling⁸ or telling the story, collectively

In our Legal Practice Program, students receive their fact patterns in several ways: client interviews (live person, but not real client), transcripts, or packets of court documents. These approaches are akin to real-life law practice and highlight the importance of asking the right questions, reading carefully, and synthesizing and reconciling multiple sources.

However, students sometimes struggle with those tasks. For example, with client interviews, students sometimes miss content or misunderstand content. Next, with transcripts or packets of court documents, students sometimes feel overwhelmed by the amount of material, even when the amount is much less than what would be typical in the real-life practice of law.

⁷ I have never had an issue with appropriateness of responses, maybe because of how carefully I craft the prompt.

⁸ Having just googled my alliterative title, I learned that “serial storytelling” is a real thing and that it means something other than how I’m using it here. See, e.g., Simon K. Jones, *Different Types of Serial Storytelling*, SUBSTACK (June 26, 2023), <https://simonkjones.substack.com/p/different-types-of-serial-storytelling>. A television series is an example of serial storytelling, “a long-running narrative set in the same world, featuring the same characters.” <https://creators.wattpad.com/writing-resources/serialized-storytelling/what-is-serial-storytelling/>. I use the term for asking students to tell the story serially.

A few years ago, I started the LRW version of fact-pattern serial storytelling. Within a few class periods of their initial receipt of the facts and around the time that we discuss writing the statement of facts, we take about half a class period for fact-pattern serial storytelling. It's simple: we go around the room in order, and each student provides one sentence of facts. The goal is not to provide a perfect narrative or a persuasive one; rather, it's to be sure that everyone has the facts correct and has all the legally significant facts. Frequently, other facts creep in, and that's fine. However, the focus is correct and complete. Some gentle nudges about organization and sequencing usually creep in too.

This exercise is insightful for both my students and for me. My students leave class comforted by the fact that they have met the goals of correctness and completeness and can envision their drafts. And I am comforted by the insight into the students' thought process. For example, based on these class discussions, I can determine who is following directions. If I asked them to contribute a sentence, and a student contributes a paragraph, I can see that the student may have trouble listening and following directions. In addition, I can determine who misunderstood a fact in the story. Misunderstanding of facts occurs most commonly with initial live client interviews because students are required to take notes instead of recording the interview. If all of my students misunderstood a fact in the same way, that tells me that perhaps the client failed to either clearly state the fact, or perhaps the client failed to relay the fact at all. These class discussions allow me to determine what facts weren't included in the collective telling, but should have been. Finally, these class discussions allow me to determine who isn't quite where I'd like them to be, such as when a student can't think of anything to say after only two sentences into the collective story.

I plan to use this serial storytelling approach for procedure as well in our trial-court memo. I plan to call on students around the room to tell the story of the case instead of merely focusing on the facts underlying the case. Although I devote class time to a discussion of the documents in the packets, some students struggle with process and relationships. I hope that telling the story of the case (akin to a procedural history, but more in-depth than that) will help them to put the pieces together.

4. Reactions and reflections

Student reaction to all the energizers has been generally to overwhelmingly positive.

- Most students loved the LP-pons, except for a couple of students who didn't appreciate their "gunner" classmates' single-minded focus on acquiring as many as possible. I had tried to address that acquisitional mindset by passing them over to call on students who didn't have many LP-pons, but my memory isn't perfect, and my ability to resist pleading puppy-dog eyes and frantically waving hands isn't perfect either. I need to be mindful of rewarding only truly "more than" performance. A few jolly beggars were rewarded when they didn't really do much, let alone more than (aside from begging more than other students, which shouldn't have been rewarded). However, the tangible reward of the paper coupon, the fun of comparing points, and the positive vibe in class were pluses to this energizer.
- While I used the snowball fight exercise only twice, I received only positive feedback both times. I plan to use it again when I'm sensing stress or ennui in the group. I also used it with a group of professors, and they also enjoyed throwing snowballs and went totally off-track in what they wrote. But in a group of peers, that tangent was easier to manage!
- Although no students criticized the serial storytelling, the students didn't seem to enjoy it as much as I had hoped, and the enjoyment I do perceive isn't universal. I'm not sure whether it's because some students feel put on the spot or because the activity often reveals students who aren't as familiar with the facts as they should be. Despite my announcing the upcoming exercise in the preceding class period, I think that some students feel as if it's a not-fun, cold-call type activity. And perhaps for

the students who are well-prepared, the exercise isn't very helpful. After I extended the serial storytelling to include procedure in the last spring semester, I learned very quickly from their first drafts that I need to guide the procedure story a lot more because some students completely missed crucial information, such as the paragraph of the complaint that identified the basis for the lawsuit. Next time, I will review the documents and highlight information that I need to be sure that they understand, even if I have to contribute a sentence to the story.

As a teacher, I love how each class or cohort of students needs something from me that is tailored for them and their learning needs. The above three energizers are recent responses to recent classes and cohorts. They energized my students, and I hope that they energize yours, too.