Teaching Cases With Clickers in Large Lecture Sections
Some Tips from Eric Ribbens, Western Illinois University

Goals
I am a huge believer in setting, and stating goals. Keep them down to about three. What are your goals for the course? What are your goals for each day? I begin each class by telling my students my three goals for the day. Then make sure you teach them! Teach like a newspaper story: tell the important stuff first, and if you don’t get to the less important stuff that’s ok.

Attendance
I require attendance in my class, since I’ve learned how important it is. If you miss a day (for any reason), you get a writing assignment on the topic: “What did we do in class the day you missed?” After I send a few back because they are not good enough, students get the message. This doesn’t penalize people who have to miss, it’s obnoxious enough that they try to get to class, and it reinforces the idea that they still need to know the material we covered.

Positive Reinforcement
Everyone likes positive reinforcement. Use it! Tell your students regularly to think back over the semester, and realize how much they have learned. Make your questions a mix, with some that most people should get right and some harder ones.

Clicker Questions
Use them frequently. I try to have one about every five minutes. They engage students, get them to refocus on the class, and help me assess how well they understand the topic.

Flipping the Class
Post a powerpoint to your course website that covers the concepts you want your students to know. Then use cases and other problems to push your students to apply the concepts, instead of introducing them to the concepts. If you design your class so that students won’t do well unless they have studied the flipping powerpoints, they will.

If It’s Important, Make it Worth Points
Students are very good at identifying stuff that doesn’t really matter, and skipping it. So if you use clickers, make them worth some points. If you use cases, ask questions about them on the tests. Or better yet, make your test a case!

Ju-jitsu Teaching: Encourage them to Cheat
What do you call 120 students talking to each other about what the correct answer is for a problem? I call it learning! So let them look up answers in their notes and books, talk to their neighbors, etc. If you want them to answer a question from individual memory, say so, and teach them proper classroom etiquette.

Tell Your Students Why you use Cases
And help them learn how to study with cases. They will be suspicious of cases, and maybe of clickers, at first. So tell them (repeatedly) why you are using them, and how you want them to learn from their use.
The Case Powerpoint
is important, so create it carefully. Add images! Your students are probably quite visually oriented. Make the case feel realistic, and choose cases that will catch the interest of students.

Modify!
Don’t be afraid to change a published case to make it fit your needs. I add dialogue, sometimes build in more content, insert clicker questions, etc. For example, I teach a case about the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. At the end of the case, I have added a section about the Chicago River, which used to flow into Lake Michigan but now empties a lot of nitrogen into the Mississippi River (eventually), since many of my students are from Chicago.

Learn how to ask Questions “On the Fly”
You will probably have a great idea for a clicker question DURING your class. So ask it! Teach your students how to answer questions that you ask and are not on the screen.

Ask the Same Question Again
If most of the students get the question wrong, instead of telling them which is right, give them some guidance, or explain why one answer is wrong, and then ask the exact same question again.

Group Work
Have the students enter individual answers and then turn to their neighbor and agree on a joint answer.

Clicker Etiquette
My students sometimes think it is ok to use someone else’s clicker for them. Teach them that using someone else’s clicker is cheating. Don’t assume they will realize this.

Throw Out Clicker Questions
I make the clicker questions worth 20% of the course grade, and when I add up all the clicker points I rescale the points so that in effect they get 100% of the clicker grade if they answered 90% of the questions right. This takes stress off the questions and helps with the occasional day someone forgets a clicker.

Clicker Questions Are Multipurpose
You can ask an “interest-generating” question, such as “Do you know someone who had cancer?”
You can ask a question they may not know the answer to, such as “How tall is the tallest tree in the world?”
You can ask a question they SHOULD know the answer to.
You can ask a question that they should be able to figure out the answer.
Use a mix of these.

When You are Finished with the Case
Remind them again what your goals for the case were. Tell them what you want them to have learned. Give them some sample test questions.