

The Essential Educator: 10 Tips for Teaching the Wharton Investment Competition

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The Wharton Global Youth Program embraces the power of high school educators in all we do. We create and deliver programs, competitions and content that introduce students to the full scope of business and finance education. Most often, teachers are our gateway to students, shaping and using our experiences to engage learners in and out of the classroom.

As we begin producing new content following our summer 2021 publishing hiatus, we are adding “The Essential Educator” blog to the lineup. This monthly feature, written by educators for educators, explores critical issues and imparts practical strategies for using Global Youth opportunities to engage students.

Here, guest blogger Alex Lamon, a teacher of economics, business and personal finance at Livingston High School in New Jersey, U.S., provides a primer on best practices for integrating the [Wharton Global High School Investment Competition](#) into the classroom.

Every year as I introduce the Wharton Global High School Investment Competition to my high schoolers, their ears perk up. They're interested in an opportunity to learn more about investing in a space bigger than themselves or our classroom. They love researching the client from the case study. They love picking stocks. They love seeing their portfolio movements. And as their teacher, it's awesome that they are able to participate in an investment challenge that provides a team-based, collaborative experience. My students hone their communication skills as they write analyses and rationales for each investment decision they make during the 10-week competition.

Registration for this year's 2021-2022 competition ends on September 18, 2021 and trading begins on September 27. Definitely check out the Webinar on the [competition homepage](#) to learn all the basics of the competition. By way of explanation for this column, a teacher often serves as a team advisor, providing student teams with guidance, knowledge, support and encouragement throughout the competition.

“Encourage students to develop an investment strategy early and note that it can change as they go.” — Alex Lamon, Business Teacher, Livingston High School

If you are an advisor to students in this year's investment competition, you might find my top 10 tips for success in the competition helpful. After several years of running the investment challenge (and even making it to the [Regional Finals in 2019-2020](#)), I've learned a thing or two about successful implementation of the program, especially embedded in a classroom setting.

Let's get started!

1. **Form balanced teams.** As a classroom teacher, my first priority is student learning. Before even forming competition teams (each team has 4-7 students), I encourage students to choose from a list of specified roles, which might include VP of Trading, VP of Communication, VP of Analysis, and VP of Strategy. Each member has defined roles during the competition in terms of trading and producing the two competition deliverables, which include a brief mid-term report and a more comprehensive final report. The exact titles and responsibilities aren't as important as simply having roles to begin with. I allow students to pick their first and second choices of roles and use that to help create teams that I believe will be balanced in terms of skill and also potential for

productivity. The subtext here: *I don't put them with all their friends!* It's also important to note that I have had students who are not in my Investing class participate in the competition outside of school hours (more like a club experience). They form their own teams to win.

2. **Assess them on the basics.** Students in the competition are challenged with creating an investment strategy and a portfolio for a specific client. A narrative case study provides details about each year's client. If students do not know that client, they will not succeed! I spend a class period for my students to research the client, assess his or her risk tolerance, and figure out how specific interests may relate to an investing thesis, or simply choosing specific stocks or sectors. Creating a quiz via your favorite educational technology tool, like Kahoot, is a solid way to make sure students have a foundational understanding of the client before moving too far into the competition.
3. **Don't rush into trading!** There is a trade deadline on the Wharton Investment Simulator (WinS) platform — i.e., teams must place their first trade by a specified date, but it is generous. Most of my students know little-to-nothing about investing. I spend the first four weeks of class teaching them the basics of investing (with the help of Wharton Global Youth lesson plans) before we touch the competition. It can be painful to not start off right away, but I've found this strategy pays dividends once we start trading.
4. **Don't reinvent the wheel.** The Wharton Global Youth Program has [a solid curriculum](#) with lessons that directly relate to the skills and knowledge needed for students to participate in this competition. As someone who is picky about using other people's lessons, I can honestly say these are quality lessons that not only have excellent content, but are also great student learning activities. And for those educators who are new to some of these concepts, each plan includes a "Background Knowledge for Teachers" section that provides useful context.
5. **Practice makes perfect.** I frequently have my students pitch stock ideas. Why does your team want to buy this stock? Why not buy the competitor? They'll do their research and then pitch to me, their team, the whole class. Developing a rationale and relating their investment decision to the potential client and a higher-level investment strategy is key to this competition. It's a hard skill, and it needs practice.
6. **Industries galore.** Students need to invest in as many industries as they have team members, but more is always better! Diversification is key. Even with an approved stock list that limits the total number of stocks available for the competition, students are often overwhelmed with where to start. [Finviz](#) is an excellent visualization tool that helps students screen stocks. I like to start simply with the S&P 500 map to open their eyes to what options are available to them before getting into more complex screening.
7. **Meet the experts.** In addition to lesson plans, the Wharton Global High School Investment Competition also has current and archived [Meet the Experts](#) videos on the website and on the Wharton Global Youth [YouTube channel](#). Investment professionals, like Peter Ammon, the chief investment officer of the University of Pennsylvania, talk about stocks and investing in an interview format. The series even features some past competition winners, like Sid Muralidhar, whose team won top honors in the 2018 Global Finale. I like to give students a choice of what videos they watch, and limit them to a portion of the video. Clips are the most digestible.
8. **How about face-to-face experts?** If you have any parental support in your school, use it! How about former students in finance? I have several of these guests come into my classroom a couple times during the competition. They spend little time speaking in front of the room. Instead, they serve as coaches. They sit down with student teams and listen to their strategies. They challenge students to consider new ideas or realities they have not before. They are excellent guides, and they help add another layer to the students' competition experience that makes it even more real.

9. **Chunk the final report.** The final report is the most important deliverable students produce. But many students are overwhelmed by the size. Familiarize yourself with the requirements and craft activities that students will later include in their final reports. For example, my students naturally create several [SWOT analyses](#) during the competition. When they're crafting their final report, they simply copy and paste their old work from that individual assignment into their final report document. It makes everything much more manageable. In short, have students begin working on the final report as early as you can, without them even realizing it.

10. **Thesis isn't just for English class.** One of the hardest things is showing student teams how to create an investment thesis or investment strategy. What do they believe is their guiding light for their investment decisions? Encourage them to develop one early and note that it can change as they go. But if they are buying stocks without checking 'does this stock align with our overall thesis and/or investment strategy?' they are probably flying blind.

The Wharton Global High School Investment Competition has been a critical piece of my Investing class curriculum. It is the highlight of the course. My students are eager to learn about stocks and this competition provides a perfect outlet that is genuinely fun for me and the students. You can ease into it your first year and ramp up as you gain experience. It will elevate your course or investing unit. It certainly did for me.