Tips for Increasing Organization and Clarity

St. Mary's University Instructor Course Evaluation Tips
http://www.smu.ca/administration/caid/documents/ICETips3_000.pdf
give many hints on how to get better student ratings on the item pertaining to organization and clarity. Although this document is totally biased toward lecture-based teaching some of the best ideas include:

1. use Advance Organizers*
2. use at least 3 examples and at least 1 non-example
3. don't describe; demonstrate
4. write the objectives for the class on the board before you begin
5. begin and end by eliciting summary statements from students

The Berkeley Compendium, which was updated and published as Tools For Teaching, has the original listings from which St. Mary's were drawn. See the table of contents for the entire compendium here: http://teaching.berkeley.edu/compendium/

Other ideas for increasing organization and clarity include:

Tell students what the conceptual base for your course/class session is. **Ask** questions about the conceptual base throughout the course/class session. Some common conceptual bases that faculty use are:

Chronological
Problem-solution
Simple to complex
Complex to simple
Local to international/international to local
Causality
Ascending order/descending order
By space or region

Use the Foundation for Critical Thinking *Elements of Thought* to increase clarity. http://www.criticalthinking.org/storepage.cfm?P=products&ItemID=314&catalogID=217&cateID=132 . Arranged in a Wheel, this chart visualizes that all thinking within a discipline is defined by 8 elements:

Purpose of the discipline – what are these people trying to get at
Questions that the discipline seeks to answer
Information that is deemed legitimate
Concepts that run through the discipline
Inferences that are accepted
Assumptions that are accepted
Implications if the work is true
Point of view

Address as many of these as possible in each class session.

*__Advance Organizers__ are a previewing framework to help students get a handle on what they will be learning. More than an overview or a review of the past class session, they force students to connect something they know to something they don't know – yet. Use an advance organizer before you begin your active teaching.

Here are some examples of Advance Organizers from Northwest Texas Network Consortium http://www.netnet.org/instructors/design/goalsobjectives/advance.htm :

1. Ask students to compare and contrast the new content based on what they know. For example, what can they tell about its color, shape, smell, feel, or taste? Demonstrate by using a related determinant. For example, use baseball to teach cricket, or ping pong to teach tennis.
2. Give a scenario and ask students to infer rules based on their current knowledge.
3. Have students identify the characteristics of a known quantity and then relate it to the new idea/concept. For example, offer renderings of different types of geometric forms before discussing their individual likenesses and differences.
4. Identify a problem and ask for a reason why it may occur (before teaching the reason). For example, you might discuss the origins of a war before describing its major battles.

Another popular Advance Organizer technique is KWLH
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1kwlh.htm .

1. solicit from students what they already **K**now about the topic
2. help them determine what they **W**ant to learn
3. identify what they **L**earn as class proceeds
4. lead students to generate **H**ow they can learn more

A different type of Advance Organizer is the **graphic organizer**. Use one of these common graphic shapes to match the 'shape' of the material for the class session. http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1grorg.htm cycle, network tree, matrix, continuum, outline, series chain, spider, etc. etc. See how two of these graphic organizers were used to corral what students already knew about a decade under study, the 60's http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1dusa.htm

Or adapt a technique from reading instructors and create an Anticipation Guide.
http://www.indiana.edu/~l517/anticipation_guides.htm

1. Choose the text or source
2. Generate several statements that focus on the topic of the source**.** Next to each statement, provide a place for students to indicate whether they agree or disagree.
3. lead class
4. facilitate discussion about the statements and whether students still agree or disagree