0.1 A vision

Those of us who have invested many hours inventing and plagiarizing the worksheets and problem sets for SC courses have an advantage when it comes to day-to-day curricular decisions. We know where we're trying to get, and if something isn't working, we know whether we need to push it, to try another tack, or whether we should just drop it. Once the set of course materials becomes more standardized, instructors inevitably lose flexibility. Some of the flexibility is lost for good, insofar as any of the subject matter fulfills prerequisites for other courses. But you can keep a lot of the flexibility if you thoroughly acquaint yourself with each worksheet before the semester begins. That way you'll know exactly what follows on what, you'll have an idea of what's hard and what's easy, and where the light is at the end of a tunnel through particularly difficult material. The only way I know to do a sufficient job of this is to personalize the coursepack. Choose a sequence of sections and problem worksheets that makes sense to you. Look for what might be a poorly conceived worksheet and write a replacement, or fill in gaps you might notice.

In tandem with personalizing the coursepack, you should develop (if you haven't already) your own vision for the course. What are you trying to accomplish and what is the role of each section of the curriculum? If you don't have an idea of this, you will continually encounter awkward moments in class where you're trying to get students to understand something and start feeling like you're just making them jump through hoops. If you have firmly in mind not only the underlying concept but what about it they really need to know, you'll be able to devise a new approach on the fly (or more honestly, if you don't then you certainly won't). In the 130-131-132 sequence, students tend to broach openly the question of why they're being made to learn such and such, which you will also have trouble with if you don't have your own vision for the course. Hopefully we've created enough raw material so that personalizing the coursepack won't take anywhere near the time it took during the pilot versions. In pre-calculus, the students are enrolled for a variety of different reasons, and it will probably help you to survey them on the first day to find out why they're enrolled.