

# 23 Practical Strategies to Help New Teachers Thrive

Based on a Magna Online Seminar titled “23 Practical Strategies to Help New Faculty Thrive” presented by Ivan A. (Ike) Shibley, Jr., Ph.D.

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A Magna Publications White Paper

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## ABOUT THIS WHITE PAPER



This white paper is based on a Magna Publications Online Seminar originally delivered on by Dr. Ivan A. (Ike) Shibley, Jr. on September 16, 2010. Dr. Shibley is associate professor of chemistry at Penn State Berks, a small four-year college within the Penn State system. He received his BS in chemical engineering from the University of Pittsburgh and his PhD in biochemistry from East Carolina University. Between college and graduate school he spent four years in the U.S. Navy, where he taught nuclear physics and radiation safety. He now teaches introductory chemistry, general chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, and philosophy of science courses; a first-year bioethics seminar; and a senior science seminar. His research involves pedagogical approaches to improving science instruction at the college level. He has won both local and university-wide awards for his teaching, including this year's Eisenhower Award, which is presented to a tenured Penn State faculty member who exhibits excellence in teaching as well as mentoring of other teachers.

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## INTRODUCTION

New faculty members need practical help to achieve lasting classroom success.

The average college professor knows his or her subject matter very well, but receives very little training in how to teach it effectively. That's because most graduate programs provide minimal instruction on classroom pedagogy.

It's not surprising that many new faculty members struggle when they are first asked to lead their own classes. Bad habits picked up early in a teaching career can become self-defeating in the long term.

Often, new faculty members try to do too much and wind up overextending themselves, which diminishes their enthusiasm. This can lead to frustration and ineffectiveness.

The best way to confront these problems is to provide new faculty members with practical guidance and seasoned advice early on.

In *23 Practical Strategies to Help New Faculty Thrive*, award-winning professor and faculty mentor Dr. Ike Shibley of Penn State shares effective strategies for success in college teaching.

Drawing upon his 15 years of teaching and mentoring experience, Professor Shibley offers compelling and realistic advice on day-to-day teaching and improving student learning to guide new faculty members around predictable pitfalls and set them on the path to a rewarding teaching career.

### **This white paper covers:**

- Deliberate course design
- Writing a strong syllabus—and sticking to it
- Improving student ratings
- High- versus low-stakes grades
- Finding the right pacing
- The reality behind teaching “myths”
- How to start and end each class
- How and why to find a faculty mentor
- Strategies for working with colleagues
- Ways to increase classroom efficiency
- Maintaining psychological health
- The rewards of teaching
- And more

# 1

## CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS TEACHING?

“If you know the content, you can teach.”

How many of us have heard this sentiment before? How many of us believe it ourselves? It is easy to assume that a content expert is automatically qualified to teach a course on his or her area of expertise. Much of the graduate-level preparation for entering university teaching is based on this assumption; graduate students study their subject areas, but little discussion is had about how to teach and what methods might be most effective. This is

*Few instructors can say that they have had an entire class period go perfectly, let alone an entire course.*

regrettable, because while content is important, the content needs to have solid pedagogy behind it in order to be effective in the classroom. Content can fall flat if all the instructor is doing is sharing the information in didactic fashion.

The concept extends to become a belief that good teachers don't need to practice. This belief is also false, as many faculty development experts know; faculty development usually means remediation, whether one is dealing with experienced administrators or new faculty.

Higher education supports this myth; if an instructor gets good ratings and is seen as a “good teacher,” then no one recommends that he or she work with a faculty developer. However, few instructors can say that they have had an entire class period go perfectly, let alone an entire course.

The reality is, there are ways to improve a class in both large and small ways every day. What works well one semester may not work well the next time the course is taught. There is always more to learn and there are always better ways to serve students.

Professional athletes continue to practice their craft. Should professional teachers do any less?

## 2

## CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

All teachers can benefit from having a grounding in the philosophy of teaching. These philosophies can give direction to a class, help to determine learning goals, and assist the instructor in measuring student (and instructor) progress. Although entire books have been written about the major theories of college student learning, a summary of four major schools of thought follows:

### WEIMER'S LEARNER-CENTERED TEACHING

Learner-centered teaching is a method of pedagogy that involves asking questions of students, getting responses, and letting the students do some of the work. This is in contrast to a teacher-centered pedagogy that involves the teacher explaining and expounding upon a subject, doing the analysis for the students. This is a move away from the “sage on the stage” mentality and into a structure that is driven more by the students.

The learner-centered model is based on a book by Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*. Weimer discusses five key changes that have to occur to redirect time both in class and out of class to help the instructor become one who puts learning first and foremost. These five key changes involve the following:

- The balance of power
- The function of content
- The role of the teacher
- The responsibility for learning
- The purpose and processes of evaluation

This concept takes the focus away from the teacher and puts it on how the students are responding to that teaching. It is about how the instructor utilizes power and how he or she uses the content; the content is not the end goal. The focus is on encouraging active learning and putting responsibility back on the students.

A particularly important aspect of this is how the instructor uses evaluations. Too often, instructors believe that evaluations are designed to sort students into “better” and “worse” categories. This model suggests that evaluations are a way to help motivate students to achieve at the highest level of which they are capable.

### CHICKERING AND GAMSON'S SEVEN EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR UNDERGRADUATE INSTRUCTION

Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson suggest seven effective practices that are particularly valuable for new faculty members to consider as they complete courses and are reviewing the results to see what they might do differently next time:

- Encourage contact between students and faculty.
- Develop cooperation among students.
- Use active learning techniques.
- Give prompt feedback.
- Emphasize time on task.
- Communicate high expectations.
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

Many writers have expanded on the original seven set up by Chickering and Gamson, and much expansion and commentary on these is available to those researching their own priorities in the classroom.

### **PERRY'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

William Perry studied students and how they develop during college. His theory centered on students' understanding of right and wrong information and opinion, and how they deal with ambiguity and differences of opinion. He identified four stages that students go through:

- **Dualism:** A common stage, particularly among students in the sciences, in which students believe that there are right and wrong answers. Students may believe that the teacher has the right answers, particularly in teacher-centered classrooms. Encouraging students to see multiple different possible answers can encourage them out of this stage, but they often embrace multiplicity.
- **Multiplicity:** Once students recognize that there is more than black and white, they might determine that all is grey. All learning may seem to be an exercise in trying to figure out what the teacher wants, and no idea seems better than any other. Students might take a dualistic view in some subjects and embrace multiplicity in others.
- **Relativism:** From multiplicity, a student can learn to differentiate among opinions and give some more weight than others, a step called relativism. Studies conducted over the past 30 years have shown that college graduates typically do not move into relativism until the first year after they graduate, so teachers of undergraduates, especially lower-level ones, may not see a great deal of relativistic thinking in their classrooms. However, an instructor's goal might be to encourage students to think that some ideas are better or more justified than others.
- **Commitment in relativism:** Ideally, instructors want their students to move into a commitment in relativism in which the students can fully articulate their views and can hold their own views while respecting the views of others. This is where argumentation really comes in.



## BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

Similar in structure to Perry's intellectual development scheme is Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy, a classification of thinking and learning in which students start by acquiring base knowledge, then move into understanding the base knowledge, applying concepts, analyzing new concepts based on knowledge, synthesizing multiple ideas, and evaluating, which requires a great deal of creativity. However, while Perry focuses on a student's approach to handling information, Bloom focuses on the tasks that a student can perform with the information in hand.

The levels, from least to most complex, are as follows:

- Knowledge
- Understanding
- Application
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

Unfortunately, many teachers stay at the lowest two rungs on the developmental ladder and design evaluations that are targeted to these levels. It is very easy to write exams based on

*Many teachers stay at the lowest two rungs on the developmental ladder and design evaluations that are targeted to these levels.*

knowledge and understanding, but designing an evaluation becomes more difficult as one moves up the taxonomic ladder.

For example, it is easy to write an exam that stays at the bottom two levels: most multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions operate at these levels. To really approach the upper

levels of Bloom's taxonomy, an instructor has to write comprehensive essay questions, design more challenging projects, and demand that students work with and apply information, rather than simply memorize and regurgitate it. This can be challenging, but some of the following strategies can help make this task easier.

# 3

## CHAPTER 3: THE 23 STRATEGIES

The 23 strategies are important tools for helping teachers improve their teaching and their courses. They are based on four important truths:

- *Teachers are made, not born.*
- *Teaching is hard work.*
- *A course develops through many small actions.*
- *Teaching can be its own best reward.*

The ability to teach is not something that one either has or does not have. Teachers are not born. Rather, they are made, through hard work, research, continual learning, and practice. Any teacher, no matter how experienced or new, can improve, and even the best teacher's skills can degrade if he or she does not pay attention to continual improvement. Teachers are made through hard work and persistence.

Likewise, the perfect course is not created and set in stone. There are many small actions that make a good course, and many of these actions need to be repeated and reexamined with every class and every year.

Therefore, becoming a good instructor who teaches quality courses is a marathon, not a sprint. By developing and honing skills, a teacher will have a long career in which the teaching itself is the best reward.

### STRATEGY #1: START WITH THE SYLLABUS

#### **Key ideas:**

- *You can never start too early.*
- *Be thorough but not exhaustive.*
- *Think like a student as you write.*

Start with the syllabus. Focusing on the syllabus at the front end helps the teacher focus his or her ideas and bring all of his or her learning philosophies together in one place. One can never start too early. The syllabus is an organic document that will continually be revised; it is a mistake to think that the syllabus is a static document that only needs dates changed to be relevant for the next term. A syllabus is an organic creation that should be changing as the teacher changes. It is also a contract between the teacher and the student, and it should be as clear as possible.

Start with the syllabus and create a rough outline, including the course schedule and the grading policy. These elements will help in planning the course.

Think also at this point about how students will address the instructor. While some

instructors prefer to be called by a first name, others believe it will undermine the authority of all teachers. Consider informing students that they do not want to call female teachers with a PhD “Mrs.” rather than “Dr.” A safe bet is to teach students to always use “Professor” unless told otherwise.

Be thorough with the syllabus but not exhaustive. This is an area in which many faculty members make mistakes. Since they correctly view the syllabus as a contract, they want to include everything that the student should or should not do. This quickly becomes a list of prohibitions, such as “no hats in class,” “no talking,” and “no tardiness.”

However, this approach undermines a sense of trust in the student. In spite of concerns the instructor may have about the youth and inexperience of students, they quickly understand

*How would you want to be treated if you were taking a course? Write a syllabus with that perspective in mind.*

how to behave in the course. Think like a student: how would you want to be treated if you were taking a course? Write a syllabus with that perspective in mind.

Think about texting in class. While it is tempting to place a prohibition against texting on the syllabus, a student who is texting in class is typically not disruptive, although the instructor may view the

behavior as insulting and rude. In this case, patience is a virtue.

Consider using a combination of brief explanations of why behavior is disruptive followed by periodic silences throughout the rest of the course when behavior becomes excessive. And, if all else fails, the instructor can reserve the right to kick a student out of class, which will at least solve the problem temporarily.

What about required elements? Some universities require faculty to include in the syllabus a statement about academic integrity and cheating, so inclusion may be as simple as cutting and pasting. However, this can still be a learning opportunity. In a first-year seminar course, consider including an activity exploring what academic integrity is, how to cite sources appropriately, and the like. Students will then perceive that this is not so much a prohibition as a chance to learn.

The same is true of including issues like a late policy. This may seem like an obvious inclusion, but often it is enough to handle these issues on a case-by-case basis. What to include on the syllabus is an issue for each individual instructor to decide, but likely one does not have to include as much in the syllabus as one thinks.

A teacher cannot control every action that occurs in the classroom. But if a teacher can patiently reflect on the actions he or she decides to take—whether it is finding a way to gently nudge a student toward paying attention or whether to ignore certain behaviors—the teacher will have a much more pleasurable experience in the classroom. This will allow teachers to thrive in the long term.

## STRATEGY #2: WRITE LEARNING GOALS

### **Key ideas:**

- *Envision exam questions.*
- *Use active verbs.*
- *Avoid “know,” “learn,” and “understand.”*

Writing learning goals is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching, and a faculty development office can be a valuable partner in helping to develop these. Although there is debate over whether or not learning goals are essential to good teaching, they can be valuable tools in organizing a course.

Learning goals should be as clear as possible for every topic because students need to know what they should be getting from the materials and how they will be assessed based on those goals. An instructor should think about the type of questions he or she wants to ask about the content, and then create the learning goals from this information. Effective learning goals will make writing exam content much easier.

Use action verbs. However, don't restrict these verbs to the lowest levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Avoid requiring students to “know,” “learn,” and “understand.” Rather, be specific about the goal. If you want a student to “memorize,” say that—then reassess whether simple memorization is really the goal.

For example:

*“Students will be able to identify and explain the economic factors contributing to the Great Depression.”*

In this example, “identify” and “explain” are active verbs that are more specific than another verb, such as “understand,” that might be substituted. The goal gives students information about what they are expected to do in a future assessment: they should be able to identify contributing factors, and they should be able to explain their relevance. This takes the goal out of the base of Bloom's taxonomy and moves it to a higher level.

## STRATEGY #3: STICK TO THE SCHEDULE

### **Key ideas:**

- *Students need structure more than flexibility.*
- *Clearly communicate any changes.*
- *Higher ratings await.*

While faculty often believe that they need to preserve their flexibility, students really want

structure much more than they want flexibility. Structure also makes the course run more smoothly.

Consider the case of changing an exam date for a student or otherwise altering the rules for one and not the class as a whole. This quickly leads to changing the rules on the fly.

Students who have built their plans for the term around meeting the goals established up front will be frustrated. In trying to make some students happy, the teacher runs the risk of frustrating others. Therefore, it is essential to stick close to the parameters established at the beginning of the class and to resist changing test dates, project deadlines, or the length of assignments. This will also reduce student confusion.

It is important to differentiate confusion about content from confusion about the course. Students will become confused about content, and it is the instructor's responsibility to help them uncover and sort out misunderstandings. However, the instructor wants to avoid

*If the students didn't understand the expectations and the majority are confused, then it is the instructor's responsibility to communicate better.*

creating confusion about the course itself. So the teacher needs to clearly communicate the course's parameters.

A good way to test this is to listen to students. If the students didn't understand the expectations and the majority are confused, then it is the instructor's responsibility to communicate better. Communication is a

two-way street, and it's too easy to blame the students. Instructors think they are being clear and that they've done their job, but if the students aren't on board, then communication could be improved.

Students like organization and one of the best ways to improve faculty and course ratings is to have a well-organized course that moves along with the syllabus and has assignments due when the syllabus indicates.

#### **STRATEGY #4: FIND A METAPHOR**

Who is the ideal teacher?

Is she a tour guide, pointing out the most interesting features of the landscape as the class progresses?

Is he a motivational coach, encouraging students so that they can succeed at difficult material?

Is she a drill sergeant, barking, "You will be quiet in my class and you will pay attention!"?

Or, is he a counselor who is there to help?

There are many in-class personalities an instructor may adopt, and while part of it depends on the course being taught, much depends on the teacher's own personality. We teach who we are, and it is difficult to divorce the teacher's personality from the content of the course.

*There are many in-class personalities an instructor may adopt, much depends on the teacher's own personality.*

This ends up being a false separation that discomforts students, so it is better to find one's own metaphor for teaching. The important exercise is to find one's metaphor and then think about what that metaphor means to teaching.

The goal of a metaphor is to help the teacher focus on his or her overall goals for each course that is taught. Teachers become better facilitators of learning when they realize that their metaphors are not usually lecturers, network news anchors, or actors. Learning is far too complex to be simply the transmission of information, yet new teachers often fall into the trap of thinking that teaching is about presenting as much information as possible to the students. That information has to be contextualized, and much of the contextualization must come from students. Teachers need to consider the course content and their own personalities because the combination helps the teachers develop metaphors and can guide professional development.

### ***Sherpa***

Consider the Sherpa, the Himalayan guide who carries the load but also leads hikers up a mountain. Some instructors view themselves as academic Sherpas. They serve as guides and sometimes they do most of the heavy lifting, but the student must take him- or herself the rest of the way up the mountain.

This can be a powerful metaphor, because the instructor does know the content more than do the students. It is not reasonable to expect students to learn all of it, so the instructor does have to do some of the heavy lifting.

However, the downside of this metaphor is that sometimes instructors feel they are doing too much of the lifting and need to put more responsibility on the students.

### ***Coach***

Another potential metaphor is about coaching. Is a university instructor an Olympic coach or one who is simply trying to get everyone not to drown? Even within the coaching metaphor, this difference in perspective makes a big difference in the classroom. If a teacher thinks she is training Olympic athletes, then she will push the class very hard

and make some draconian selections about who is able to keep up and who isn't ready for the course at that time in their educational career.

On the other hand, a teacher who thinks that all students can "learn to swim" establishes his grading policy a little differently and is perhaps a little more lenient in rewarding effort and small successes.

The coaching metaphor can lead to the instructor doing a fair amount of yelling at students, trying to motivate them. Students can grow tired of this. But in some cases, the instructor-as-coach may emulate coaches like Bobby Knight and be willing to yell at students for the greater good of learning.

However, if instructors use this metaphor appropriately, they will see that the best coaches don't even seem like they are coaching. They're helping students achieve their best performance. The instructor and the student are working together to help each individual student maximize his or her learning. The coaching metaphor works well if the instructor can give students individual recommendations.

### ***Midwife***

In the midwife metaphor, the content is out there, and the instructor is helping the students deliver the content and make the content their own. The midwife role is meant to be more supportive than the coaching role. This is a very constructivist idea.

The downside of the midwife analogy is that a student doesn't always understand the content, or gets confused. As a teacher, at some point an intervention is needed.

## **STRATEGY #5: CREATE MULTIPLE GRADING OPPORTUNITIES**

### ***Key idea:***

- *Use multiple approaches, like exams, quizzes, short writing assignments, activities in and out of class, and group projects.*

How a teacher grades a class can be an important tool for accommodating different learning styles and different students. As Weimer suggested, instructors often use grading to determine who the best students are, when grading can really be a tool to help many different student learning types become better students.

Not every type of assessment will work well with every student. Some students do well with exams and quizzes, others express themselves well through written work, while others prefer group work or presentations. While it may not be possible to include all types of assessments in a single course, including a variety is a good way to address the needs of a range of learning styles and preferences.

## STRATEGY #6: USE HIGH- AND LOW-STAKES GRADING

### Key ideas:

- *High-stakes assessments include exams, group presentations, and term papers.*
- *Low-stakes assessments include participation, short writings, quizzes, and homework.*

High-stakes grading events are ones that carry a significant amount of work for a significant proportion of the course grade. Exams, group presentations, and long-term papers are examples of high-stakes grading. A course that determines a final grade purely from a midterm and a final uses only high-stakes grading. A 20-page term paper is a high-stakes assessment, as is a formal group presentation.

Low-stakes grading events are ones that carry few points and a low percentage of the final grade. This might include short writing assignments of a page or two, quizzes, or homework. A teacher can include many more low-stakes assessments in the term, and although they are worth fewer points, over the term those points add up.

High-stakes assignments need to be reserved for special occasions, but they can be an effective way to encourage students to focus. An organic chemistry class that includes three high-stakes in-class exams in addition to occasional quizzes will motivate students to pull together information and synthesize it in preparation for the exam. Although students will feel stress over these events, that stress is an important way to encourage them to spend more time on the course material.

*High-stakes assignments need to be reserved for special occasions.*

However, instructors need to be wary of putting assignments on the syllabus that are not graded and for which the students will not receive credit. Unless some points are awarded, student will tend not to do the work. The currency of the realm is points, so if a teacher thinks an assignment is worth the students' time, it probably should have some points awarded to it. Upper-level students may require less motivation through points than do lower-level students, but even these students will make their time-management decisions based on what they are getting points for.

Likewise, consider the challenge of grading groups. The assignment itself and the goals the instructor has for the students dictate the grading, but there are three basic approaches: *Individual grades:* This is the safest way to go because students like to know that their work matters. The difficulty lies in ferreting out each student's contribution. Some projects are done together, then each student writes his or her own summary, or each student contributes one part of the project and that part is clearly demarcated.



*Combination of grades:* This is a nice compromise. One thing to consider is having students anonymously grade each of their group members' contributions. Then the teacher can modify the points accordingly so that students know they cannot loaf without a point reduction.

*One collaborative grade:* If the teacher wants to stress the collaborative nature of group work, this is a good strategy. However, it is the riskiest strategy. Students get anxious about grades when they feel like they have little control over the outcome—it can lead to unproductive stress. In this situation, the teacher needs to find ways of assuring students that the work will be fairly assessed. The teacher can also encourage them to share the final results with the entire group so that everyone knows exactly what is being turned in.

## **STRATEGY #7: RELY ON NOTES IN THE CLASSROOM**

### ***Key ideas:***

- *Don't be too proud to bring notes.*
- *The notes might be reminders of activities.*
- *If using PowerPoint, use it as notes, not as a textbook.*

What characterizes a good classroom teacher? Is it the one who knows the content so well that he or she never relies on notes?

Notes can be important tools for classroom success. Notes help ease transitions and remind the instructor to talk to students about key points. Even if jotted on a sticky note, they can be important tools for the professor to use to organize the lesson.

Some faculty make extensive use of PowerPoint presentations as a way to structure the course, and they can be effective if used as notes to cue the instructor. These presentations are less effective and less interesting if the teacher uses them as an electronic textbook, reading each slide aloud. PowerPoint presentations do not replace the student's responsibility for note-taking, and reading a complete lecture aloud is neither effective communication nor effective pedagogy.

## STRATEGY #8: INTRODUCE AND SUMMARIZE

### **Key ideas:**

- *Like a TV serial, include a recap of the last episode at the beginning and a preview of the next at the end.*
- *Don't forget to have students participate sometimes in these activities.*

The instructor is a kind of conductor of the class, and his or her responsibility is to provide a bit of a warm-up for the students to reintroduce them to the content and to get them focused on the class at hand in a day filled with other classes and responsibilities. So, one effective approach is to dedicate a few minutes at the beginning of the class to introduction and summary.

Think of classic television serials. These shows often introduced each episode with a quick recap of what happened during the last installment, then cut to where the viewer was

currently in the action. The episode would end with a cliffhanger and a preview of the next episode.

*Students want to know where the class has been, where they are going, and what they are going to be doing next time.*

This is a model for instructors to use in a class. Students want to know where the class has been, where they are going, and what they are going to be doing next time.

Include this information to help students see the overall structure.

Instructors can solicit the students' help with this task. Ask students to write "minute papers" or index cards identifying the most important point made, the muddiest point, or the one question they still have remaining. Address these in a future lecture. It is important for the instructor to introduce and summarize, but students can be involved in this process.

## STRATEGY #9: DON'T RUSH

### **Key ideas:**

- *Students learn more when they are relaxed.*
- *Try not to cram too much into each class or onto each PowerPoint slide.*

A speaker who starts rushing through his or her content creates stress. And even though there are times for creating stress—such as in advance of a high-stakes exam—it is unnecessary to stress students every day. This is what happens if the instructor runs out of time and habitually tries to finish the day's content in a rush at the end. Students learn better when they are relaxed.

There are always times when an instructor will have to drop some content or tell students that they will need to do something on their own. That's OK. Instructors often feel that unless they tell the students something or cover the material in class, they can't test on it. This is not the best strategy; it is appropriate to put some of the responsibility back on the students.

Therefore, if an instructor encounters a class in which he or she is not getting quite as much content covered as planned, the instructor should slow down and tell the students that there are a few more slides that they should look at on their own. Plan to answer the questions that arise at the beginning of the next class. Instructors should resist the tendency to try to get through everything too fast.

This concept extends to the creation of the PowerPoint slides themselves. Instructors should avoid the temptation to cram too much information onto each slide, which creates the same sort of student stress.

## **STRATEGY #10: PRACTICE PATIENCE**

### ***Key ideas:***

- *Little actions can have huge consequences.*
- *Take deep breaths.*
- *Don't respond immediately.*

Teachers everywhere are familiar with the little frustrations. Teachers get tense in class and get upset at students. Cell phones go off; students are talking to other students. They rustle papers. Someone spills a drink; someone comes in late. These are all opportunities for the teacher to set the tone of the course.

The desire to yell at the class is a natural one. However, yelling at an entire class is counterproductive and lowers the level of learning for everyone. It sets a tone that is undesirable, because students will feel bad and be on edge.

Consider the case of a cell phone that rings during class. The first time this happens is the perfect time for an instructor to decide what kind of classroom environment he or she wants to create. First, take a deep breath, then think about how to respond in a way that will address the unwanted behavior while preserving the desired tone of the course. The instructor may wish to walk over to where the cell phone is located and then wait while the student turns it off, and, most likely, apologizes. This lets the rest of the class know in a fairly humorous way that cell phones should not ring during class. The same technique might be applied when a student is texting.

Using humor in this way can be a pressure relief, and it tends to diffuse tension instead of creating it. The effective teacher should take a few seconds before acting to think through the impact of any response to a classroom situation.

## **STRATEGY #11: GRADE EFFICIENTLY**

### **Key ideas:**

- *You don't need to use multiple choice tests to grade efficiently.*
- *Low-stakes grading should be quick.*
- *High-stakes grading may require more time.*

The ideal teaching situation is one on one, but this is rarely possible in a college course. So, which grading strategy is the best compromise: multiple choice tests, not grading homework but only checking for completion, using peer review to help grade writing, or online quizzes?

None of these situations are ideal; all have limitations. There is a place for taking a cursory look through homework to see a good-faith effort and then awarding points. There is also a place for having other students give feedback before turning in a final draft, although one should not allow students to grade.

Multiple choice tests are easy to grade, but it is difficult to write good multiple choice questions that are anything other than the two lowest levels of Bloom's taxonomy. With

*If an instructor is tempted to rewrite the grammar on lab reports—that faculty member is in danger of burnout.*

online quizzes, there is the problem of cheating. A teacher can use question banks to be sure that students get different quizzes, and they can be allowed to take the quiz open book, but it is difficult to prevent the student from working with another student or having one student complete the quiz for another.

New faculty often spend too much time on grading. If an instructor is tempted to rewrite the grammar on lab reports and correct details of that level—which may be appropriate very early in the term—that faculty member is in danger of burnout through spending all his or her available time grading. A teacher has to compromise. A good instructor cannot give the kind of grades that demand hours of time, because that will stand in the way of being a good teacher. One has to find a compromise.

How about grading writing? Which strategy seems like the best compromise and which would lead to the least amount of grading: 10 one-page papers, five two-page papers, two five-page papers, or one 10-page paper?

A single 10-page paper tends to be a high-stakes assignment at the end of the term, and it leaves little room for coaching for improvement. This can be ameliorated by requiring drafts throughout the semester. However, if all the instructor is doing is assigning a grade, the grading can be fairly simple. Comments aren't required, although some justification for the grade is needed and rubrics can be a good tool. Overall, however, an instructor must avoid grading every single sentence of a long paper as if he or she were an editor of a professional journal. This will lead quickly to burnout.

However, if an instructor wants to have an opportunity to learn what is expected, perhaps two five-page papers are the better bet. One can be graded fairly hard with lots of feedback, with the second graded more easily (although the students won't know this). Five two-page papers take a great deal of time, especially early on as the instructor gives feedback to be sure that students understand expectations.

## **STRATEGY #12: GRADE WRITING EVEN MORE EFFICIENTLY**

### ***Key ideas:***

- *Use “review” functions in Word for revisions.*
- *Include summative comments only when grading.*
- *Record comments when possible.*
- *Hold student writing conferences.*
- *Use a student writing mentor.*

There are a number of additional strategies for grading writing even more efficiently. They include the following recommendations:

1. Consider using the review functions in Word for revisions. These editing tools allow you to embed comments and corrections into an electronic version of the paper. Consider having students submit their papers electronically. Then turn on “Track Changes” to correct grammar and spelling and to embed comments in the paper. Comments can also just be blanket suggestions, like “watch your grammar here.”
2. Include only summative comments when grading rather than trying to mark each individual error or issue. Like the example above, an instructor might consider just noting that a particular factual or mechanical error is repeated throughout the paper, and then leave finding these instances as an exercise for the student.
3. Some faculty members actually record comments in an MP3 format and share this with the student. This allows the instructors to talk to their students about papers, and then send the papers back with comments for revision. Once the technology is set up, some instructors find this easier, and students respond well.
4. Student writing conferences are another valuable tool. Consider having sessions where students can come to review their writing and find errors and argument problems prior to submitting a final draft.

5. Some universities have writing mentors who will come to class when there is a peer review going on and help guide the students. This can be a very effective way to provide feedback.

### **STRATEGY #13: ENCOURAGE STUDENT COLLABORATION**

#### **Key ideas:**

- *Provide time in class for out-of-class assignments.*
- *Consider Web-based collaborations.*
- *Use small discussion groups.*

Student collaboration fits in well with many of the key pedagogical principles, and it doesn't always have to take place outside of class. Students don't typically like out-of-class assignments in which they have to get together with colleagues. So in-class time is one way of handling this, as is the use of wikis, email, and other technologies that help students collaborate without having to get together in person.

*Students don't typically like out-of-class assignments in which they have to get together with colleagues.*

However, it is important not to neglect the value of in-class collaboration. Instructors should avoid the assumption that class time has to be spent simply sharing content with the students. It is possible to move some of that content outside of class and then use collaboration inside of class to help students learn.

For example, readings can obviously be completed outside of class, but blended learning techniques also make it possible to allow students to view videos, listen to recordings, and even view lectures outside of class. This frees up a great deal of time for in-class discussions, exercises, activities, and collaborations.

### **STRATEGY #14: MAXIMIZE ACTIVE LEARNING**

#### **Key ideas:**

- *Have activities for students in class.*
- *Think of ways for students to work prior to class.*
- *Show, don't tell.*

Student collaboration is a form of active learning. Students have to do things in class, and they have to do more than take notes. Although many teachers seem to think note-taking is the epitome of active learning, this is typically not the case.

Other than taking notes, a teacher might require worksheets and group projects. A jigsaw, in which the teacher assigns different students different concepts and then requires them to share those concepts and teach other people in the class, is also a valuable technique. It is a great way to get students to learn from each other.

Active learning requires making students more responsible for the lower level of knowledge before they ever come to class. Teachers who tell students to read the book before class and then use class time to lecture students on what the most important points are, are actually teaching the students that they should not do the reading because the teacher is going to tell them what they should have gotten out of the reading.

Students may have a lot of issues with learning, but one of the things they excel at is figuring out how to maximize their efficiency in the course. They won't do work unless there's some kind of grade associated with it. They will figure out what they have to do to prepare for class, and if a class is required to simply sit down and take notes, they will not prepare much ahead of time.

If, however, a teacher uses a worksheet and tells the class that, having done the reading, they will now get together in groups and work on the worksheet, the instructor can circle and listen to the conversations. Those who did not do the reading will be obvious and can be counseled on a case-by-case basis.

## **STRATEGY #15: INCORPORATE TECHNOLOGY**

### ***Key ideas:***

- *Definitely use email, your course management system, and Web resources.*
- *Consider adding blogs, wikis, Twitter, online quizzes, drop boxes, chat rooms, Facebook pages and message boards.*

Think about technology. Some are scared of it. Some hate it. Some view it as a necessary evil. And some think it is the best thing since blackboards.

Technology can be a wonderful tool. Students are generally more comfortable with technology than instructors expect. And if instructors have a solid support staff, they can take advantage of this resource to more effectively use the technology at hand. It is a good idea to make friends with the instructional designers and the IT support staff. These folks can help integrate technology into classes, keep the technology up to date, and bail an instructor out of the occasional jam.

Some of the most important technologies for instructors to learn to use and include are e-mail, the university's course management system, and Web resources. Find out which technologies the university uses and become familiar with them. These are the basic instructional technologies, much as blackboards and chalk once were.

Instructors may also wish to use blogs, wikis, Twitter, online quizzes, drop boxes, chat rooms, and message boards. These technologies can make nice additions to a course if they are used well by an instructor. Take the time to investigate these and use only the ones that support the pedagogy behind the course.

## **STRATEGY #16: LIMIT YOUR AVAILABILITY**

### ***Key ideas:***

- *Students expect your availability, kind of like an ATM.*
- *Faculty need to delineate hours that they are available around without being overbearing.*

Technology facilitates a great deal of communication, but the down side is that students may come to expect 24/7 availability. Like an ATM, they expect an instructor to be available for a “withdrawal” any time they need information. Faculty need to delineate the hours they are around without being overbearing.

This is a difficult challenge for many beginning teachers. Some experienced faculty at research universities have gotten very practiced at limiting their availability, but most beginning teachers want to be there for their students, working with them one on one. This is not typically possible.

Instead, teachers need to learn to use resources like the learning center, which typically has tutoring hours, or peer mentors, undergraduates who are in the class. Class-based active learning activities help as well.

A teacher cannot be there to bring every student up to the level they want to be at; students need to do some of that on their own and figure out what they need individually. So instructors need to set office hours and be there, but have other work to do in case students don’t show up. And instructors don’t need to feel that they have to always be available, especially with respect to technological communication.

Some instructors handle this by setting policies about when they will check email. For example, one might choose to check email first thing in the morning, and then not again until the next morning. Anyone who emails during the day needs to be aware that the message won’t be answered until the next day. It is the student’s responsibility to think a bit ahead and realize that the instructor will not always be available.



## STRATEGY #17: TRUST YOUR STUDENTS

### **Key ideas:**

- *Learning is pleasurable; find a way to help students discover that.*
- *If you build it, they will come.*
- *Deal with breaches of trust individually.*

Many instructors believe that they need to adopt a rule-enforcement persona in the classroom. Syllabi become filled with prohibitions against specific behaviors and limitations on making up work or being excused from class. However, the reality is that students generally want to learn, and if the instructor trusts them, this will happen.

Should an instructor require notification or a doctor's note if an exam is missed before allowing the student to make up the exam? Until a student gives reason not to be trusted, this is probably not necessary. Students typically provide instructors with ample notification and usually do have a doctor's note, if applicable. Trusting students establishes a power relationship with the expectation that everyone is honest and hardworking. However, there is often a breaking point at which this trust has been abused, and instructors need to be aware of where that line is for their classes.

Consider the common case in which a student approaches the instructor asking for a review session, stating that the entire class needs the review. The instructor may choose to politely decline, to explain that review is a student responsibility, to sigh and offer the review session, or to enthusiastically offer to organize one. The response is a highly individual one, depending on the personality and mood of the teacher and the construction of that particular course.

Although the offering of a review is certainly dependent on a number of factors, the most important element in play is trust of the students. Most students are there because they want to learn, even if sometimes they are not sure they are in the mood to learn anything new that particular day. At minimum, they want a good grade in the class.

Another typical case is the use of laptops in the classroom. While laptop computers can be a tremendous boon for student note-taking, research, and collaboration in the classroom, they can also bring a great deal of distraction in the form of chat programs, social media, and off-topic Web surfing.

Again, this is a time to trust the students. Walk around a lot if possible so students will not be surfing inappropriate sites, but ultimately trust the students. The student who is not taking notes but who is not disturbing anyone else is harming only him- or herself. Consider the class's attendance policy. If the instructor is forcing the attendance of students who clearly want to be elsewhere, are there more creative ways to compel attendance and participation?

Overall, students want the instructor to help them learn. They don't simply want to pass the class time engaged in something that is boring. Instead, they will rise to the challenge of activities, active learning, and collaboration. While older teachers may have reached the point of advising that students are out to take advantage of the system, the truth is that most are honest, caring, and possess a desire to work efficiently.

## **STRATEGY #18: ACCEPT COMPROMISE**

### **Key ideas:**

- *No one teaches the perfect course.*
- *The question isn't whether to compromise; it's when to compromise.*
- *The main concern is student learning.*

Compromise is its own effective teaching strategy. It is important that a teacher not be too hard on him- or herself. No one can ever teach the perfect course. Every teacher has to learn to accept compromise, whether that be giving preference to the teacher's needs in offering a review session, saying "no" to students, limiting availability, or giving multiple choice tests. While no teacher will want to make all those compromises in a single course, compromise is inevitable.

Compromises can take many forms, including compromise on how much or how deeply to cover content, how strictly to grade, and how closely to monitor student behavior. Any course will ultimately be different from how the teacher envisions it before it starts, but this is the result of compromise. This compromise can be a positive tool to aid student learning.

*The question is not whether a teacher will need to compromise, but when.*

The question is not whether a teacher will need to compromise, but when. As long as a teacher takes steps to become better and places the focus on student learning, compromise is acceptable.

## **STRATEGY #19: FIND A MENTOR**

### **Key ideas:**

- *Your mentor does not need to be in the same discipline.*
- *A mentor will help you feel less alone.*
- *Meet via lunches, quiet talks, visiting each other's classes, and sharing suggested readings.*

New teachers will particularly benefit from finding a mentor. This mentor does not need to be in the same discipline, nor does the new teacher need to limit mentoring to a single

mentor. A teacher might choose one mentor to help with technology and another to help construct a syllabus. Or a mentor may be assigned by the university.

A university mentor program may provide the only mentor an instructor ever needs, but it is more likely that the instructor will decide to select other mentors. Regardless, the new instructor should find regular times to meet with his or her mentor and discuss issues, triumphs, and challenges that arise in the course. A mentor is valuable as an experienced member of the profession who is outside of the chain of supervision of the new instructor. The mentor can suggest courses of action or improvements in strategy without impacting the new instructor's chances at promotion and tenure. Even more-experienced instructors might select a mentor in a new area (like online instruction) or to give a new perspective.

A mentor will help a new instructor feel less alone in his or her endeavors. Consider meeting for lunches and quiet talks, visiting one another's classes, or asking the mentor for suggested readings.

## **STRATEGY #20: STUDENT RATINGS CAN HELP**

### ***Key ideas:***

- *Try reading evaluations with a beverage.*
- *Utilize a colleague.*
- *Don't read evaluations immediately.*

Some instructors dread or hate student evaluations; some view them as a necessary evil, while others find that they help. However, student ratings of a course often contain some helpful nuggets of information. It is important to take these in.

Once the instructor is settled into a comfortable chair with an adult beverage, it is time to begin the process of reviewing student evaluations of the course. Hopefully, the university will have a mechanism in place to protect student anonymity; otherwise, it is helpful to remind students not to put their names on the evaluations. The point is the content, not who wrote it.

Take evaluations for what they are—the perspectives of students who have just finished the course but who have not yet gone on to use the material in future classes or in a “real world” context. If there are comments that the material will not be useful in the future, it is important for the instructor to evaluate—perhaps with the assistance of a mentor—whether that is true. Often, an instructor can see uses for material the students cannot, but perhaps that use could be made clearer in future courses.

Also, consider comments on teaching style and assignment effectiveness. While any given class should have a range of opinions about these topics, and each class will likely have at

least one student who loved and one who hated any given aspect of a course, the prevailing opinion may give some intelligence about what worked well and what missed the mark. The instructor might choose to take these comments into consideration when planning the next iteration of the course.

Finally, an instructor might consider waiting a short period before reading student evaluations. While the students must necessarily write their comments in the heat of the moment of a finished course (sometimes, it is even the last activity after the final exam), it is not necessary for instructors to read the comments in the exhaustion following final grading. Wait long enough to gain some emotional distance from the course, and then take a look to learn what can be improved and what went well.

## **STRATEGY #21: UTILIZE UNDERGRADUATES**

### ***Key idea:***

- *Use undergraduates as peer mentors, writing fellows, or tutors.*

Instructors often underuse undergraduates in their courses, but they can be a valuable resource. Solicit volunteers who will work through the learning center, or pay students as peer tutors. Use undergraduates who may have done well in this course or a similar one to become peer mentors, writing fellows, or tutors, or to facilitate in-class activities.

The use of undergraduates might mirror the traditional use of graduate students in the classroom. With good supervision, these more-experienced students can add another perspective to the course and help provide individualized attention while taking some of the weight off the primary instructor.

## **STRATEGY #22: READ ABOUT PEDAGOGY**

### ***Key ideas:***

- *Read pedagogy in your field.*
- *Students can learn content from the text.*
- *Helping students to learn is more important than overwhelming them with knowledge.*

Instructors often rely on colleagues for advice, asking next-door neighbors, office mates, or others in the discipline for help. However, it is important to read about pedagogy in the field and in other fields. Helping students to learn is more important than overwhelming them with knowledge.

Good basic theory is included in the philosophy section of this white paper, and a great way to learn more about pedagogy is to read some of these classic works. However, there is a great deal of pedagogical thought that is specific to disciplines, and instructors of every level can continue to learn by reading about the thinking in various fields.

### **STRATEGY #23: REMEMBER YOURSELF**

***Key ideas:***

- *Don't lose yourself to teaching.*
- *Take breaks in your quarter/semester.*
- *Maintain hobbies.*

Above all, an instructor should be careful not to lose him- or herself to teaching. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Most instructors get into teaching because they love students, the content, or, ideally, both. With appropriate self-care, the instructor can be one who loves his or her job so much that he or she never wants to retire. It is important to allow some breaks in the term and to maintain hobbies outside the classroom. This will work against burnout.

Teaching can be a lifetime journey, but in order for the teacher to make the journey intact, he or she needs to practice self-care. Be willing to accept compromises and to care about students, but care within a clear set of guidelines about what the instructor can and cannot do for the students. If a teacher maintains his or her well-being, he or she will be a better teacher for many years to come.

## APPENDIX A: SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

### “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” by Chickering and Gamson

Answer the following questions by filling in the chart below. What activities can you design to help students learn? Carefully consider each of the practices recommended by Chickering and Gamson, and then identify a component of your course that might accomplish the practice.

Good practice	I can accomplish this by..
1. Encourage contact between students and faculty.	
2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.	
3. Use active learning techniques.	
4. Give prompt feedback.	
5. Emphasize time on task.	
6. Communicate high expectations.	
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.	

### Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice by Maryellen Weimer

In this activity, consider each of the changes proposed by Weimer to help create a learner-centered environment. Then answer the question associated with each change. Make sure you understand the change being proposed and then write some ideas about the best way to enact the recommendation.

Key change	I can accomplish this by...
1. The balance of power: how can you share power with students?	
2. The function of content: think time on task.	
3. The role of the teacher: how does your role as teacher benefit the learner?	
4. The responsibility for learning: how can you make students more responsible?	
5. The purpose and processes of evaluation: how can grades promote learning?	

## APPENDIX B: SHIBLEY'S RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR NEW FACULTY

*Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* by Charles Bonwell and James Eison

Every faculty member should be aware of the value of active learning strategies. If you have no idea what active learning is then read this book.

*Advice for New Faculty Members* by Robert Boice

The first book is more recent but the second book is more concise. I like both of them and probably would recommend the first simply because you can always skim. Some of the sections are worth reading in their entirety.

*Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* by Stephen Brookfield

If you choose this book, focus on the first half. Brookfield likes to talk about himself, which is a shame because his ideas speak for themselves. This is one of those books that might cause a paradigm shift in your thinking.

*Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Tom Angelo and K. Patricia Cross

This book is chock full of useful suggestions to gauge how well your students are learning. You won't read this cover to cover, but it's a valuable resource and the most popular book on higher education ever published by Jossey-Bass.

*Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* by Gerald Graff

A book about argument in the classroom. Graff describes using arguments to motivate critical thinking in a fun, captivating way. I've used parts of his book when I teach philosophy of science.

*Cooperative Learning for Higher Education* by Barbara Millis and Philip Cottell

Filled with useful information about a subject that many college teachers don't think about. Since you're working in higher education you should start thinking about group work.

*Creating Learner-Centered Classrooms: What Does Learning Theory Have to Say?* by Fran Stage, P. Muller, J. Kinzie, and A. Simmons

This book describes learning theories with clarity—so much theory seems to obfuscate learning rather than clarify it for me. If you have any interest at all in educational psychology then you'll want to choose this book.

*The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer

If you've already taught before and don't know of this book, perhaps you should read it. The book is a bit heavy on the spiritual/emotional side for me, but it's a book that is quite honestly adored by many, many teachers.

*Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* by John Bean

The single best book I've read on using writing to promote thinking, and it's now in its second edition. Filled with a mixture of theory and practice, I refer to this book constantly and sing its praises when I present at educational forums for science teachers.



*How People Learn* by Bransford, et al.

If you want empirical evidence on why you should avoid lecturing whenever possible, this is the definitive source. There is so much information in this book that you'll find yourself telling anyone near you about one study or another that's described in the book. An absolutely outstanding book.

*Learner-Centered Teaching* by Maryellen Weimer

*Inspired College Teaching* by Maryellen Weimer

Weimer is my friend and mentor. She's an insightful thinker and talented writer. I'd highly recommend either of these books.

*Redesigning Higher Education: Producing Dramatic Gains in Student Learning* by Lion Gardiner

Gardiner is one of my pedagogical heroes and I finally got to sit on a panel with him a few years ago. This book is slim but powerful. I've practically adopted Gardiner's ideas in toto. When I reread the book recently I was amazed at how many of his ideas I have committed to memory.

*Teaching with Classroom Response Systems* by Derek Bruff

A book about using clickers effectively. I use clickers in most courses and think they can change the way your students learn. The use of technology to engage students is something you'll want to embrace. Why not start with this book?

*Teaching What You Don't Know* by Therese Huston

This just came out and I raced through it. Since many new teachers are "content novices," many of Huston's ideas will apply to you. This a well-written, thoughtful book about teaching in general and especially for teaching courses you feel unprepared to teach.

*What the Best College Teachers Do* by Ken Bain

Bain presents the results of a 15-year study examining more than 60 teachers across the country who consistently win awards and whose students demonstrate learning. A concise book that provides global ideas about teaching well.

*Women's Ways of Knowing* by Belenky, et al.

If you want to understand how teachers can work to keep students from feeling marginalized, this is a great book. This is a book that I love because it hits at the heart of why I teach: to make the world a more tolerable place for all people. I don't think you can read this book and not be moved.

## APPENDIX C: HAPPY READING! SHIBLEY'S FAVORITE ARTICLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MENTEES

“A Portrait of the Artist as Apprentice” by Jay Parini (2001): This short piece from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* condenses some of my views about the mentoring process.

“From Teaching to Learning—A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education” by Barr and Tagg (1995): If you read only one article in this collection, it should be this one. This piece clearly articulates the pedagogical agenda for the next 20 years. The authors clearly state why we should focus on learning instead of teaching. I have heard Carl Lovitt say that our colleges need to make the shift from talking about teaching to talking about learning. It's not just semantics. This article has been one of the most cited articles since it appeared. It's a true classic and has had a huge positive impact on higher education.

“Good Teaching: A Matter of Living the Mystery” by Parker Palmer (1990): This article is one of the best for reminding yourself why you teach!

“Confidence in the Classroom: 10 Maxims for New Teachers” by James Eison (1990): Although Palmer's article is motivational, if you only have time for one other article, this should be it. Eison's suggestions are based on a solid body of research, and if you adopt all 10 of them in toto, I guarantee you will help your students to learn more! Of all 10 maxims, the second, “Examine Why You Want to Teach,” may be the one to keep at the forefront. This profession can get demoralizing, but it's one of the noblest professions I know. Teach who you are and students will respond.

“Evaluating and Grading Students” by Marilla Svinicki (1999): A useful, practical guide to determine how to assess student work. This is from a faculty handbook at the University of Texas. Although it's quite detailed, and may be better saved for later, the advice is quite solid and will put your assessment policies on firm ground.

“Writing a Syllabus” by Altman and Cashin (1992): The syllabus is the single most important document you will ever write in your entire career. My syllabi get better every year, but you need some type of guidance to aid in the improvement of your syllabi. This guide will help—as will discussion with your mentor when you start to create your syllabi for the spring.

“Collaborative Learning and Teaching” from CELT, the Center for Learning and Teaching at University Park: This article, combined with Roberta Matthews' piece, will introduce what I think is one of the most powerful learning tools you can utilize in the classroom. Collaborative learning has changed the way I teach for the better. It has been quite an experience for me, and it has taken nearly four years to get where I am now, but it's exciting, challenging, and fun, and best of all it improves students' attitudes and learning!

“Collaborative Learning: Creating Knowledge with Students” by Roberta Matthews (1996): This is from one of Weimer’s edited collections. This article is bit long but it covers a lot of ground and will hopefully serve as motivation for you to implement collaborative learning in your classes. As with all pedagogical tools, you’ll need to implement this technique gradually over the years. Start with one or two classes a semester, and then extend it to once a week and then maybe to the entire course. The article will help you figure out how—as will your mentor!

“Rethinking Academic ‘Excellence’” by Alexander Astin (1999): Astin is one of the gurus of higher ed. He has had more of an impact on higher education than probably any other single person. His book, *Four Critical Years Revisited: What Matters in College* (which you can borrow sometime if you get really ambitious), is the most cited book in higher education literature. He has thought extensively about what it means to be excellent as a college graduate. Astin has inspired me to educate students as citizens first and as members of a particular academic field a distant second. I don’t teach chemistry, mostly because of Astin; I teach why chemistry is important to an educated citizen. The article doesn’t have practical advice but it will give you some insight into what your mentor thinks is important in college.

“Pedagogy of the Oppressed” by Jane Tompkins (1990): One of my very favorite articles! The title is a pun on the title of an earlier book that introduced Paulo Freire’s conscientization theory, which deals with helping students to connect important issues in their lives with their education. Tompkins likens discussions of teaching with discussions of sex: we tend not to do either. Part of what I hope to accomplish as a mentor is to help you to feel comfortable discussing teaching. So this article is my way of inviting you to talk about your classroom—it doesn’t have to be a closed door. And I think the article will make you smile; it’s fun.

“Developing Writing, Then Teaching, Amongst New Faculty” by Robert Boice (1995): This article is quite long but provides a nice summary of Boice’s work with new faculty. Boice helped me in my quest for tenure more than any other author. I greatly admire this man, and his advice is sound.

## APPENDIX D: SAMPLE SYLLABUS

### LEARNING COMMUNITY ON BIOETHICS

#### PHIL 132: Introduction to Bioethics

#### PSU 005: First-Year Seminar

Fall 2010

MWF 11:00–11:50, Luerssen 1A; F Noon–12:50 Luerssen 1A

Maureen Dunbar 17L x6328 med18@psu.edu Office hours: MWF 2–3 PM	Zach Weisman zcw5011@psu.edu Peer Mentor	Ike Shibley 234L x6185 ias1@psu.edu Office hours: MWF 10–11 AM
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#### Required Texts:

*Strength in What Remains* by Tracy Kidder

*Writings on an Ethical Life* by Peter Singer

*Handle with Care* by Jodi Picoult

*An Introduction to Bioethics* by Shannon/Kockler

*Ethics* by Aristotle

*The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy

*The New York Times*

#### Grading Policy:

A (92–100%)	C+ (78–79%)
A- (90–91%)	C (70–77%)
B+ (88–89%)	D (60–69%)
B (82–87%)	F (less than 60%)
B- (80–81%)	

**PHIL 132**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Points per Assignment</b>	<b>Total Points</b>
Discussion sheets	12 @ 10 points each	120 points
Quizzes	12 @ 25 points each	300 points
Attendance/participation		30 points
<b>Total</b>		<b>450 points</b>

**PSU 5**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Points per Assignment</b>	<b>Total Points</b>
Campus Life	Attend three events	30 points
Workshops	Attend four workshops	40 points
Common reading	Attend one event	10 points
Attendance/participation		20 points
<b>Total</b>		<b>100 points</b>

**Discussion sheets:** Every reading assignment requires that you complete a discussion sheet. Every Monday you need to hand one in at the beginning of class. The sheet needs to consist of three parts, typed, usually on a single page:

1. **Summary:** Write a one-paragraph summary of the reading in complete sentences, making sure to include the main argument in the reading.
2. **Evaluation:** Write a paragraph in which you react to the reading. Some questions to consider: Was it useful? In what ways did it make you think? Was it well written? Was the topic pertinent? Please do not simply answer each question. Write a complete paragraph about the article as if you were writing to a friend to describe whether the article helped you to learn.
3. **Definitions:** You need to select three words that you either do not know the definition for or words that you are not sure of the exact definition for and define those words.

**Quizzes:** Every Friday at noon there will be a quiz. The quiz will cover the reading material for the week as well as class discussions. A few questions will be taken from the reading for Friday from The New York Times. The quizzes will be a mixture of multiple choice, short answer, and essay.

**Attendance/participation:** You must attend class every day. We don't know how to state this more simply, but inevitably at the end of the semester a student approaches us and asks why his or her grade dropped just because he or she missed a few classes. If you must miss a class, please email or phone one of us. If we don't hear from you and you miss class, the class will be considered unexcused and you will lose 10 points from your attendance grade. If chronic absence becomes an issue early in the course and it becomes obvious that you cannot pass the course, you will have to drop the course.

**Disability Services:** Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the university's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for modifications or reasonable accommodations in this course, contact Susan Anderson in the Office for Disability Services, located at 153 Franco, at 1-610-396-6410 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the office's website at [www.equity.psu.edu/ods](http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods).

**Academic Integrity:** *49-20 Penn State University Academic Integrity Policy*

"Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at the Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the university community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the university's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights, and property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the university community and compromise the worth of work completed by others."

**PHIL 132S/PSU 5 Schedule**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Phil 132</b>	<b>PSU5</b>
8/23-8/27	What Is Ethics? Singer, 7-17 Shannon, 5-7, 28-34	Campus Tour
8/30-9/3	Aristotle: I i, vii; II i, v-vii; VI i-vii, xii	Learning and Writing Center Cuseo Chapter 1
9/8-9/10	Aristotle: VIII i-iii, viii; IX iv, v, ix, x; X i, iv, vii	General Education Cuseo Chapter 2
9/13-9/17	Philanthropy: Singer, 105-117	Time Management Cuseo Chapter 4
9/20-9/24	<i>Strength in What Remains</i>	Common Reading
9/27-10/1	Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide Singer, 194-200 Shannon, 168-195	Officer Rudy Alcohol Awareness Cuseo Chapter 13
10/4-10/8	<i>The Death of Ivan Ilyich</i>	<i>Wit</i>
10/11-10/15	Taking Life: The Embryo and the Fetus Singer, 146-164 Shannon, 67-87	E-Lion/Scheduling Cuseo Chapter 10
10/18-10/22	Reproductive Technologies and Early Diagnosis Shannon, 89-125	George Neubert
10/25-10/29	Genetic Engineering Shannon, 201-249	Co-op Office
11/1-11/5	Stem Cell Research Shannon, 250-269	Career Center—Tish Jepsen Cuseo Chapter 11
11/8-11/12*	<i>Handle with Care</i>	<i>My Sister's Keeper</i>
11/15-11/19	Environmental Ethics: Singer, 86-102 Shannon, 302-311	Open Discussion with Zach
11/29-12/3	Animal Rights: Singer, 28-46	<i>Food, Inc.</i>
12/6-12/10	Animal Rights: Singer, as assigned	Focus Group/End-of-Course Evaluations

\* Late drop period ends

**Weekly schedule:**    **Monday:**    Discussion sheets due  
                                   **Wednesday:**    *New York Times* choices (bring Tuesday's to class)  
                                   **Friday:**            Quiz

## APPENDIX E: HOW TO READ STUDENT RATINGS FOR NEW FACULTY

### Background Information

- Student ratings are one of the most studied aspects of college teaching.
- Student ratings are good as global indicators of teaching effectiveness.
- Students *are* qualified to rate how much they think they learned in a course.
- Students *are* qualified to rate the fairness of a teacher.
- Students *are* qualified to rate the level of workload involved in a course.
- Students *are* qualified to rate the teacher's pace, volume, clarity, organization, and other observable behaviors.
- Students *are not* qualified to rate the depth of the material or the teacher's knowledge of the subject.
- Students *are not* qualified to rate the content validity of the textbook.
- Students *are not* qualified to rate the scholarship of the teacher.
- Student ratings remain essentially constant for a given instructor in a given course over time.
- Student ratings primarily measure learning, not popularity.
- When students are asked several years after completing a course to rate the teacher again, the ratings are essentially the same as when the students took the course
- Few students when surveyed agree with the statement "The best teacher I ever had was the one I hated the most."
- Courses with 20 students are generally rated higher, but only slightly, than courses with 200 students.
- Although many faculty console themselves when they get low ratings by saying that they are "tough," giving every student an A will not usually mean higher ratings.
- In a course with many sections that employ a common final exam, students of teachers with higher ratings do better on the exam.
- If two different people teach the same course, the ratings for teaching the course will often be very different, because students tend to rate the teacher, not the course.
- According to research, significant gaps exist between student and faculty perceptions of student ratings.
- Most researchers agree that student evaluation of teaching (SET) should be included in promotion and tenure decisions.
- Despite the importance of SET, more and more recent articles have focused on its misuse.
- On a scale of 1-5, there is probably not a significant difference between 4.2 and 4.4.



### Recommendations for Reviewing SETs

- Find a trusted colleague to help you review SETs.
- Make a list *prior* to reading the SETs about what worked and what didn't work in your courses.
- Ignore comments that are personal attacks; focus instead on substantive comments about your teaching.
- Make a list of changes that might help you improve the learning environment of the course the next time you teach it.
- Consider doing a mid-semester evaluation if you try something different the next time you teach the course: mid-semester evaluations show students that you care about their opinions, especially if you make changes to the course based on their suggestions (and your ratings will probably be higher at the end).

### Case Study

Pat and Sean are meeting for lunch at a delicatessen near campus at the beginning of Pat's second semester of teaching after finishing graduate school. Sean is a teacher with 15 years of experience at the institution who has been assigned to mentor Pat. The reason for the meeting is that student ratings from the previous semester have just been sent out. After exchanging a few pleasantries and deciding what to order, the two teachers begin an earnest discussion.

Pat: I don't know what to make of my student ratings. First of all, I have no idea how to read these numbers. Should I be worried? I taught two sections of the same course and got different ratings for each section, which I don't understand. Then I was rated high on my content knowledge but low on fairness, which I really don't understand. Oh, and some of the written comments are brutal.

Sean: Okay, let's look at one issue at a time. Let me start by saying that student ratings are always hard to take, even for experienced instructors. Criticism is often difficult to hear. Many of the "brutal" comments may have been unjustified. Still, I think that if we try, we can make at least some sense of these ratings. First of all, let me ask whether you taught differently between the two sections.

Pat: No, that's just it. Maybe I was a little more prepared for the second section, but that's the section that was rated lower! I know that I liked teaching the first section better. They seemed more alert.

Sean: Are there things that you did to make them more alert?

Pat: Not that I can think of. I really thought I taught the two classes pretty much the same way.

Sean: But you said that you liked the first section better. Do you think your attitude about the second section might have been apparent to the students?

Pat: Hmm, I'll have to think about that. My first reaction is no, but I can't be sure. I joked more with students in the first section, but that's because several students seemed to laugh at my jokes. The students asked better questions in the first section as well. And I knew a few more names in my first section.

Sean: That's interesting. So there do seem to be some differences that might account for the difference in the ratings.

Pat: Maybe. But what about the numbers? I mean 2.5 on a 5.0 scale: does that mean I failed? My first section was a 3.1: how much better is that?

Sean: I'm not sure anyone looks at a 2.5 and says that you failed because you got 50%. I think the average for our school is 3.9, so your scores are on the low side. The difference between the two sections may be significant. It may be that the students in one class were just more attuned to your teaching style. It happens. Look, the good news for you as a starting teacher is that your scores can be improved. I can tell you from experience the administration likes to see improvement, so a 2.5 and a 3.1 are not the end of the world. Let's talk about improvement.

Pat: Sigh. I have no idea how to improve. I'm not sure I'm ready to teach a whole lot differently. I thought I did okay.

Sean: Let's look at some of the concrete comments you received: you mentioned knowledge and fairness, I think.

Pat: Yes. I'm glad I got high marks on knowledge. I worked really hard to bring as much of my training from grad school to the course as I could. I thought I was really fair. I'm not even sure I know what students are looking for when they talk about fairness. I certainly didn't show any favoritism. And the tests were almost verbatim from ideas in class and the book. Boy, another low area was enthusiasm.

Sean: There are some definite things students are looking for when they talk about fairness. But what do you think is going on with enthusiasm?

Pat: (agitated) Well, even in the better section, they rated me low on enthusiasm. Do they expect to be entertained? Do they expect me to be some sort of stand-up comedian? If so, they can forget about it. I'll just learn to toughen up and live with low marks on enthusiasm!

Sean: I know this is a sensitive issue, but I think the calmer you can be as we talk about these ratings, the more progress we'll make in trying to get some useful information from them.

Pat: Yeah, I'm sorry. I'm just so frustrated.

Sean: While I can understand that, the stark reality is that student ratings carry a lot of weight. You don't have to entertain the students, but you can take some steps to improve your ratings without compromising your integrity. You talked about jokes with your class, so you seem to entertain them a little. Teaching doesn't have to be serious all the time. I think you may have to think about how much you want to let the atmosphere in the course be more fun. This might be a rich area for you to think about. Let's talk about the written comments you received.

Pat: Oh, man. One student said that I seemed like an uptight teacher from some prep school. Another claimed that I should get someone to dress me in the morning. Come on, what is this?

Sean: Many of those kinds of comments are best forgotten. Unless the student is providing feedback germane to the learning, you can probably ignore it. I know it is much easier said than done, but honestly, you don't want to change your personality; you simply want to become a better teacher who gets better ratings.

Pat: Right now I'll just take better ratings.

Sean: I'm not sure what to say. I mean, I am not an expert teacher by any means, so trying to give

you advice right now seems somewhat arrogant on my part. I just...well, I really think you can learn something from these ratings, and I guess I believe you can improve your teaching and not just your ratings. I do care about helping students learn, otherwise we wouldn't be talking about this subject.

Pat: I care about learning, too. Someone I know in another department told me that ratings don't count for much in promotion decisions, so right now I'm just ready to forget about the evaluations and focus on teaching my courses this semester. Can I just not give evaluations for future classes?

Sean: The institution mandates that we evaluate every section that we teach. Let's get back to the ratings you just got. Did you come up with the open-ended questions yourself?

Pat: No, I used the ones the department chair recommended. I asked three questions: what the students liked best, what they liked least, and any suggestions for improvement.

Sean: Those questions leave things too open for students, which may be why you got the crack about your clothes. Next time, maybe I can help you write a few specific questions that will help you figure out what to change for future classes. Were there any comments that seem relevant to your teaching?

Pat: Well...one student said that he couldn't use most of the quizzes to study for the midterm because I took several weeks to grade and return the quizzes. But, man, I was busy. And another student suggested that I be clearer about what I plan to test on. In fact, several students said that. I know that some questions were confusing, and I know that I'll change some of those questions next time I teach this course.

Sean: Okay, so there are several areas to work on. We can talk about those in more detail...we'll also talk about mid-semester evaluations and peer reviews.

### Questions for Reflection

1. How would you characterize the relationship between Sean and Pat?
2. How does Sean help keep the conversation focused on ratings rather than letting the lunch turn into a complaint session about students and the school?
3. The subjects that Sean and Pat teach are not mentioned. Should Sean and Pat be in the same discipline to make the conversation more meaningful? Did you have a particular subject in mind while you read, and would knowing the subject they teach affect your reading of the case?
4. What do you think about Sean's advice?
5. What other types of questions does Sean need to ask to help Pat make sense of the student ratings?
6. The names are gender neutral. Did you have specific gender in mind as you read? How might gender play a role in the conversation?
7. Age is not mentioned, either. We might assume that Pat is younger because he or she has just finished graduate school, but people often attend graduate school relatively late in life. Would an age difference change your view of the conversation?
8. How does your own bias of ratings influence your reading of this case study? Do ratings measure student learning?

## Resources

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