Best Practices in Teaching

Compiled from Faculty Suggestions

The Arthur J. Samberg Institute for Teaching Excellence
I have been struggling with what to say. First I had a list of trivialities (come prepared, give feedback etc) and then a personal list that works for me but may not work for others (such as get a good haircut, hand out popcorn, etc). I feel it is ultimately a personal thing. One needs to see what works for oneself and be comfortable with it. So it is -- excuse the tacky term -- more Zen-like than a "standard operating procedure" might ever be.

-- Bernd Schmitt

Another thought: the Latin word for education is educare which means "to draw out”. I think this is a valuable guidepost to have in mind.

– Ralph Biggadike

Good teaching requires two things. First is thorough knowledge of the material (this allows us to qualify). Second is presentation, the orchestration of each lecture with relevant examples, anecdotes and great organization (this allows us to win).

-- Nelson Fraiman

There are some absolutes:
- Students will notice if you don’t care much about them.
- Students will notice if you're disorganized.
- Students will notice if you're unprepared.

If you care about the product you deliver, these won't be a problem.

– Charles Jones

You have to remember that even the best of your students are listening to you less than 50% of the time. –Bruce Greenwald
Daniel Ames – Management

- Distributing handouts of slides at the beginning of the class, and prohibiting the use of laptops, keeps everyone focused on the discussion rather than writing or typing (students usually request two slides per page on three-hole punched paper)
- Roadmaps in lecture materials are crucial; students appreciate having an organizing framework or roadmap that helps them put a particular class in the context of the course and that helps them track where they are in a given class (e.g., "Today, we'll deal with X, a critical component of course topic Y; in the first half, we'll review three aspects of short-term X and then we'll conclude by discussing long-term X"); return to the roadmap at each transition within class so students can track where the lecture is
- Students appreciate it when distributed handouts of lecture materials are reasonably stand-alone (i.e., they convey some/much meaning without the lecture itself); this helps greatly in initial understanding and later in review; this implies creating bullet points that contain meaningful phrases or sentences rather than simple lists of words or jargon that, without further explanation, convey very little
- Using multiple modes helps reinforce key teaching points: readings, lecture, discussion, exercises, and videos

Asim Ansari – Marketing

- It is important to be thoroughly prepared and organized. That means knowing what the lecture is and what to say on each slide.
- It is crucial to be relaxed. This helps in answering questions and in handling of the discussions.
- I use few slides, each having little content spelt out. This helps the discussion. If everything is written on a slide, there is not much to discuss.
- It is important to curb the tendency to hurry through or to answer questions yourself, instead of letting the discussion build up in the classroom.
- There are times when I don't know the answer to a particular question. It is best in such circumstances to admit that you don't know and move on, rather than try to formulate a convoluted way out.

Sid Balachandran – Accounting

- Provide an overview of what we will cover in Managerial Accounting, and what the takeaways from each part of the course are. Discuss this overview at the beginning of the course, use the overview to put course material in context during the course, and go over it together again at the end so the students can compare their understanding before vs. after the course.
- Communicate why Managerial Accounting is an important fundamental building block for their future, and hence why it is in the core.
- Give your students periodic Heads-ups about: (A) the pace of the course (We are going to go a bit fast here, if it's too fast, tell me to slow down.); (B) Workload (The assignment that is due a week from today is more difficult than our usual, start early, plan to spend more time on it.); and (C) potentially dry material (For the next half hour I'm going to cover some fairly boring definitions, but they are important; please try to stay focused so we don't have to spend any more time here than we need to).
- Be consistent in helping the students understand what is a correct vs. and incorrect answer, as well as what is a better vs. worse answer and why.
- Don't succumb to the tyranny of PowerPoint. Work stuff out on the board regularly because it often communicates logic and detail more effectively. The low-tech approach often works better.
Tim Baldenius – Accounting

- Mix lecture, cases, and discussion to avoid tedium.
- Try to elicit students’ first-hand experience with the course material (if any).
- In the first class, provide an overview of things to come; keep referring to this road map throughout the course.
- Try to relate the material to current events.

Eric R. Baron – Marketing

- **Class Participation**—do whatever you can to ensure participation and interaction. It creates energy and excitement.
- **Creating a Safe Climate**—create a safe environment for learning—no humiliation or embarrassment is acceptable.
- **Exercises Help the Learning Process**—exercises are the key. Subgroups working on tasks related to the subject matter help students make connections.
- **Guest Speakers**—when outsiders, ideally from the business community, discuss the course subject matter it makes the learning more relevant.
- **The Attitude of the Professor**—the attitude of the professor makes or breaks every class. Enthusiasm, a willingness to speculate, and treating students with respect yields great results.

Ann Bartel – Finance & Economics

- Be organized; make sure it is clear to the students how each class builds on the preceding classes. Help the students to see how the topic being covered fits into the course.
- Give feedback quickly; return graded assignments as soon as possible.
- Ask lots of questions to encourage student interaction.
- Learn the students’ names.
- If you cannot answer a student’s question, tell them you will get back to them and then make sure to follow-up in the next class (or via email).

David Beim – Finance & Economics

- Do not lecture. Lecturing is the least effective of all teaching strategies. When the class is one-way communication, minds switch off.
- Pose problems and puzzles, then let the students wrestle with them. Do not be afraid of silences - let things hang in the air if necessary. Call on students freely. If anyone seems to be drifting off, walk right up and ask him or her a question.
- Use cases whenever possible. Cases force students to work out solutions to problems, and the reality of cases motivates serious effort.
- Connect the micro with the macro whenever possible. We all need to teach a lot of micro detail, but motivate it by showing its connection to larger issues whenever you can. Show students where the course is going and why this is important.
- You must actively like your students and want to help them. Get to know them as individuals. Grade class participation.
Ralph Biggadike – Management

- Highlight different viewpoints and foster continued discussion of them.
- Put the students in the shoes of the decision-maker.
- Refer to student comments, by name, in building the closing summary.
- Spend more time on figuring out questions to ask to stimulate thinking.
- Summarize, conceptualize, and transition the dialog at appropriate intervals in the 90 minutes.
- Another thought: the Latin word for education is *educare* which means "to draw out." I think this is a valuable guidepost to have in mind.

Mark Broadie – Decision, Risk & Operations

- Set clear expectations for the course
- Clearly identify the main points for each class session
- Make the examples relevant
- If a point is important, highlight it in class - don't leave it for a reading which is not discussed
- Learn from the student's questions - if one person has a question, then probably many others have similar questions

Alan Brott – Accounting

- Enthusiasm for the subject. At times exhibiting passion.
- Encouraging interaction through the use of questions posed to students.
- Use of humor.
- Detailed lecture notes with illustrative examples distributed before each class. Sometimes the notes have blanks to facilitate class discussion.
- Walking around a lot. Keeps the students awake.

Nelson Fraiman – Decision, Risk & Operations

- State “rules of the game” for the class very early and clearly and do not deviate.
- Return assignments, exams, emails, and phone calls promptly.
- Meet with academic rep a few times a semester to get feedback.
- “Cold call” on the students. It is not a popular practice but forces the students to be better prepared for class.
- Be very organized.
- Spend 3-5 minutes at the beginning of the class discussing “lessons learned” from the previous class.
- Although our students are used to and expect for us to use Power Point, my best classes happen when I do not and use the board or overhead projector instead.
Paul Glasserman – Decision, Risk & Operations

- Be organized: Start on time; end on time; have all materials ready on time; return graded work promptly. Students deserve this and it builds good will.
- Be prepared: Know exactly what you will cover in each class. If you use slides or notes, don't rely on them to lead you; know what's next without them. Anticipate questions. Anticipate points that need to be emphasized and repeated.
- Listen to the class: Make sure you understand a question before you try to answer it. Make sure your answer was understood before moving on. Be patient. Never get defensive. Listen to feedback even if you don't agree with it.
- Watch the class to make sure they're engaged and understanding. Force questions at points you know are difficult. Make eye contact.
- Make the material relevant.
- Respect the students and their objectives.

Bruce Greenwald – Finance & Economics

- Importance of clear, simple course structure (that can be conveyed in 3-5 minutes)
- Publicize the Structure... in every class, “tell them where they are.”
- Repetition is key. You must repeat each point at least three times.
- Work through examples (especially as a form of repetition).
- Summarize the lecture in 5 points or less. (A manageable set of teaching points is no more than 5.)

Gailen Hite – Finance & Economics

- Develop Tight Administrative Controls (and stick with them!) - Students are always looking for opportunities to renegotiate to their own advantages. For example, if they do poorly on the midterm, they will beg to have its weighting reduced and more weight assigned to the final. Accommodating them may seem like a good idea at the time but you will hear from those who did well on the midterm and who will then be disadvantaged. They will complain and you will be forced to backtrack and chaos will ensue. Therefore, pick a thoughtful administrative plan for grading, assignment schedule, etc. and stick with it. You can make changes next term based on what you have learned.
- Don’t Be Afraid to Admit a Mistake - Sometimes we misstate arguments or concepts and a student calls us on it. Don't get defensive and compound the problem. If you can correct it on the fly, do so. If you can’t, tell them you will get back to them. And then follow through on the correction, either by email or in the next class.
- Don’t Let the Wall Streeters Dominate the Class Discussions - Enough said.
- Managing Expectations About Background Knowledge I - If teaching an introductory course in which many students in the class have some background, e.g., finance, reassure the novices that they are not expected to have prior knowledge and that you are aware of initial differences in background. This situation may be new to them but assure them that you have seen it all play out before and that they must trust you to help them deal with it. Advise them they will need to spend some extra time on language and new concepts but if they do the work, they will be fine.
- Managing Expectations About Background Knowledge II - If teaching an upper level course, make sure students have the prerequisite knowledge base and, if not, how they can acquire it.
Columbia Business School – Best Practices in Teaching
Faculty Suggestions

Gailen Hite – *Finance & Economics* (cont’d)

- **Provide a Road Map** - Provide a road map the first day that shows the three or four major topical areas of the course and how they fit together. Return to the road map as you finish each topical area to review what you have finished and to introduce the next topic. At first, the novices will not fully comprehend the scheme because they will not have the requisite vocabulary. But as they see it again and again they will come to appreciate the organization and feel a sense of accomplishment at seeing how far they have come. An added benefit is that this forces the instructor to develop a tight picture of how everything in the course fits together.

Ray Horton – *Management*

- Don't waste a second in class on administrative matters. Send them an opus email before the course that lays out your rules of the game, and address other administrative issues by email as they arrive. In other words, tell them from the start they're going to get 90 minutes (or 180 minutes) of substance each time the class meets.
- Don't waste time regurgitating or summarizing the preceding class. Part of the contract is completing the materials in the syllabus, so get it done on time and start a new topic on time. If you have to summarize, do it through ANGEL.
- Constantly send them links from press/journals etc. and relate them to topics that have been, are being, or will be covered later in the course.
- Treat them with respect, that is, don't get pissed if they leave the room for the bathroom or whatever, but also make it very clear what your expectations are (covered in the opus email before the course starts).
- Calculate what the students collectively have coughed up for a particular section/session, and then ask yourself whether you've tried to give them their money’s worth.

Wei Jiang – *Finance & Economics*

- Stay organized.
- Be clear and consistent with class policies.
- Be informed about current market conditions/news.
- Remind the students of the usefulness of the tools they learn in class as often as possible.
- Avoid leaving the impression that you think the materials are easy.

Todd Jick – *Management*

- Be student/learner centered more than teacher centered.
- Pay attention to the process plan for teaching as much as the "content".
- Create an "environment" for learning...you can enhance it, or detract from it by what you do.
- Before you walk into each class, leave yourself 15 minutes of time to focus, decompress, and get your "game face" on...
- Every class should begin by situating the students in the logic of the course, as well as the space and environment that you want to take them to...You want to gain their heart and mind to the subject and to the discovery of what they can learn...
Charles Jones – Finance & Economics
- Everyone needs to develop her own teaching style: what works for Bruce Greenwald may not work for you.
  - Don’t try to be funny if you're not.
  - Don’t try to be pals with the students if you're more comfortable with a certain distance.
- For lectures:
  - Use examples, charts, data, multimedia wherever you can
  - You can and must still get students involved
- Students will work hard to learn if they can see it will matter on the job. Convince them.
- Whatever it takes, get students involved. Passivity is your enemy.

Jonathan Levav - Marketing
- Know your material inside and out;
- Be intellectually demanding;
- Care about teaching.

Costis Maglaras – Decision, Risk & Operations
- "Manage" questions; i.e. avoid (politely) engaging questions that seem confusing and counter-productive.
- Keep discussions and explanations clear; work through issues in class rather than presenting ready solutions; use examples that "build" up in complexity; and connect whenever possible to practical issues that are easy to understand -- referring to practical problems that are beyond someone’s understanding sounds convincing but adds little value.
- Maintain an image of total control of all course related issues, logistics, procedures, etc.
- Start with a 1-2 minute review of previous class, state the goals of the current class, end with a 1 minute recap of what was done.

Chris Mayer – Finance & Economics
- Have pride and a passion for what you do. The students will accept many human frailties if they think you care about what you do and about their learning.
- Organization matters!
- Have a limited number of points that you want to get across for each lecture. Start the lecture with what you are going to do and then be sure to end by summarizing what the students were supposed to take away. Ending with what they were supposed to learn is especially key. Sometimes it is very hard, but five minutes before the end of class I always try to skip to an organized ending.
- The best content in the world is useless unless the students are able to understand that content in an intuitive way. It is hard to provide too much intuition or too many examples.
- Relax. This is not rocket science. While few people will be teaching superstars, almost everyone can be an effective teacher.

Roger Mesznik – Finance & Economics
- Disabuse them of using empty buzzwords and common slogans in lieu of answers.
- Call on the students in class all the time. Help them develop an answer if they do not know it
Doron Nissim – Accounting

- After the mid-term evaluation, read the evaluation forms carefully, summarize the comments and their frequencies, and review this summary in class. You will often find that there are comments on both sides of the distribution -- e.g., the pace is too fast/slow -- let students know this; it will make them understand the difficulty you face when teaching students with different skills and backgrounds.
- Be nice, but don't compromise content.
- Be organized.
- Be very well prepared for each class.
- Go to sleep early the night before each class.
- If a particular class does not work well, prepare especially well for the next one.
- If you don't have an answer to a particular question, tell the student you will check and get back to her, and make sure you do so.
- Meet with the class representatives regularly and specifically ask if the students expressed any particular concern.

Michel Pham – Marketing

- I generally do not write on the board when leading case discussions. This allows me to listen more carefully to what students say and makes the discussion much more interactive.
- I spend more time thinking about questions that I am going to ask them when preparing a case than thinking about what I am going to tell them.
- I structure and position the concepts I teach as analytical steps a company has to go through (which is action oriented) rather than frameworks (which is a more theoretical way to view the world).

Laura Resnikoff – Finance & Economics

1. Create a “zone of psychological safety” in the classroom.
   - Make sure everyone has “space” to speak.
   - Compliment freely, with explicit statements as well as incorporating the students’ remarks into the official give and take. Make references to students’ well-placed remarks in the same and subsequent class meetings.
   - Declare openly when a student’s repetitiveness reflects a negligence to listen to all others with care.
   - Set and enforce the language standard – complete sentences, no vulgarity, no common phrases that veer towards vulgarity, no humor that highlights anyone or any group.
2. Meet with every team no later than one third into the semester.
   - Encourage each member to speak openly about process effectiveness.
   - Review each team’s submissions.
   - Use these materials, along with your assessment, to take an active role with changing team formations for the remainder of the semester if you determine that will be advantageous for the individuals and the classroom community
3. To expand students contact with each other -
   - Ask students to relocate when you are planning in-class group work
   - Stand away from the classroom center. Move to stand at one or another side, to the furthest point from the podium.
Paolo Siconolfi – *Finance & Economics*

- When teaching theory, always make explicit reference to a relevant practical situation and use throughout the explanation.
- Work out at the blackboard lots of numerical examples.
- Ask lots of questions.
- Break up arguments and/or solutions to problems into steps and title the steps.
- Fake a heavy Italian accent.

Suresh Sundaresan – *Finance & Economics*

- Give an outline of the topics that will be covered over the next 2 weeks on a rolling basis.
- Assign readings specific to the two-weeks worth of topics clearly.
- Go over homework problems/solutions briefly in class and distribute solutions.
- Try to summarize the "take-aways" in each topic, if not in each session.
- Make problem sets a group assignment and give 30%-40% of the course weight to them.

Hitendra Wadhwa – *Marketing*

- Each time you launch into something new — class content, teaching approach, or even a new course — make sure to tell yourself, “this is an experiment”. That way, you won’t be discouraged by failure, but will instead focus on what you can learn and how you can improve. Over time, everything can be taken to a highly accomplished level provided we keep testing, learning and adapting.
- Explore your core beliefs about the student body. Do you tend to see them as diligent, ethical, interested in learning? Or do you tend to see them as lazy, unethical, uninterested? Your beliefs will silently influence how you interact with them, and these interactions will create positive or negative outcomes for you.
- As much as possible, convey your lessons through stories. People love stories and in my experience, the lesson stays on in their minds for much longer. Draw stories from your own life when you can, and from the lives of others — you can even get the class to contribute stories as a way of illustrating a point you’re making.

Yuan Zhang – *Accounting*

- Be very organized, in terms of both lectures and handouts. Work through (more complicated) examples before class, even if you have taught it many times already.
- Clearly communicate your expectations to the students and provide feedback to students when possible.
- Use real world (and better yet, ongoing) events as examples whenever possible.
- Be enthusiastic about the subject.