



Advice for new teachers

A CRC CASSL Publication

**From the Fall 07 CASSL Seminar, Cosumnes River College
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Expectations, Attitudes and Affective Issues:

- Remember what it was like when you were a student: the challenges and the achievements, the disconnects and the discoveries. However, don't expect that your students will be just like you were when you were a student. And remember that there is really no such thing as the "traditional" student.
- Remember that some students will no doubt think you are the best teacher in the world and others will feel quite the opposite...and both will be wrong.
- Respect the students as individuals, even when they are frustrating. Try not to err in the direction of either cynicism or naiveté. Whenever possible, show compassion while being professional; being kind can be accomplished without being a pushover.
- Be generous in your interpretation of the way students respond to you; not everyone follows expected patterns of communication, style, attention, etc.
- Know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, the way you learn, your limitations and biases. Work on your weaknesses, play to your strengths. Share what you can of who you are as a person with your students.
- Your interest in the material is infectious; show your passion for your discipline and your enthusiasm in obvious ways in front of the class.

Teaching Approaches and Tools:

- Teach them all of the tasks you ask of them. If you ask them to study, teach them how. If you ask them to do a take home exam, work on an inquiry project, write a research paper, produce a creative project, or any of the myriad tasks that are familiar to us but not to our students, teach them how to do it.
- Teaching as a profession requires that we are always learning our craft. We all have two disciplines – our academic or career discipline and the scholarship of teaching. Talk to your colleagues about teaching, they are a source of wisdom. As Craig Baker (former CRC chemistry professor) used to say, try to avoid repeating the same year of experience more than once.
- Be prepared. Do your homework with respect to the material, the media, and the methods you will use in the classroom. Make a plan for each day. Have a plan B; something will go wrong from time to time. Know what outcomes you want for your students (and remind them what those are as needed).
- Provide timely and constructive feedback to students. Return exams and assignments as quickly as is feasible. Talk to students informally about their progress (e.g. Before or after class, during labs or studios, etc.). And don't forget to get feedback from your students; don't wait until a major exam to find out that they didn't "get it".
- Choose media and technology wisely. Don't use new technology for its own sake; use what works best for the teaching task at hand. When you are going to try a new media or a new technology, master it well before trying it in the classroom.
- Encourage scholarship. Make the culture of scholarship grow in your classroom. Teach them how to be scholars; teach this directly in a planned way, as well as by example. Reason things out explicitly with the students; provide examples and applications of the material and of the thought process you use to understand it. Keep learning yourself and bring that new knowledge, and your joy at learning it, into the classroom. Celebrate discovery and make the process of discovery evident. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" and then share the process of finding out with the class.
- Teach less, better. Prune away unneeded details and have the students do more sophisticated things with the main ideas. Don't tell them the answers, but help them to discover it for themselves. Keep expectations high, even in the face of frustration.
- Remember that what is familiar to you may not be obvious to your students.