

Attitudes and Strategies for Becoming a Great TA!

You have been given the opportunity to teach some of the best students in the world – congratulations!

Though it will be hard work, you really master a subject when you have to teach it – so you will learn a lot too!



You yourself have had great teachers, and they have impacted you in a positive and lasting ways. Now is your chance to make a difference.



The foundations of a great class

- Know your subject cold

- Preparation, Preparation, Preparation

- Put yourself into their shoes

Reaching out

- Media is not as important as being with them

- Work with them

- Provide a nurturing environment

Inspiration

- Bring a sense of wonder

- Remind them of their own potential

Organization

- Steps to take before each class

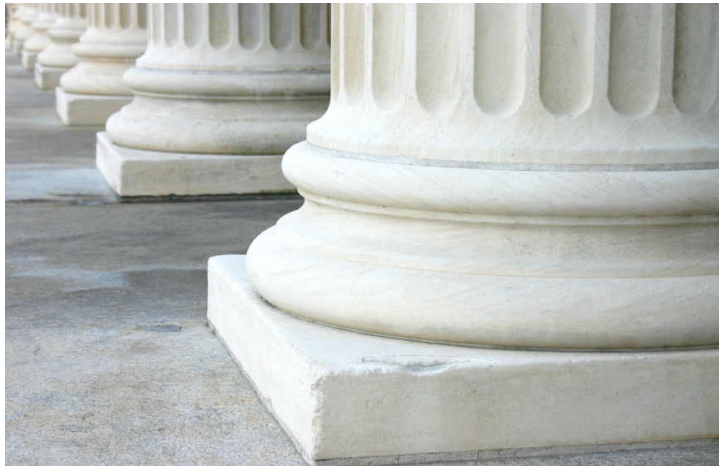
- Homework and Quizzes

Having a good attitude!

The Foundation of a Great Class:

What makes great teaching? While most of what makes a great class is preparation preparation, preparation, there are many intangibles that supersede the impact of what you deliver, even if you do a perfect job. Rather than focusing on materials, let's take it as a given that you have a solid foundation to work from. This includes:

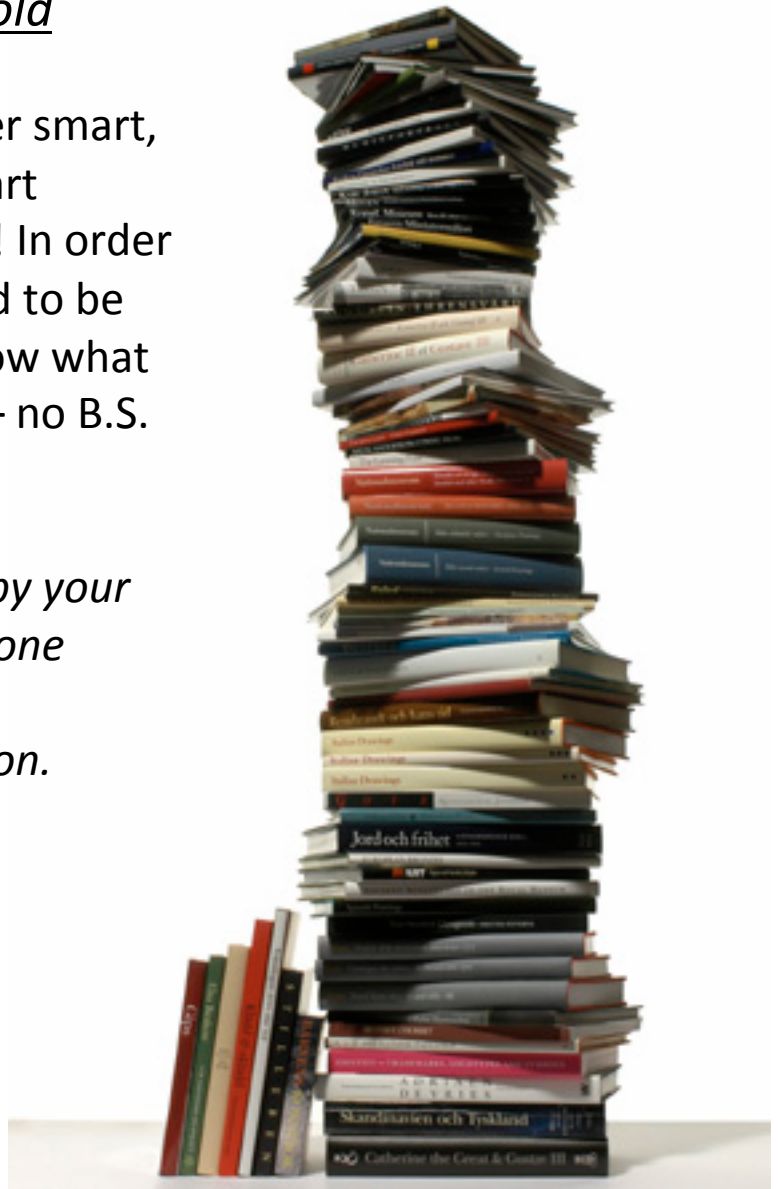
- a) a good sense of what you need to cover
- b) an organized plan for laying out concepts
- c) a reasonable outline with a good sense of how long things will take



Know your subject cold

Your students are super smart, but you are plenty smart enough to teach them! In order to teach well, you need to be over-prepared and know what you are talking about – no B.S. please!

If you are intimidated by your students, there is only one solution: preparation, preparation, preparation.



Put (a lot of) time into preparation
& make sure the students are confident in you

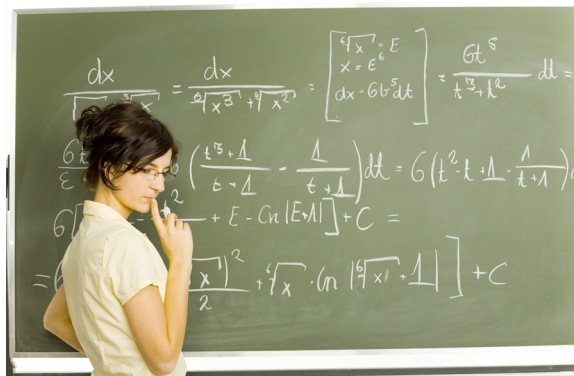
If you are new to teaching, preparing will take a lot of time.

Don't wait until the last minute.

Don't go to sleep until you have mastered all the materials

(Use the day of the class just to get organized, review and polish up.)

Get them to respect you right off the bat by showing them that you are knowledgeable. This can be done by doing board work – make sure they know that *you* know what you are doing!



Put yourself into their shoes

If there is just one key thing that a teacher needs to do to turn a good class into a great class, it is to *put yourself into the shoes of your students*. Remember what it is like to be new to the subject, and constantly remind them of the bigger picture – not only in terms of the subject they are trying to master, but also in terms of society and the good that they can bring by being part of the scientific process.

Bring things that are relevant to them to the class. What are they most interested in? What are the hot topics in the news that are relevant to your topic? Make your course connect to real world issues.



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It isn't about the media, it's about being with them.

It doesn't matter what you pick – board, slides, etc. All formats can work well. The key is to be with them, and not talking at them.

It must be a two-way conversation, not a lecture. *The single most powerful way to achieve dialog in the classroom is to learn all of their names.* This means printing out their pictures and having them in front of you during class. Study them before class, and just keep working at it. It really matters!

Another way to make it interactive is to call on people using a random list. By doing so, students are much more likely to come prepared and thus to get more out of the class. However, it doesn't work if you are threatening, so if someone looks uncomfortable either help them out or just move on to the next person.

Try to walk away from the podium,
and into the classroom

Teaching from the front of the class puts a distance between you and your students. Try to venture into the room, sit next to students when they are working on solving a problem and help them through it. Doing so will speak volumes to your being on the same team as them.



The key is to provide a nurturing environment

The atmosphere in the classroom should be demanding with high expectations, but not critical. You never want students to be afraid to speak up. You want them to be entirely engaged and interactive – that is how they learn best.



If you are too formal, they can be intimidated by you. To put students at ease, you can do some of these things:

- ♦Get to know all their names and before class, talk to them from within the class (not from the front of the class). Use their names when you talk to them.
- ♦If you ask a student to do something in class and they are struggling, help them through it.
- ♦Bring humor with you... not too much, but enough that people are upbeat. It is a fact that happiness increases learning capacity.
- ♦Remind them that you are human too and were just like them not too long ago.

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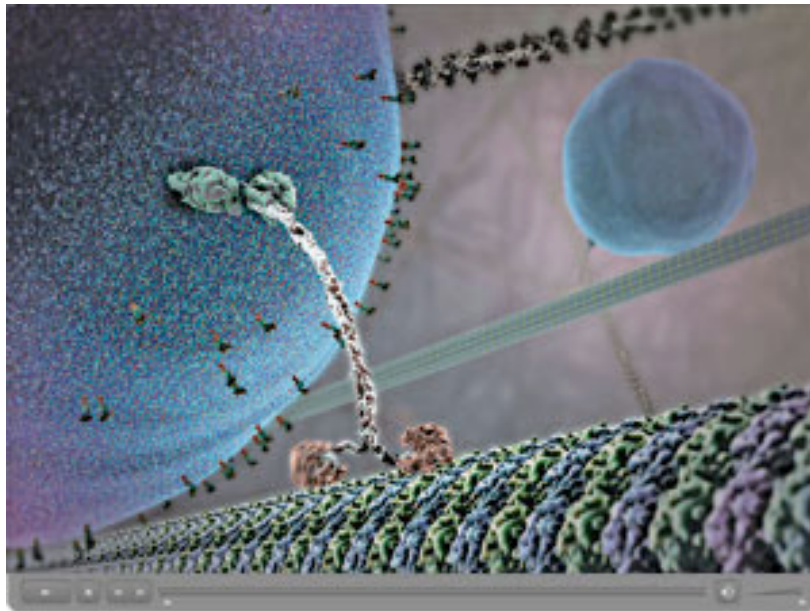
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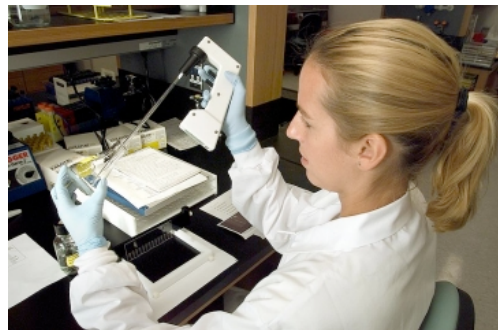
Bring a sense of wonder! Never leave your fascination with life sciences behind you – bring it to the classroom and help the students really see concepts, and not take them for granted.



Inspire them by reminding them of their own potential

It is especially important to focus on the bigger picture during the first day of class. Remind them of what some of the pressing problems in society are and how scientists are addressing those problems. Give many perspectives – basic science, public health, contributions in academia, creating new medicines through industry. Remind them of the many ways to have a positive impact, and remind them that they are tomorrow's leaders.

An example of relevant every-day news to share with your students: “Dropping Prices to Save Lives, Heavily Discounted Vaccine Plan Announced”



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Before each class

Make sure you know the subject cold. If you read that paper last year, re-read it anyway just so that you are on top of all the details.

Go through your slides and ask yourself “what am I trying to say with this part of the course”

Use an outline and constantly go into details, but then come back up to a higher level to remind them why they need those details before plunging into the next set of slides. Refer back to the outline repeatedly so that they are reminded of the flow of information for that lecture.

Be sure to recap at the end of class – don’t crunch the end of class – leave time to reflect on the key things that were learned.

***“Tell them what you are going to tell
them, tell them, tell them what you told
them.”***

Make sure the homework and quizzes really reflect what was covered in class. One way to help yourself is to sit down just after each class and quickly write down a list of what was covered. You can then use these lists when preparing tests and quizzes.



**What are you going to
teach today?**

**Why should your students
bother coming to class?**



If you can't answer these
questions clearly and
concisely, you need to get
back to the drawing board!

Your attitude matters – taking a few minutes before class to take a walk, or listen to some music, is a great way to get a fresh and upbeat start.



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