You Can Teach Anything

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**You can teach anything**

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You can teach anything

Before you start...

Anybody wanting to teach anything must have a thorough grasp of his or her subject. If your knowledge is incomplete or inadequate you will always be found out - usually sooner rather than later. Almost anything you know a lot about can be made interesting to a group. If it fascinates you, you should assume that it can fascinate others!

It’s a safe bet that someone in a large group will know at least as much as you do, and may be looking for a chance to prove it.

If you don’t know the subject yet, don’t try to teach it yet.

Once you have a thorough grasp of a topic, try to forget all of it. Go through the mental exercise of trying to strip the topic down to bare essentials - imagine that you have never heard about this topic before and that you are outlining it to yourself.

Goals and Objectives

Before you start preparing to teach anything, you need to know exactly where you are going and what the teaching is for.

- **The Goal** - What is the goal?
- **Target group** - Who is it?
- **Objectives** - What do they need from you?

If possible, ask the department sending the staff what they actually need. Until you know this, you can’t start. It is possible that the department won’t know what is possible, and what you can teach.

You can find this out in several ways:

- **Interview - with the department head**
- **Interview - with the potential students**
- **Questionnaire - circulating one**

If you decide to conduct an interview, start by finding out what the learner wants to learn - don’t start by telling them exactly what you are going to teach! The teaching will be better if you can relate it to what they actually need.

The purpose of an interview is to see if you, from your vantage point of full knowledge of the subject can see ways to meet the learning requirement - even if it isn’t articulated very well by the subject.

**Departmental Objectives**

Talking to department heads is different from talking to potential students. Try to analyse the global objective before you talk to individuals who plan to take the course. Even if you meet their local needs, the course will have failed if it is not related to what the department wants to happen.

Will the learners have to go back to their jobs and use this new knowledge? Will there be any follow-up courses to consolidate the learning?

Is teaching being taken seriously?

Will the managers understand that the staff will need time to digest what they have been taught. If they say ‘yes’ to this question do they really mean it?

Will the learners have to go back to their jobs and use this? Will there be any follow-up?

Ensure that the group has an interest in common. If possible, try to get groups that are all at the same level in the organisation.

**Yourself**

You may also find at this stage that you can’t meet the requirement without extra preparation or learning yourself. If you find this out on the morning of the course you are going to look very awkward as the truth dawns!

**Writing Questionnaires**

**Yes/No?**

If you decide to use a questionnaire, avoid questions that only have ‘Yes/No’ alternatives. Go instead for as many qualitative questions as you can. They will be much more revealing.

**Privacy**

Do you want anonymity? You may get more candid information from anonymous replies. However, you can call back named replies later as you have discussions with the class, and you want to work on a particular person’s problems.

It’s obvious, but never reveal to the rest of the class what an individual has put down. This would break the atmosphere of trust between you and the class which is vital to successful teaching and training.

**General points**

**Perceptions**

Look for trends and common perceptions. Focus on these in planning your course. Work out
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how you are going to deal with false and wrong perceptions.

Plan to choose what your learners want most to learn, and what you as a course designer are most able to work with them on. Your job as a teacher is to open up channels of communication between you, the class, and perhaps even individual members of the class.

Redefinition

If you feel that you can’t meet the objective, and the expectations of the learners, don’t start the course at all. Redefine the goals mutually with the class in terms of something you know you can do.

Stating the aims

After analysing the requirements, you should be able to prepare a sentence or two which encapsulates the purpose of the course. Complete the sentence:

‘As a result of this course you will be able to........’

and you will be well on the way to success before you even start.

Publish the aims to the participants and their managers.

Prospectus

If the aims and proposed course have general applicability across a wide group, build them into a general prospectus - but always ensure that a new group fully understands what the aims are.
# Preparation

Planning is crucial. Once you have determined the needs, you can start work on the detail.

## Mental

The most important requirements for you as a teacher are:

- **Know the subject** inside out
- **Remember** what it felt like before you knew it
- **What steps made sense to you in learning it**

On balance, the greater your technical (perhaps computing) skill the more awful your likely image. You will immediately fall into the trap of **Knowing Too Much**. Teaching is not a catalogue of what the teacher knows. It is a process by which others grow to learn it too! A recital of information that you need to know for your job - but which they don't for theirs will lead to disaster.

It is truly astonishing how many people act in the classroom as though the sole purpose of teaching is to show the taught how much they know. If you think this, you can't teach. You will simply get angry that the people you are teaching are not as clever as you.

Be aware how much pain and suffering people have to go through to get to the other side - the side you are on. Call them and coax them. If they are sufficiently motivated, they will want to come.

## Co-presenters

If you plan to present the course with a colleague - ensure they understand your mind both in terms of what you will teach, and how you plan to present it. Ensure that one of you is perceived as the leader. The students will be confused if there is no clear focus on a leader.

Think of all the successful comedy partnerships you have seen. Each partner has a personality, each may seem to be independent - but the ones that work best are based on a pecking order. Often the relationship becomes complex with the apparent leader actually being the led, and the underdog providing the brain.

If there are two of you, hand the baton over, and cross-refer to each other - ‘as so and so pointed out earlier and so on.

Think about what makes these relationships work:

- Morecambe and Wise
- Laurel and Hardy
- Peter Cooke and Dudley Moore (if you can remember that far back)
- Sergeant Wilson and Captain Mainwaring
- French and Saunders
- Ruby Wax and almost anyone else

Think also why these people never seem to work as a double act:

- Frankie Howerd
- Rolf Harris
- Paul Daniels

## Notification

Check these points and include them in any pre-course briefing or invitation letter you send out:

- **Who initiated** and/or sponsors the course.
- **What the objective is**.
- **Dates** - start and finishing times.
- **What the learners should prepare in advance**.
- **Pre-course Questionnaires if any?**
- **Location and facilities**. Ensure timetable is precise and known to all. Travel directions should be clear.
- **Arrangements for tea, coffee, meals, accommodation etc.**

## The learners

Think carefully about your learners. Here are some topics for you to think about

- **How were they recruited?**
- **Experience** - how much have they had so far in this area?
- **Expectations** - What are they - are they hopes or fears?
- **Existing relationships** - Are they friendly and familiar with other group members?
- **Motivation to learn** - what is it like?
- **Responsibilities after the training** - what will they be?
- **Realism** - Will they try to take on too much on returning?

## Why....

Are they being sent to you because their boss wants some teaching to be done to them, are they volunteers? Have they been pressed? Do they just want to know more?

## Previous Experience.....

If the class is highly experienced, your teaching must take this into account. Start from the right baseline. Your teaching is
to take them forward, not tell them what they already know.

Expectations.....

Some people have had bad experiences of previous teaching and teachers. Some have been taught in the past, only to find that they soon forgot everything. If this course is part of a general training programme that is generating good feelings elsewhere, expectations will be high. If word of mouth precedes you, you have nothing to fear.

If you are coming in to teach where there have been problems before, you need to know this.

Existing relationships.....

Teaching strangers who are strangers to each other is quite different from teaching people who know each other. Groups who are well acquainted will have in-jokes, and you may be in danger of being seen as an outsider. You have to develop yourself quickly as the focal point. It will help if you know a lot about the department they come from before you start. Try to find out what people don’t like about the organisation, and use it to get them all onto the same side (though be careful not to insult or upset anybody who is in the class).

Motivation.....

Learning only happens inside the learner! You may not believe this - but it’s true. People only learn when they want to - and just because you are teaching them is not a sufficient or adequate reason for them to want to!

Your enthusiasm should cause them to want to know more.

Responsibilities.....

What are they going back to? Will they have to use this teaching immediately? Will the managers understand that it is hard to do things before the teaching has sunk in? Will skills have to be developed over time? Do they and their managers understand that the teaching or training is only the start, and not an end in itself?
Think hard and be analytical about yourself. Think about these topics carefully:

- **Skills** - Do you have the skills to design this teaching? Do you know the subject thoroughly?
- **Objectives** - What are your personal objectives? What are those you have for the class?
- **Expectations** - What do you most hope for and fear in this exercise?
- **Relationships** - If this is a joint presentation, what is your personal relationship with the other members of the presentation team?

### Personal road blocks

It’s worth bearing in mind that there are many blocks to successful teaching. They are largely the same as those that give us problems as social beings too.

Being a good teacher depends on you being able to confront personal blocks. You will discover that half the battle is already won when you start the actual teaching - but only half, and the other half - the blocked half - has to be understood and put in its’ place, firmly on one side.

Let’s look at the main blocks to personal interaction.

All these comments represent different aspects of the same thing. The end product you want to project is confidence. If you aren’t confident, they won’t even let you teach anything. If you aren’t confident, learning is no fun.

#### ‘Don’t talk to strangers’

This is the source of much emotional paralysis. We like to hide. We have been told not to be outgoing because it can lead to being hurt. This is fatal for a teacher. If you hide, you cannot open up a channel between you and those you teach.

**Solution**

Redefine the term ‘stranger’. Your class wants to be here. They expect you to teach them. They want to open a channel of communication between you. Unfortunately, they won’t give you the benefit of the doubt for long - normally about a minute into the session, they will know if you are feeling awkward, and they may well switch off to avoid causing you embarrassment.

You all have a common interest, and you hold all the cards in this relationship. Exploit them ruthlessly. They will appreciate it. They want to feel confident in you.

#### Wait to be properly introduced

We like to be introduced. We have been told that it is rude to be forward. However, if there are 30 people in the class, you could wait for ever.

**Solution**

Project yourself, introduce yourself, and go forward. You are in charge. People want to be told what to do.

Perfect your self-introduction - your full name, what you do in context of this session. “I’m David Clover, I present courses in .... for the Computing Service. Our objective today is to .......”. Write your name down.

Sometimes, someone from the host department will introduce you. This is nice, but don’t let them go on too long. You are the focus. Get on with it.

#### Good things come to those who wait

We believe that if we hang around, things will go better. This is wrong. Only grey hair, baldness and varicose veins come to those who wait.

**Solution**

Be the host. Get on with being in charge - now. Take initiatives. Be the host - use the pre-conceptions people already have about guest/host behaviour. Hosts initiate. Guests wait for someone to take their coats. Hosts have something to do. Guests don’t. Extend yourself to the guests.

#### Better safe than sorry

We don’t like to risk rejection. It hurts. The audience might not applaud. A joke may fall flat.

**Solution**

As the focal point, the teacher, doing the safe thing - nothing - is much worse than making something happen. Our egos are on the line. You need to open yourself - even thinking about doing this can hurt. But if you don’t reach out, nothing happens at all.
Change is a risk.

Teaching changes people. It is meant to change the students, but after a time, most of all it will change you. Old ways fade - new ground is broken. New confidence is built.

If you are anxious about taking this risk of changing your outlook, you will find it hard to teach. On the other hand, as many former Open University students have found, the changes this brings to them in personal growth and development have not always fitted in with those around them - family and friends.

A supportive background will help you to be a better teacher. But you will also be successful if you are constantly self-critical about what you are doing, and how to get better. There is no room in teaching for self-indulgence.

Setting tasks

If your teaching involves any form of interaction - for example learning how some piece of software works - make sure that the class can recognise when it is complete. Always try to relate the task (the thing that you all did) to the stated objective.

Analysis

After a practical or task-oriented session, look back on the things you did, discuss them, and draw lessons from them. If someone got different results, see if the class can help to work out why.

Review and evaluate

Once a section of teaching is done, see whether the class could now explain it to you and to each other.

Involve the class in evaluation of the exercise - in particular use evaluation forms and read them and discuss them with your training colleagues. People like to feel that they have been take seriously, and that they have developed themselves and perhaps you too!

The layout

There are many different options for laying out the teaching room.

You will probably have rows of chairs, a podium, a board. Try to avoid too much formality - though a little will help you to establish control.

Size of teaching groups

Different groups behave differently. Big groups feel different from small groups. If you are starting in teaching, start small. In the end, the techniques you develop for a few can be scaled up to a large group. Most of this section concentrates on smaller groups.

If you have a small group this arrangement will give you quite a wide arc to work over, but it won’t matter as you will be close to each member - almost equidistant. There is nowhere either for you, or the class to hide, and if you teach well, you will rapidly be accepted as the focus of attention. It works particularly well for discussions.
Doing teaching

The alternative arrangement where students sit in serried ranks is very hard to work effectively. People are hidden, it ‘feels like a lecture’, and though you don’t have to look over a wide arc to see all the people in serried ranks, you won’t be able to make them feel part of your teaching and you certainly will find it hard to relate to anything but the front row.

In fact, you will notice that in a layout of this kind, nobody sits in the front row anyway!

You have to tailor the setup to take account of two things:

0 What learning atmosphere you want to establish
0 What the class expects

A meeting of company directors listening to you talk about Company policy may not feel happy if you get close in to them as in the figure on page 6. They may prefer the distance implied by the serried rows. They may also feel safer if you are behind the desk or podium.

Boards

Use a white board or flip chart if you can. Pens and paper are better than chalk because of the latter’s associations with schools. But anything is OK if used properly.

Don’t prepare too much in the way of elaborate flip sequences before you start. This will lock you in to a sequence that may, as you work, start to become inappropriate. You need to avoid being locked in to a sequence for too long if you want the teaching to flow naturally, and take in comments from the participants.

Get the right kind of pen for the surface. It is embarrassing if you can’t rub the whiteboard clean because you just used an indelible marker!

Screens

Screens need to be seen. Ensure that the projector is in focus, and that as far as possible you eliminate the ‘keystone’ leaving the display square. A badly set up or odd shaped picture is very distracting. Also check that you can switch it off and on easily. Don’t leave it on all the time if you can avoid it.

Avoid jokes - you can’t see or read them from a distance. If you use a pencil to emphasise a part of the slide, lay it flat and leave it. Jiggles and wobbles on the screen distract people. Face the audience - not the screen.

If you are projecting an image of a computer screen, make sure it can be seen clearly from a sitting position. Move round the room and sit in different chairs and be critical.

Machines

These come into the same category as ‘children and animals’ for many people. If you are going to use machines - Computers, Videos, Projectors, Computer palettes - whatever, arrive at least an hour early if you don’t know the room, and half an hour early if you do. Someone else may have messed it up!

If you regularly teach the same software, and the machines are attached to a
Doing teaching

network, keep a complete set of the software and the training example files available to download at short notice, to ensure they work and can be seen properly.

Climate for learning

Create a climate for learning. Keep the room tidy. Make everything look shipshape before you start. Put papers in neat piles. Don’t be drinking coffee when the class arrives if you aren’t giving them any. Look alert. Don’t be fiddling around trying to make machines work.

Be relaxed, welcoming, the complete host, and project trust and confidence.

Your Arrival

Be sure that you greet the class. If they are all sitting down when you come in make your arrival an event. Don’t shamble in and out, cough nervously, hope they will stop talking - do something effective like opening a window, closing one - you need an initial attention getter - then it is up to you to maintain it.

Don’t be at sea, or have people working frantically on things that aren’t ready.

Maybe you could ask the class to help with some simple activity like drawing the blinds. Make them feel involved - now.

If you are working with a co-presenter keep separate and avoid confidential huddles or asides with him or her to avoid creating ‘them and us’ barriers.

Starting

Start on time, and make it clear that you have started. - but don’t draw attention to latecomers. Make them feel welcome too. In fact, dealing with latecomers is an art in itself. You have much less time to make them feel welcome, and they will be embarrassed at finding things obviously under way. Make an early attempt to involve them so they will feel the effort has been worthwhile.

Introduction

Find out in general terms where people come from.

Good gambits are to do with things that everybody has experienced - today - or in the very recent past. If you make comments that only one or two can understand, you will lose the concentration of the audience at the very time you need it most.

0 “Now - can everybody see properly”
0 “Did anybody see ‘Neighbours’ last night” (Make sure you did)
0 “We live in difficult times” (expand on this)
0 “Thank you all very much for coming - Did you come far? Have you been waiting long” (The Queen uses this one a lot)
0 “I’m sorry I’m a bit flustered, but I’ve just finished a meeting of the Queen’s Hall Escape Committee” (This one for conferences in uncomfortable buildings)

The general key is to mention something that everyone has in common in terms of this group, and this day and this event. It could be the temperature, the buses today - or anything you know that they have experienced. Avoid saying things like:

0 “I don’t expect most of you want to learn about this today”
0 “We have come to teach you lot a lesson”
0 “When I was a student”

Avoid arcane and specific references unless you know they will be amusing to everyone.

It’s OK to disclose something about yourself, but only if it’s something that makes you more interesting to them. Think how comedians start - “As I was coming here this evening, a very funny thing happened - yes no really missus”. You won’t be good enough to get a laugh out of this yet, but watch professionals at work, and learn how they get attention.

Small talk

Have some handy topics available - ‘Neighbours’, ‘Twin Peaks’, non-contentious items. Only real experts can get away with contentious topics. But don’t be esoteric - ‘has anyone visited a real Turkish carpet factory recently’ - etc.

Jokes

These should be appropriate, tasteful and timely. Bad jokes will kill your presentation. If in doubt, steer clear of them. Jokes are better than quotes. But remember there is nothing flatter than a fallen joke!

Goals

Explain early on what the goals are and how and why you have them. Outline the teaching methods you will use. If you circulated a pre-course questionnaire, give the class some feedback on the results.

Outline the general schedule for time usage, and any housekeeping details like where the coat hooks and fire exits are, when you are expecting coffee and so on.

If all this seems like a lot to say, put it on a handout.

Be alert

As you teach, you must always watch and be alert. Try to remember something about each student and come back to it - it could be a preoccupation they have - how does this fit in with my work - that sort of thing. You can say things like ‘this brings us to Jenny’s earlier point’.
Be involved with the group, encourage interaction. If the course involves using computers or equipment start them using it as soon as you possibly can. If things go badly, change pace and tack.

**Timetables**

Whilst it’s a good idea to have a detailed timetable in mind, something will always happen to wreck it. You can of course carry on regardless and say:

“I’m sorry, but the schedule is such that we won’t have time for that”

This will kill your course stone dead.

Or you can tear up your immediate schedule, and examine the issue carefully. If the idea was a good one (and provided you know your subject thoroughly you will know how to fit it in) explore it now - and refer back to it at the point later where you might otherwise have brought it up. Also give full credit to the person who brought it up. Also give full credit to the person who brought it up. They ‘helped’ you, and were ‘useful’.

Occasionally though you have a schedule, and probably more importantly, the issue that a student just raised simply can’t be fitted in at this moment. In that case explain:

‘That’s an excellent point, and don’t let me finish before we go through it properly’.

With luck, the person will forget. If it was a total irrelevance, offer to talk to them at the end on their own, and try to put the misunderstanding straight then.

**During the teaching**

Here are a few golden rules about the things to bear in mind all the time as you teach:

0 **Remember at least one point about each person and use it.** It could well be something they told you about one of their outside interests.

0 **Write down a plan of the room and who sits where** with the names of the people on it. Remember them, and use names often.

0 **Avoid saying ‘I’ too often.**

0 **Although you are an expert, don’t put yourself forward as one.**

0 **People are important. Make them feel it.**

**Using notes**

If you want to make notes, use small cards and keep the information on each fairly minimal. Prepare any quotations in full.

Don’t look down to find your place - “I came to talk about er... (looks) er yes - this...no sorry - wrong card I think - er.....” etc.

Be flexible - you should be able to alter the sequence before you start - or whilst you are teaching.

**Length**

As a general rule, The smaller the audience, the shorter the talk should be. Keep an eye on the time, but don’t be too obvious about it. If you look at your watch, the class will too. The Queen has a small wristwatch inside right arm - she can see it when shaking hands. Have a clock on the desk or be able to see one. And ALWAYS finish on time....

**The finish**

Always finish ON TIME. We can all recall boring speakers who overran, then the next one demanded the correct time allocation, and lunch was late. If you are any good, you will pace yourself. If your material is too much for the time, be like the end of ‘The Archers’ - leave the audience wanting more.

Review the topic and the order you covered things in.

Ask the class to see whether their personal objectives were met in the things you talked about.

**Difficulties**

**Trouble makers**

People don’t mind seeing a person put down if they perceive them being a pain in neck. If you are alert, you will feel that. Don’t waste time pandering to obvious idiots. But keep a velvet hand too as you do it - be kind to people - people don’t like seeing blood on the carpet. You can often show someone up more effectively by being massively helpful in explaining their ‘misconception’.

It is better to wait patiently while a troublemaker digs a very big hole, and falls in it. It’s his or her problem then, and you were seen to give them a fair chance to take your advice before they buried themselves.

**Teaching your colleagues**

Teaching close colleagues needs particular care and preparation. They won’t be worried about taking you apart if you don’t take it seriously or if you pretend to know things they know better.

If a more senior person is also in the group, don’t show people up in the his or her presence. If you are leading the teaching, don’t show up a superior in the presence of subordinates either!

**Drying up**

If you lose your thread, try to move around or do something determined - alter a slide or wipe the board while you think. Could you take up on a point made by someone who interrupted earlier to tide you over?

You must know the subject so as to be able to have plans in reserve.
Doing teaching

Questions

If no one asks any, invent some - “Mr Smith, I imagine that your area could benefit from this - how much of what we have said would apply do you think?”.

Don’t offer an unanswerable question to the world if you actually want a reply though! Don’t for example ask “Now - what are all your names”. No one person can answer the question.

Some people feel that it is enough to say “Feel free to stop me any time and ask a question”. They do sometimes, but not early on - and not even later if they don’t feel part of what you are doing.

What you may be unintentionally getting across is a message more on the lines of: “feel free to look a complete idiot in front of the class by asking a question which no-one else seems to need to ask”

Always answer a question raised by a student. If you can’t, say you will come back to it at the end- “I’m coming to that point shortly, but first let me say...” or even redefine the question to suit the present moment “The real question here is.....”

Mixed levels of staff

If there are senior people present, involve them early on (though don’t frighten the others off). Move amongst the audience - watch how cabaret artists do this - come down amongst them. Keep up eye contact - choose people in turn. Pick up ideas from the audience when questions are asked and elaborate on them.

Course content

What you actually put into a course is very important! You can have the best techniques in the world, the most attentive class, and you can throw it all away by poor content.

We’ve already said that you need to know your subject thoroughly before you can teach it. But this isn’t enough on its own.

Unique selling point

Everything worth teaching or telling someone about has some aspect within it which makes it really useful and interesting. Often it’s something which isn’t immediately obvious to an outsider. For example -consider electronic mail. A useful selling point might be that if you are using this for sending messages, the person you are sending to doesn’t have to be available now. This makes it more useful than the telephone for example.

You could start teaching about electronic mail by explaining how to log in to a computer, how to assemble files and so on. The serial sequence of events you follow to get the result. But the users you are teaching don’t know what you know. If you start with the most important aspect - the unique selling point- the learners will be hooked immediately. Moreover, they will be better motivated to proceed with the slightly dull task of learning how to get the mail system working if they an see the end point before they start.

Avoid ‘serial’ teaching

It is too easy to be a ‘serial teacher - to explain things only in terms of the actual sequence you have to go through. It feels very fine and logical and as a teacher, it may well be the sequence you yourself use every day as you use the program. But if you can structure your material so as to make the interesting and useful aspects immediately obvious, so much the better.

Some real examples

An example

Putting a rug on a horse

If you want to explain how to put a rug on a horse, you could bring one (a rug that is!) with you and dress two members of the audience in it, as though they were a pantomime horse. Then, you could talk about why horses need ‘rugging’, what makes them cold and so on. This would make the talk interesting.

A badly organised ‘serial’ presenter though might start by talking a lot about being cold, horse’s temperatures, types of fabric and so on. This would probably be a boring way to present the subject though if introduced later it might lead to an interesting discussion.

Don’t be a serial thinker and teacher. Start at the interesting bit - capture the attention, then work outwards from that core so that they can see where they are going to. If you have seen a gripping epic film or read and examined the structure of Milton’s Paradise Lost you will know what I mean. Use the same principles in your teaching.
Techniques

Being at the centre
In all your teaching, you must be the focus of attention - you are the centre! If you are to establish control, you have to be the person that counts most. You have to do this both by knowing the subject thoroughly, but just as important, you also have to know the physical techniques that put you there.

Eye contact
Never lower your eyes or look away. Maintain eye to eye contact with each member for at least 10 seconds every two or three minutes. People of course mostly have two eyes, and it can be a problem to know which to look at! If you find this hard, concentrate on just one of their eyes. If your eyes flick and shift, you will look (and probably feel) shifty.

Practice this all the time - on friends, enemies, children. It doesn't hurt, but to start with, you may feel it breaks all the taboos and blocks you have on privacy. Well you are right - it does. And if you want to go on being private, you shouldn’t be teaching......

Movement
Don’t jiggle. Don’t fidget. Make your movements deliberate - if you feel that you are over-exaggerating this, you are probably doing it OK. If you feel awkward, make a bold move to another part of the area - and then stop. It’s OK to move right in amongst the class too - but respect their personal space. If the group has aisles and spaces, exploit these.

Appearance
Try to look good. You don’t always need to wear a suit - or trainers. Match your style to that of the class, but be slightly ahead on points - whatever the current vogue may be, do it better... Be relaxed but not casual. Alert but not taut. Keep your hands off your face - don’t scratch or twitch.

In particular, avoid elaborate hand talking gestures.

Facing the class
Always face the class. As you write on the board, face the class. If you don’t face the class and maintain eye contact, you won’t be successful.

You will have to develop movements that feel unnatural. Writing on a board from the side for example. If you have to concentrate for a moment on something else, face the class as quickly as you can afterwards. Memorise where you have written things on the board, and point to them without looking at it.

But face the class as you do everything

○ Always face the class.
○ Never look away for more than a moment.
○ Maintain eye contact at all times

Pace
Change the pace often. Use dramatic pauses. Build up to a climax.

All this has a lot in common with acting - and as you teach more and more, you will get better at it. Sometimes, you will go adrift. Be self-analytical. Watch and be critical of good and bad speakers.

Above all, keep the pace under your control. Be the origin of it. Don’t let yourself be driven by the demands of the class.

As with movement, if you speak in a way that feels to be exaggeratedly slow, it will probably be about right. If you can tape record a few efforts - or even practice reading at different speeds into a tape recorder, you will learn a great deal about this all important topic.

If the students are doing a practical session, it’s OK to hurry them to a conclusion - but make sure that they have enough time to experiment.

Never rush feedback. Avoid the:

‘Any questions - no - good....let’s get on then...’

syndrome. One reason why people don’t ask questions is because they don’t want to reveal ignorance. Ask some typical questions yourself, then answer them:

‘I expect some of you are wondering........’

and so on.

Humour
If you are good at jokes, or if you are a naturally funny person, by all means use this. But if you aren’t, don’t bother.

Humour will flow naturally into a well-structured session, and it will lift it beyond the ordinary. As you relax, you will find the right level.

Imagine you are relaxing with friends - and be natural.

Charm
Aim to captivate, delight, please. A teacher, like a Doctor, is in a unique position to gain
Techniques

affection. Charm is in you - you can’t buy it. Think of some people in history who had this quality. Richard Nixon - no charm. Reagan - charm. Charming people make others feel comfortable.

Voice

Your voice is your fortune as a teacher. Pamper it. If there are microphones, use them. Amateur teachers do annoying things like saying “One..Two.. Testing...” when the audience is actually in the room. Professionals get there early and check the sound with a friend. If you can hear your own voice over the system, you are too loud.

On the other hand, develop a projected voice - if you are really serious, go for lessons from a voice teacher. Speak from the chest, not the head. Speak slowly. Sound thoughtful. Don’t use a high-pitched gabble. You can’t always use a sound system, and you need to reach every corner of the room.

Don’t shout. In fact, the more quiet and restrained you are, the more people will strain to listen - but this doesn’t mean whispering or being feeble.

Many of the emotional blocks referred to on page 5 will cause you to sound small and frightened. As your confidence develops, so should your voice.

Think of all the irritating speakers you know - Politicians with over-produced voices. Now think of the kindly Uncles and Aunts who came for Christmas and seemed to dominate the room with geniality. Try to be a bit of the latter, but learn the production techniques from the first!

Body language

Your body is the single most important tool you have as a teacher. It gives you away, or it supports your argument. You can’t learn good body language. It comes out of you, and it gets more assertive and effective as you get better at teaching. The important thing is to feel in control of what you are saying with your body.

People ‘own’ the space that exists around them. Yours has to be as big as the group you are teaching!

There are several good books on body language. Desmond Morris’s ‘Manwatching’ is probably the most fun.

If you can get someone to film you teaching, study the interactions carefully, and see how you behave.

Self teaching

Disraeli is supposed to have said: ‘When I want to read a book, I write one’.

I would take that a stage further, and say: ‘When I want to know about anything I teach it....’

It is truly remarkable how the simple act of trying to present and explain something to others suddenly cements it firmly inside your own head!
Tools

Handouts

It is worth spending time making good handouts. But remember all those useful handouts you got at courses that went in the bin, or in a heap.

If something you say or want to cover is useful, make a handout that someone else might even want to use later. Put your name or initials at the bottom of handouts so you get credit.

It’s OK to handout material piecemeal, but be structured, and make each relevant. If they are to the point and interesting when you hand them out, half the class will stop listening to you, and start reading them instead.

Transparencies

Transparencies or overhead slides are often very badly done, but it isn’t always easy to see what has gone wrong.

Most have far too much information on them. Cut it down. Most are not artistically laid out. Think about layout, even if you use handwriting. Slides are ‘something I made earlier’ and if they look hurried, the audience, might feel you didn’t care enough to do them properly.

It’s OK to write them out, but pay careful attention to spelling and grammar. Mis-spellings and bad expression will stand out badly.

Slides that you move paper down to reveal points like a strip-tease always annoy me. They end up too full, and start looking dull. Swap slides often.

Of course you can have too many slides. You can become their prisoner. The best presenters have a few really good ideas, and extend them. The best way to get good at slides is to watch and be critical of other people’s.

Don’t use the full A4 size of the material for your slides. They end up too tall, and keystone badly. Short fat slides are often more successful.

You can use blank slides to draw on as the mood takes you.

There are a number of very effective slide producing programs on the market. This slide was made using PowerPoint from Microsoft. The original is in colour, hence the slight fading in this black and white version!

If you have a computer, this is a good way of getting a ‘designer feel’ to your presentations simply and effectively.

See also the illustration about keystoning on page 7 for an example of another problem with slides!

Boards

Boards come in various forms. The old-fashioned blackboard is rarely found, but can be used to dramatic effect because of the sound the chalk makes on the board as you write. It can be jabbed, scraped and wiped to make points.

Whiteboards are common, but have their own hazards. The most common one is picking up a pen that is intended for a flip chart. You can’t rub these off!

35 mm slides

It can take longer to make a slide presentation, but if the audience is there to be impressed rather than taught, it can be worthwhile. Slides have to be viewed in darkness or semi-darkness, and there is a danger of sending people to sleep. Keep slide sequences short - about 10 minutes is enough. Some computer programs - for example Microsoft’s ‘Power Point’ let you make slides for overheads, 35 mm projectors, and provide...
facilities for class handouts too. Because the computer is used to generate the slide material, it can be kept up to date easily. You send a floppy disk to a slide bureau, and they turn it into superb quality slides at very high resolution. They charge around £6.00 a slide. Other programs are available that do the same sort of thing.

**Graphics programs**

If you need to add graphics and pictures to your presentation, a number of very good packages are available. The diagrams in this document were made using ‘Corel Draw’ which also has an extensive library of clip art and ideas to make your teaching material look really good.

If you have a computer attached to a projector screen, and if the details are clear and can be seen in daylight, you could even use the computer and mouse as your drawing tool instead of a whiteboard. If you are illustrating dynamic concepts, you can actually move things around on the screen as you talk! However, if you are not very good at using the software, don’t attempt it till you have practised a bit.

You can also use Microsoft’s ‘Power Point’ program to drive a screen directly and display your slide show.

**Environment**

It may seem strange to find these aspects included as teaching tools, but they can be exploited as such very easily. They help you to change things, and keep things interesting for the students. They provide relief when the actual material may not be going down well.

**Lights and blinds**

It is hard to stay awake in the dark. Keep periods of darkness to the absolute minimum. If you can afford it, buy a reflective parabolic screen which will give ample gain to all projected material in the daylight.

If you have to turn off lights, install a light dimmer switch. This eases the transition from light to dark. It is as unkind to plunge people into instant darkness as it is to awake them rudely!

**Air conditioning**

Install air conditioning if you can. In hot weather it will really pay off. Make sure you can adjust it easily. Often cooling a room will make people take more notice - or even get them to react against it. You can then ‘help’ by warming (or cooling) the room for them. If there are windows, and you can open them, again do this in response to requests.

**Tea and biscuits**

If you plan to have this, Insist that these be brought to the room on time. Don’t waste time making it yourself. The pleasure that a good well-timed tea or coffee break brings is enormous. Having biscuits is a cheap option, but enormously worthwhile in terms of user satisfaction.
Software teaching

Everything in these notes applies equally whether you are teaching ideas and concepts, or something practical like how to use a piece of computer software.

Computers on the desk

In most cases, a special teaching room will have been set up, and the students will probably have computers on their desks. You need to give some thought to how best to present the training, and how best to teach them the necessary motor skills that will make them into productive users.

People are often very anxious about learning how to drive machines - computers are no exception.

Start at once

The golden rule is to PLUNGE STRAIGHT IN. Don’t spend ages explaining theory and abstract ideas. Once your preliminary introductions and questions are complete (see page 8). They plucked up the courage to get here, and you don’t want them to develop cold feet.

Immediate results

Try to arrange the training so that after about ½ an hour, they have produced something really effective. If they are using a Word Processor this can be an immaculately presented memo or letter. If it is a drawing, package, a picture with perhaps their name on it, or that of one of their children - or cat - or dog - that they can show their friends later. If it is a spreadsheet, a useful ready-reckoner for their bank account.

You need to do quite a lot of preparation for this yourself. Most modern programs allow you to create templates and macros that the user fills in with a minimum of decisions, or chances for getting it wrong. Make this the basis of the first session.

If you are using a graphics program, have plenty of good clip-art available to embellish. In the case of a spreadsheet, load some examples up that work already.

The Training Room

Great care must be taken to establish the right layout for the teacher or trainer. Serried ranks of computers have more in common with typing pools in the 1950’s, and should be avoided at all costs.

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Software teaching

distracted by other people’s screens, and there are no barriers between you and them.

Plan B...

Things will inevitably go wrong. You must be master of the piece of software so that when it does, you can change tack immediately into something that actually works. A users’ chief fear and worry is that they will ‘never be able to understand this’. You know of course that this view is unfounded - most people will get there in the end.

However, the chances are that some anxious students will already be looking for reasons to fail and say ‘I said I was no good at computers’. You mustn’t let them. If they seem to be getting depressed, stop talking about computers, and introduce a conversational topic to do with life in general.

Preoccupations and worries

You can often find out what a person’s preoccupations are without asking them. Ask a Word Processing class to type out some text they make up for themselves. Give them specific headings to work under - these can be nice happy things like: ‘What I like doing best’ and the converse ‘What I hate most’. I sometimes use ‘I often feel ....’ and then keep a close eye on what comes up.

This is the quickest way to tune into the concerns and issues that your group thinks is important.

When you save files, get the class to use their own names as part of the file name. This will help you to remember who is who as you inspect them.

Golden rules

Follow these golden rules when teaching software:

- Use the machines immediately.
- Don’t lean over and touch their keyboard.
- Establish control over the group.
- Make sure that each student is at exactly the same point as the rest.
- Ask them questions about what is happening.
- Be on their side against the things and people they don’t like.
- Find out who in their department they dislike - and dislike them too!
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Acknowledgments

Grateful thanks is due to Graham Barrett, Linda Clover, Keith Lamdin, Sadie Miles and Teri Walton.

Comments from readers...

These notes were given to members of an IUTC conference at York University in the Spring of 1991. Here are some of the comments I received:

I found the bit about not teaching something you don’t know. Hah! This is, of course, true but I have yet to work anywhere it could be applied as a matter of course. Having been worried by this in the past I kept records of feedback, course requests, personal contacts etc and discovered that people would rather move along one step behind a trainer who had explained the situation and took it in their stride, than be delivered into the hands of an expert who couldn’t teach.

Katharine Baker <GRTA16@ UK.AC.GLASGOW.CMS>

Well yes - of course, though some trainers find it hard to separate the two aspects I find. I had a conversation with someone at a famous University who was saying that “all secretaries are stupid” and so on, because she didn’t like training. In fact, there is very little stupidity in the classroom - it’s just that the ‘clever’ lecturer may not be able to work out the difference for him or herself. As to whether it is better to be one jump ahead, or just clever at teaching, I would agree that a good teacher can always teach anything - even at one jump ahead. What people want from you is confidence. A knowledgeable person who hasn’t thought much about teaching will be very hard to live with in the classroom.

DA CLOVER@UK.AC.OPEN.ACSVAX

Your booklet, “You Can Teach Anything” is one of the best guides to teaching I’ve seen. It lacks only “Don’t Panic” in nice friendly letters on the cover!

From: Reid J <jerry@uk.ac.sx>