

Question 2:

What is the one piece of advice you would give to a novice instructor?

“Keep a teaching journal. We all encounter successes, failures, and pleasant surprises in our classrooms – and all of those experiences can help us to improve as teachers. However, if we do not document those experiences, we risk losing the lessons within them. Use a journal to document memorable moments in the classroom. Acknowledge what went well to build a set of resources to revisit in the future. Document efforts that did not produce desired results; reflect on what went wrong and how a different approach might have yielded more positive outcomes. Note any serendipitous classroom experiences that might lead you to modify strategies for future classroom activities.

In addition to serving as a means for professional development, a teaching journal provides a tangible product of one’s work. Researchers can refer to their books and articles, but for our work as teachers, it is not as easy to point to the fruits of our labor. In moments when a disillusioned novice instructor might question the value of our work, the teaching journal presents tangible evidence of what we do in the classroom.”

Michael Irvin Arrington, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Sam Houston State University

2013 John I. Sisco Excellence in Teaching Award, Southern States Communication Association

“One easy classroom mistake is to conflate the concepts of ‘supportive’ and ‘affirmative’ instruction. It’s easy to find one’s self accidentally agreeing with student comments or reflections in the classroom, mostly because a smile and a nod makes everyone in the room feel better. However, I often find that students best learn and apply material when their comments are critically discussed (and even challenged). A teacher can best do these things after they have established openness and accessibility, however, lest those behaviors be perceived as confrontational. Come to class a little early and chat with students, and linger after it ends. Make your lectures and discussions as interactive as you are comfortable, pausing to solicit feedback from students--and do so more frequently than you would otherwise deem necessary. Hold extra office hours in the campus coffee shop, and accept the invitations of student organizations to be present in their space.”

Jonathan M. Bowman, University of San Diego

2014 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education

“As a new teacher, your first priority should be to build positive relationships with your students. The more students realize that you are interested in them personally, the more they will be engaged in your lessons. Discover the activities and interests of your students and use this information in your lessons. Students will respond to you in a very

different way when they know you care about each one of them. Your second priority should be to establish, practice, and re-establish expectations and routines to for your classroom. Spending the extra time it takes to make your classroom run well gives students a clear understanding of what is required of them. Simple, clear, and well-rehearsed expectations and routines will ensure that little time will be wasted. When expectations are not met or start slipping, take the time to reteach them so that everyone is clear about what behaviors are acceptable. Once established, a real sense of community can be built around relationships and learning in your classroom.”

John Heineman, Lincoln High School (Lincoln, NE)
1998 Marcella E. Oberle Award for Outstanding Teaching in Grades K-12

“The one piece of advice I would give to a novice instructor is to strive for balance. A new position brings new responsibilities and expectations and it is easy to become overwhelmed quickly. A new faculty member will be expected to get involved with departmental and institutional committees. No one wants to say ‘no’ when asked to serve and wants to be seen as willing, competent, and collegial. However, in my experience, when administrators discover one’s willingness and competence, they turn to the new faculty member repeatedly. New instructors must learn to pick and choose the projects with which they become involved, and learn to say ‘no’ when it is necessary so that they can perform at a high level with their pedagogy and with those activities they do take on. Additionally, it is important to continue to have other interests that give relief from daily pressures in order to maintain one’s sanity in the midst of competing responsibilities.”

Thomas Bovino, Suffolk County Community College
2010 Michael and Suzanne Osborn Community College Outstanding Educator Award

“Don't condescend to your students. They will recognize and resent it. Respect their intelligence and maturity. Know what you are talking about but don't be afraid to acknowledge that you don't know everything. Students will give you wide latitude for inexperience and will work actively to help you, so long as you do not undermine your credibility by patronizing them.”

David Zarefsky, Northwestern University
2012 Wallace A. Bacon Lifetime Teaching Excellence Award

“Probably all of us were at one point influenced by a splendid teacher, whose engagement with subject and student changed our ways of looking at the world. It is likely those memories indelibly shape how we go about our own encounters with teaching. I would encourage new teachers to try to stop thinking about those models. Why? Several years ago I was lucky enough to attend a master class taught by the violinist Itzhak Perlman. As gifted a teacher as he is a performer, he was working with impressive young violinists from the Conservatory of Music.

One young man performed a virtually flawless technical rendition of a Mozart sonata. Yet, oddly, although he got all the notes, very little of the ‘music’ came through.

Perlman's coaching was exemplary—gentle, firm, focusing at first on very small (easily rectified) missteps. The student (who was sweating bullets at the beginning, for all the reasons you can imagine) slowly began to relax into the interaction. He became more comfortable, his playing got richer, subtler. Perlman said, almost in a private aside to the student, 'Remember: you play who you are.' You cannot faithfully teach what you have not lived. And your life is uniquely your own, the only truly distinctive component of what you teach that you can give your students."

Timothy Gura (Emeritus), Brooklyn College, CUNY
2008 Wallace A. Bacon Lifetime Teaching Excellence Award

"It took me a very long time to figure out how to talk with students about their grades early in the semester (invariably because they didn't do as well as they thought they should have). Over time, I realized that I needed to ask the students to bring in their notes and their readings. It enabled me to show students some ideas about how to take better notes (e.g., in some cases the students could have memorized their notes and still not have done well because there wasn't enough meat there; in other cases, they could coordinate between their readings and their notes because that's the material most likely to be on the exams). It enabled me to show them ways to read the texts more efficiently and effectively (e.g., by outlining each chapter's structure, and by jotting notes in the margins, whether to highlight an idea that is especially intriguing or confusing, or marking where they see a connection between concepts and something/someone it reminds them of). I also learned to assure each student: I do not equate this grade with your *knowledge of the material*; I do not equate this grade with *what you will eventually get* in the course; and most importantly, I do not equate this grade with *your value as a person*. I confess I was amazed at how many times students would express great relief at this. It also took me a while to get over the fear that I wouldn't have all the answers. I had to relax, to realize that part of the educational process is exploring together, and that by showing that I didn't know something but was willing to find out about it, I demonstrated the value of lifelong learning. This also showed that I was open to learning from *them*—one of the great joys of teaching."

Kathleen J. Turner (Emerita), Davidson College
2007 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education

"Preparation is crucial. The more prepared you are the better. Couple of ideas: First, create one lecture or unit for each class day. It helps students if lectures don't cross classes. Second, try to teach the same class across semesters. That way you get better and better. Third, make a folder for each lecture. Put everything about that day in that folder—your notes, exercises, slides, etc. After the first semester you will have most of your material ready to go for the next semester. And anytime you read something new you want to include in a lecture, you know right where it goes. Fourth, prepare more than you think you'll need. You'll discover the first time you offer your lesson you'll cover your material very quickly. The tenth time you teach the same lesson, you'll have no extra time at all. The more you teach something, the more details, stories, and examples you'll develop."

John A. Daly, University of Texas
2002 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education

“One of my favorite assignments for Basic Speech course students and Oral Interpretation students is the Cultural Tapestry Speech. Basically students are asked to answer the question, ‘Why are you, you?’ They are asked to analyze to various cultures that influence them significantly. What traditions and rituals are used in their everyday life? What are their holiday traditions and celebrations? How does food play in part in their culture? I ask them to consider how does their family influence their lives? How does their hometown or specific area of their home city play a part in their lives? What family customs and rituals can be seen in their expectations and celebrations? Are there specific career pathways that can be viewed within the family structure? Does media have a significant impact on their values, behaviors and likes/dislikes? This speech is normally given during the third to fifth week of the course. I suggest three to five minutes per student. The explanation of this assignment can be difficult for students who believe ‘they have no culture.’ We discuss the culture of small town America. We discuss the impact of living in a city situation. We discuss the impact of living in poverty, middle class and wealth. We discuss the various holiday celebrations. We discuss the impact of students who did live with their nuclear families. We discuss the impact of students who want to be polar opposites of their family traditions and rituals. I believe that this assignment gives amazing insight into the backgrounds of the students. The instructor and the classmates get tremendous insight!”

David A. Wendt, Iowa Wesleyan University
2000 Marcella E. Oberle Award for Outstanding Teaching in Grades K-12

“My basic strategy as an instructor is simple—I try one strategy after another in classes until I find one that works to achieve my purpose. In many cases, this means that I teach undergraduates using a ‘flipped’ format in which class time is spent going through case-studies based on principles that have been presented in the book I wrote specifically for the class. I’ve used this strategy for decades, long before the idea of a ‘flipped class’ became common. But there are occasions in that class when discussion lags that I scrap the discussion framework and simply lecture about a particular work of rhetoric and explain how it illustrates the principles that we are considering that day. I usually tell them that I’m going to lecture about one work of rhetoric, but I will then expect them to apply the principles to a second work of rhetoric. That often results in improved discussion. In graduate classes, I also use a variety of strategies. Normally, the bulk of the class is spent going through thought questions on readings, but when that doesn’t work I sometimes organize ad hoc debates on topics in the class. On many occasions, I’ve played the devil’s advocate, taking a position quite different from my own. The key point is that when a strategy doesn’t work, I persevere and try something else. I’ve found that every class period is different and that choosing from a variety of particular strategies can enhance the learning process.”

Robert C. Rowland, University of Kansas
2005 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education

“I find myself closely drawn to the writing of Parker Palmer who states that good teachers share one important trait—a capacity for connectedness. Good teachers ‘are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts—the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self’ (Palmer, 1998, p. 11). Palmer’s premise is concise and insightful: good teaching rests in the integrity and character of the teacher. In certain respects, I believe that the challenging and complex endeavor of teaching may not easily be solved by a book chapter on the importance of teacher clarity or an article discussing the virtues of group discussion. Rather, to be a good teacher it becomes necessary to look inside oneself, to find the courage to share one’s passion, the courage to inspire, and in Palmer’s words, the courage to teach. In essence, there are countless techniques that can be shared to improve classroom instruction, but the best recommendation is to look within yourself and to let your identity and your integrity speak in the classroom. Good teaching is that simple and that complex.”

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.

Joseph P. Mazer, Clemson University
2013 CSCA Outstanding New Teacher Award

“Don’t respond to student’s questions immediately. Give yourself time to consider your answer. Be positive. Don’t complain about anything (the traffic, your bad hair day, your dislike of the current administration, your visit to the doctor, etc.) at any time. You can get good responses to negative comments initially but over time the class becomes toxic. You won’t want to attend class and neither will your students. If you can present a positive outlook (fake it if need be . . . half of teaching is acting), you will find that after a couple of weeks the class will carry the positive aura and you won’t have to work very hard to keep it going. You will look forward to attending class and so will your students.”

Joe Ayres, Washington State University
2005 Wallace A. Bacon Lifetime Teaching Excellence Award

“Use the resources of your regional and national organizations. Start attending your regional [ECA for me] and national [NCA] conference regularly. Use the teaching resources available at your conference. Attend the GIFTS [Great Ideas for Teaching Speech] programs. Attend programs in the Instructional Divisions. Find the Super Star Teachers who attend your conferences, the ones winning the teaching awards. Go to their programs, become their groupies. People who love teaching are always willing to give advice to young teachers.

Take short courses at conferences. Great material for prepping a new course is often found at short courses. Learn to use the resources available on the NCA website. The *Teaching and Learning* Tab and the *More Resources* Tab on the NCA homepage [natcom.org] both have a tremendous amounts of information.

Consider attending NCA's Institute for Faculty Development. According to the NCA webpage, 'the NCA Institute for Faculty Development, also known as the Hope Conference, is a small conference that provides undergraduate Communication faculty members opportunities to solicit feedback on scholarship, to build collaborative research and pedagogical relationships, to learn about new directions in theory and pedagogy, and to develop new course area expertise.'

Bonnie Jefferson, Boston College

2006 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award

"Over-prepare and be clear about what you want students to know and do. When I first began teaching, I was always a bit nervous that I would run out of things to say in class. I started my teaching career as a high school teacher and our classes were 50 minutes long. I worried that 35 minutes into the class I would be done with my lesson plan. I believe this may be the same concern many novice teachers have as well. As a result, I always made sure that I had more material than I needed 'just in case.' It didn't take long before I knew exactly how much material I could cover in 50 minutes but having that type of 'back up' made me feel more confident as I began my life as a teacher. The second piece of advice I would give to a novice instructor is to be very clear about what I want students to know and do. On a course syllabus, we outline the goals and learning objectives of a course. In addition, each time I begin a class, I usually go over the things we will cover that day. Likewise, when I give an assignment, I always provide an assignment sheet so that everyone clearly understands what is expected of them. I know these two things helped me as I began my teaching career, however, they have continued to help me throughout my career as a high school and college teacher."

Sara Chudnovsky Weintraub, Regis College

2014 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award

"Put the following statement in your syllabus, 'I reserve to myself the right to ask a student who is behaving in a disruptive fashion to leave my classroom. I also reserve to myself the right to call campus safety if a student acts in a hostile way, verbally or physically, toward me or toward anyone else in class.' Having this statement in print will more than pay for itself the first time you need to invoke it."

Alfred G. Mueller II, Neumann University

2013 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award

"When I first started teaching college, I had an image in my mind of what teaching should be like, of what students would be like, and of what success in teaching would mean. It turns out that all those assumptions were either wrong, or biased in odd ways, or fictional. Over the past thirty years (!) of teaching college--on traditional campuses, in prisons and jails, on an army base, and abroad--I have come to learn that each classroom evolves its own norms of deliberation and exchange, and that each student brings her or his unique perspective and skillset to the class. Thus, instead of trying to achieve some pre-established set of goals, I have learned simply to *cherish the process* while striving to help students take a few steps down the road of their personal growth.

My advice, then, is to throw out assumptions, pocket those expectations, and instead dig into the deep, rich particularity of each class, focusing on what you can do to help each student grow. For some students, that will mean producing super sophisticated written work, for others that might mean making a video, for yet another that could mean communicating via painting or dance or poetry--that is, let the students work in their comfort zones of expression, even as you gently nudge them down the road of intellectual development. At the same time, try also to create avenues for students to work outside their comfort zones, so that the dancers learn a little more about writing, or the arguers learn about listening, or the shy students learn to speak up. What I am calling *cherishing the process* is thus a delicate balancing act of improvisation and careful forethought, of covering key information and skills while also being open to student-generated experiments and detours along the way.”

Stephen John Hartnett, University of Colorado Denver
2012 WSCA Distinguished Teaching Award

“Be as organized as possible. As a novice instructor, you might assume that things will just ‘fall into place’ or that you can make it up as you go. This is partially true, but the semester will move much faster than you think it will. A class has lots of moving parts; changing one thing tends to have a domino effect. If you change an exam date, three other things are impacted. Changing dates or creating the syllabus as you go is also stressful for students. Some may have planned ahead to complete an assignment on time. When you change the due date, their good behavior is punished, and the student who waited to the last minute is rewarded. You also open yourself up to requests for extensions if students don’t have adequate notice about due dates.

By the start of the second week of the semester, your syllabus should list all units, all major assignments, all exams, and dates for all. You should have a good idea of what you’ll be discussing and doing in each class period. A syllabus that has a complete schedule of units, exams, assignments, and due dates gives students a roadmap for where the class is going. Being organized at the beginning of the semester frees up time later in the semester for the teaching activities that really matter, like connecting with your students and helping them learn the cool stuff you’re teaching.”

Ann Bainbridge Frymier, Miami University
2007 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award

“My advice actually applies beyond one’s role as a novice. In one sense, anytime an instructor teaches a new course, the following point also applies: you will learn more than your students the first time you teach a course that is new. This is not a bad thing! You are faced with answering questions about a topic or area that you are not as well-equipped as a more veteran instructor to answer. Faking or making up an answer is far worse than an honest ‘I don’t know for sure, but will get back to you’ response. There is nothing wrong with admitting uncertainty about how to best answer a question. Students, by and large, are perceptive observers of one’s behavior and attitude. They know when you are unprepared or less prepared than you’d like. That is why you work harder than a veteran in preparing for each class!!”

Raymie E. McKerrow (Emeritus), Ohio University
2017 Wallace A. Bacon Lifetime Teaching Excellent Award

“Be yourself. Students are savvy and can easily detect b.s. Admit when you don’t know. Avoid adopting a persona that isn’t you. I’ve seen TAs over the years who believe that they need to be authoritarian and rigid to gain respect. If that is not your nature, don’t adopt that persona. It will lead to student mutiny. Students appreciate an instructor who is caring, forthright, clear in his/her expectations, and fair. If something isn’t going well in class, metacommunicate with students to learn what issues they are encountering. After you learn the issues, work with students to figure out how to meet and resolve them.”

Betsy Wackernagel Bach, University of Montana
2017 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education

“I still think Robert Boice (author of *Nihil Nimus: Advice for New Faculty Members*) offers the best advice for beginning teachers. The idea of *nihil nimus*, everything in moderation, cautions against over-preparation. Sometimes, when developing confidence in the classroom or when teaching a new class, instructors try to exert control by scripting out every moment or preparing material for vastly more than one class session, so that even jokes are canned and prepped material is not covered. Teaching can consume as much time as one will let it, and a pre-scripted, one-size-fits-all- approach to teaching can often miss out on the spontaneity and play that often make learning more impactful for students. Constant in-the-moment adjustments are needed. Relatedly, the important piece, I think, is to ensure a clear flow through from your course learning outcomes to your specific lesson plan and its goals through the instructions and rubrics on particular assignments. The rest is secondary to that flow.”

Lisa Keränen, University of Colorado Denver
2015 WSCA Distinguished Teaching Award

“Remember that, at the end of the day, teaching is almost certainly the most important thing we do as professors and as an academy. At the beginning of my career, I kept thinking about how to expand my presence in the field through research and service. The bigger the research and service portfolios grew, however, the harder it was for me to give attention to my teaching duties and to always be there and present for my students. The reasons for doing research and service are supposed to be to generate knowledge and to help build a robust academy – but what good are they if we are not sharing that knowledge as teachers?

I sometimes fantasize about how nice it would be to go back to my assistant professor self and say, “Slow down. A lot of this stuff can wait. You will likely have years and years in the academy. Pour yourself into your teaching and only those research and service projects you care most about doing.” Not that it is easy to do that – I still find myself struggling to say no now. But maybe if my mindset was “no first, only yes if it is truly worth it” from the beginning, maybe it would be habit by now.”

Jimmie Manning
Professor and Chair, Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Reno
2020 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education
