

67 Teaching Mistakes

- 1. Lacking specific exam (unit) objectives in advance of any lectures.** In addition to being the very first step in the education process, it is also the most important. Too many instructors complain that students do not show up prepared for class, when the easiest way to ensure this is to provide specific objectives in advance for that class period and have a system of holding them accountable for being prepared. –
- 2. Promising something and not delivering.** The trust relationship with the student is destroyed by this. If you promise to post grades by a certain time, DO IT. Or don't promise by a certain time/date. Say, as soon as possible. Or sometime before Friday. Instructors who do not do what they say they will do are not effective. –Sally Flesch, Black Hawk College, IL
- 3. Always standing behind the lectern.** Many students, both young and more mature, enter some classes with reservations. One of many reasons is too many students hear or have heard horror stories about the professor. These stories automatically cause a stressful and stale environment. I have learned over the years that one of the best ways to combat this is by not separating myself from the students by spending all the class time standing behind the lectern. A lectern can be an intimidating wall that separates the students from the professor. When they feel intimidated, they mentally isolate themselves. Professors should stand behind the lectern mostly when they need the book or some other tool in order to instruct. Otherwise, they should move about and around the room in order to establish eye contact and physical contact with the entire class. This can help the professor more easily read the students' facial expressions. For instance, if a concept is unclear, facial expressions communicate just that. On the other hand, when the students are connecting mentally, this shows as well. Most of all, the environment becomes more conducive for learning because students feel less intimidated by the professor and the subject. –Emmie D. Stokes, Faculty, English, Augusta Technical College, GA
- 4. Lacking knowledge and preparation.** The so-called conventional wisdom of “those who can do and those who can't teach” is not the case. Teaching is as much an art form as it is a technique. Effective teachers are able to display both and know that knowledge and preparation create the foundation for both. –Sheryl T. Smikle, Associate Dean, Baccalaureate Studies, The College of Westchester, NY
- 5. Failing to see the influence of Cultural Imperialism** -- in how we teach and learn (or - Failing to include a "global" cultural sensitivity to teaching and learning in our Instruction). This is such a "wide" and influential mistake -- that it is unlikely you will get its nomination -- RE: it impacts virtually ALL instructors in Western cultures -- or those whose instruction "imitates" Western education (most of the rest of the world). The key point here, is that "cultural imperialism" -- or the dissemination of the imperial culture's values (European systems of education, information dissemination, specialization, even "purpose of education" etc.) are so predominant and impact the degrees, the modes of instruction, the exercises, and virtually everything outlined in the prior mistakes to such a large extent, that like the "white elephant" in the room... the majority of us can ONLY be aware of cultural alternatives to learning and teaching -- if we've lived or experienced them for a long period (i.e. lived, learned, or taught in cultures that have distinct alternatives to the Western academy). The remedy: begin to include media, interviews, and contacts with educators living in other cultures. Asking a simple question: "How would you teach this" to virtually anyone in the Congo, Ecuador, Northern India or Mongolia -- immediately gives enormous insights into alternatives to not only how we teach... but what and why we teach it! --Michael Naylor, Michael, Washtenaw Community College, MI

6. Not having your facts straight. Nothing is more important than being really knowledgeable about the things you teach and having the best available facts and figures or scientific thinking available to share with your students. First, giving wrong information is worse than not teaching at all! Secondly, if students notice that you are not really an expert on what you teach you probably have lost their trust and even made it harder for others to teach them. This also means admitting if there is no clear answer to a question and pointing out the limits to what we do/can know. –Christian Goergen, Faculty, Political Science, College of DuPage, IL

7. Talking too much and doing too much. Whenever the ‘teacher’ is relied on to supply the bulk of the material or s/he is the focal point, the class energy is lost to a passive state. If the ‘learning’ is to take place, it must go through a processing stage in the students, and the more active the better. The more responsibility the students take to present, manipulate, debate, sum up, and draw conclusions about the information, the more they truly learn the material. The alternative is merely to add a layer of data (if you’re lucky) to already jammed systems with little ability to integrate for future applications, leaving students with short-term recall and little if no carryover to the work they will one day face when they need the material. Student-centered classrooms look completely different and teachers become facilitators for the learning to take place. –Marla Benik, Brevard Community College, FL

8. Relying too much on all the current pedagogical advice and not taking into account your own instincts, knowledge of your actual students, and personality. –Allen Culpepper, Manatee Community College, FL

9. Talking to the board. This is not to be confused with talking to the board, which is what tends to happen when we talk to the board. Many of us still use a white board, chalk board or a screen on which material is written or projected. Perhaps because of time constraints, we may turn our backs to the class to write or point to information--and simultaneously we talk about the issue at hand. What seems like a small movement from facing the class to turning our backs on them may have larger implications. At the very least, talking to the board allows students to disconnect with the instructor, however briefly, thus negating our best efforts to engage them in the first place. –Kym Kleinsmith, Adaptive Technology/Educational Support Specialist, Reading Area Community College, PA

10. Creating a shoddy or formulaic syllabus--keep it short, simple, direct, to the point. Keep it flexible, like the Constitution. And cover your bases. First impressions are everything, and the first and most significant impression between teacher and student is a covenant known as the syllabus. The syllabus serves as a contract of last resort when, at the conclusion of the semester, there may arise a disagreement over grading and attendance policies as well as other evaluation instruments. Keep the syllabus specific and legalistic (like the U. S. Constitution) rather than lofty and idealistic (like the Declaration of Independence). The Declaration inspired the revolution and embodied its ideals: government by the consent of the governed; all men are created equal--great theory. In practice, however, the Constitution stopped the revolution from getting out of control. It provided the identity and boundary markers--the 'rules'--of a new world order. But it did so with precision, specificity, and diplomacy. As well as flexibility. --Paul L. Van Gilder, Faculty, History and Critical Thinking Instructor, Southeastern Community College, NC

11. Using a student to demonstrate something negative and in so doing making him/her feel singled out and self conscious. You’ll lose students’ attention for at least the rest of the class and possibly the remainder of your time together. The exact opposite is the number one best teaching strategy. Use students to exemplify something positive which relates to the lesson. That will elevate a

student and engage her/him for the remainder of the course and will also encourage other students to be positive contributors as well. If in doubt, ask an elementary school teacher; they have to use all of the right strategies just to stay alive. –Jean Kaput, Workforce Initiatives, MiraCosta College, CA

12. Failing to develop credibility. I have instructors who are wonderfully qualified but enter the classroom telling students “I am new to this; we can learn together.” The students assume they are new to the subject, not to teaching. Once you make this mistake, it is hard to win back the students. –Anita Miller, Dean, Harrison College, IN

13. Underestimating students. If you assume that your students are not capable of contributing real ideas to your discipline, you will project those low expectations onto the students. If you do not believe in your students' intelligence, they will not believe in their intelligence. If you patronize your students, they will feel worthy of your patronization. But if you expect students to contribute, if you ask hard questions believing that they can offer intelligent answers, they will deliver intelligent answers. **Part of our job as instructors is to prove to our students that they are smart and to teach them that expressing their intelligence is satisfying, gratifying experience.** --Ashley Hogan, Faculty, English, Meredith College, NC

14. In writing or composition, talking about the form before you talk about the message, or worse, never talking about the message at all. Respect your student's essay or paragraph as an attempt at communication. After years of trampling over students' messages on my way to the grammar, I now constantly remind myself to respond to the interpersonal communication first. This does not mean uttering a formula like, “The ideas are good” or “I like your subject, but....”. It means **showing authentic interest in the message:** “How is your sister now? Did your friend ever go back to school? I am impressed at the way you managed the ADHD. You made me see the village market as a test of reasoning skills.” –Carla Boyer, Learning Center Director, El Centro College, TX

15. Making a course so easy that almost no learning takes place. I know lots of people who think there is a place for extra credit and exam reviews, but I think that when students know the exact content of the assessments (they have the actual test before they take it) they don't care about learning any more. I've seen professors give “review exams” and then give that same test as the “real exam.” If the test is comprised of discussion questions, that strategy might actually help learning; however, when the test in question is all multiple choice, this strategy stifles curiosity and learning even by the most motivated students. –Beatriz Gonzalez, Faculty, Natural Sciences, Santa Fe College, FL

16. Taking it personally. The indeterminate “it” being everything that students dish out. “It” isn't about us. I have taught at a rural community college for the last ten years. Trust me, few of my students “want” to learn how to do a research paper or analyze a poem, and many are resentful that they have to take classes in areas that don't seem to have an immediate impact on what they want to learn about. Some cheat. Some don't attend class on a regular basis. Some whine and complain. Let them. My job remains the same—to help them learn the writing skills they will need to earn a degree and communicate on the job. If I get angry or over-react every time a student challenges something, I would never get anything done. **We have to model professionalism.** Set your schedule. Stick to it when you can. **Make changes only when it will increase student learning. Be open to their concerns;** sometimes students do have legitimate grievances. **Enjoy being liked, but don't depend on it. They aren't out to get you; we mustn't be out to get them.** –Amy Kolker, Faculty, English, Black Hawk College, IL

17. Trying to teach content without teaching the learning skills that would be

helpful to the student in learning the content. You can teach how to learn as you teach your subject matter! For example, teach a mnemonic device for learning the cranial nerves in an anatomy class. –Jan E. Starnes, Professor/Counselor, Alamo Community College District, TX

18. Not showing enthusiasm for your topic!! Enthusiasm is contagious and the ultimate technique for getting student's attention and getting them excited about the topic. If they feel pumped-up, they are likely to read the material and pay attention. Sometimes my students continue the discussion long after class time has ended. They regularly line up in the front at the end of class to give their last thoughts on the topic. I judge my presentation by the amount of chatter as they file out of the room. –Susan Burr, Santa Barbara City College, CA

19. Underestimating the importance of quality academic time spent with students outside of the classroom and its impact on their success, satisfaction, and retention. –Jim Brouard, AIB College of Business

20. Being under prepared or not preparing at all. Teachers should have an outline of what they plan to cover for the class period. Materials should be collected and ready. Any multimedia should be tested before the class period. A contingency plan should be part of the plan. Students are in a class for a brief amount of time but they expect that time to be used wisely and to their benefit. They don't want to watch an instructor flounder for something to do or drone on through a lecture. Students expect the instructor to clarify or help them learn something they couldn't find on their own from the course materials. –Hilda Black

21. Not explaining terminology inherent to academia. The words matriculation, curriculum, syllabi, articulation, and even credit hour mean nothing to new or prospective college students and can only foster boredom and fear. The philosophy of explaining terminology becomes even more important as coursework levels rise. It's the same scenario as a physician's office. A diagnosis of erythema toxicum neonatorum in your newborn would horrify a new mother. But telling the mother that her newborn has minor red bumps on his skin will make fear subside and an understanding of the issue easier to deal with. –Lydia Ulatowski, Niagara Community College, NY

22. Being disorganized. This can take place in many forms such as: being late for class (consistently), being unable to find your materials for class quickly, not being comfortable or up to date with the course content (just got the lesson plan for the class a week before class starts or worse, you don't have one!), being uncomfortable with the technology in the class such as PowerPoint, lecterns, DVD's, flash drives ,etc; being unsure of what upcoming assignments are due and a HUGE ONE is passing assignments and exams back weeks after they were due. Students have no idea how they are doing which hinders their ability to make responsible decisions about continuing in the class or withdrawing. –LaVonya Williams, Student Development Faculty, Harper College, IL

23. Lacking understanding of or interest in the academic preparedness of each student. Whether it is generational or regional, our classrooms are increasingly filled with students who have such varied backgrounds that it often feels like herding cats just to get them to come together. Whether it's writing or reading skills (or lack thereof) or a sense of entitlement that they deserve A's just for taking a particular class due to years of being taught a self-esteem curriculum, the wide gaps between students' academic skills is an increasing problem. **Faculty who focus on content without considering these very real complications end up teaching to only a small percentage of the class.** There is a better way! By understanding the academic preparedness and trends they experienced in their K-12 learning experiences, professors can tailor learning activities to not only use

what is familiar to the students, but to teach them new skills. They can also structure activities where the students teach each other. At the core, I think all faculty believe that students are capable of learning. Rather than growing frustrated about what they do not know, we can teach them what they need to know. If they missed learning how to read, listen and take notes, why not teach them using your particular content? If they have never experienced failure or constructive feedback we can teach them how to do that in the safety of a classroom before their job depends on it. Every discipline could teach self-discipline and self efficacy! If we truly believe they are capable of learning, then let's **TEACH them!** --Anne K. Robey-Graham, Adjunct Professor of Communication

24. Telling your students, "This is easy" or worse, "This is so easy." The message it conveys to students is that if they don't find it easy, they are not very bright. Better: "This problem requires some thought and time but with **effort** you will get it." --Joyce ZAritsky, Faculty and Program Director, Academic Peer Instruction (API), Communication Skills Department, LaGuardia Community College, NY

25. Not knowing every student's name by the second week of class. --Liesel Reinhart, Mt San Antonio College, Ca

26. Telling students they must read the textbook or other materials and then not following up on that requirement. Students today often spend over a hundred dollars for our texts and then find they never had to buy it in the first place...much less read it. Instructors who do not use the text are cheating their students from practicing the important skill of reading to learn new information. A well chosen text adds new perspective to the lecture as well as reemphasizing the points of lecture and adding credibility to the instructor. If there are discrepancies in ideas or theories from the lecture to the text the student will have the opportunity to critically examine the multiple possibilities. **Students that have read texts (because the instructor has accountability for same) come to class better able to discuss these ideas. I require students to have completed handwritten reading notes on the chapter I am about to lecture on each class...and I let them use those handwritten notes on quizzes before the lecture. No reading notes in their handwriting, no quiz...that way I actually know which students are doing the reading and which are not.** There is a high correlation to students with reading notes and A's and B's. A side benefit of knowing your students all have reading notes...I never do definitions...lecture is a lot more interesting for me and for them. --Linda Tyson, Faculty, Natural Sciences, Santa Fe College, FL

27. Not setting high enough goals/ expecting too little from the students. Others include spoon feeding students information, most "extra credit" assignments, and not listening, truly listening, to your students. --Keith Krapf, John A. Logan College, IL

28. Having a class online so that the computer is doing all scoring and the teacher and student know which items are wrong, but they do not know why problems/questions are wrong. If the item involves calculation, the students who omit the item, try the item not knowing how to work it, and those who really know how to work it but have a trivial error with the calculator all miss the item and get the same score. This is not teaching! It is evaluating for the purpose of grading. And students continue practicing their mistakes! --Olin Wood, NC

29. Not giving clear explanations. Students say that their teachers talk too fast or don't talk to them, they teach to the board. Our verbal explanations for difficult concepts, such as in math, is our main mode of teaching for our students. Consider using fewer words in trying to explain these concepts, and speak slower when doing so. **Pausing after an explanation will give their brain time to catch up after hearing this new information. It takes students time to digest what they hear and instead of rambling**

through several examples, consider doing fewer examples with clearer explanations, and speak slowly. It can be a hard thing to transition to, but when I tried this with my **developmental math students**, I have gotten a very positive response. –Vicki Garringer, Adjunct Faculty, Mathematics, College of DuPage, IL

30. Testing for knowledge and understanding of course content through multiple-choice tests and exams only. This approach merely encourages rote learning on a short-term memory basis. This is not to say that multiple-choice tests do not have a place. However, there are ways to deliver these tests using technology which provides further “teachable moments.” For example, using clicker technology to deliver a multi-choice test allows you to collect students’ individual responses then respond immediately to the range of answers given by the class. This way, students get instant feedback on their progress; myths, misunderstandings, and misconceptions can be discussed and corrected in real time; and the students remain much more engaged in the process. Getting students to take the knowledge gained from the course and use it in different ways to create responses in different formats allows students with different learning styles to truly show what they know and understand. Some assignments may have to include feedback loops to develop the level of learning you are looking for, such as working on drafts of posters or research papers with feedback prior to final submission. –Fiona Chrystall, Faculty, Environmental Science, Lees-McRae College, NC

31. Not giving feedback often enough/quickly enough. –Katherine MacKinnon, Butte College, CA

32. Teaching the course material rather than teaching students. I believe that when the focus is on the students learning the material and the students learning how to learn the material, then the material will be learned. When the focus is on the material and not the students, the students are lost along the way. When a class needs more time to absorb a concept or students are excited and running with an area of the curriculum, it is better to adapt the syllabus than to lose students. –Barbara Dean Wolfe, Chair, Department of Academic Strategies, Director, Academic Strategies Center, Hillyer College, University of Hartford, CT

33. Failing to establish yourself as a credible source. Too often we say things like “I’m not really an expert at this, but I think....” or “The Dean just told me last week I was teaching this class so I haven’t really prepared.” True, this lowers expectations, which may make the novice instructor feel more comfortable, but it also greatly lowers the students’ interest in and excitement for the class. Instead, let the students know why they are very fortunate to have you as their instructor for this class, based on your experience in the field. –Ellen Sheppard, President, Carolinas College of Health Sciences, NC

34. Adopting a new strategy just because it is popular, or everybody is doing it, without thinking it through as to whether you really are committed to that strategy. Another big mistake: Trying to be someone you’re not. Always be yourself. –Gerald Mozur, Professor of Philosophy, Lewis & Clark Community College, IL

35. Making a hard and fast deadline for every major assignment and allowing no make-up or extra-credit alternatives to meeting course objectives. Today’s non-traditional students have lives that are logistical nightmares, so one effective way to ease students out of the course is to make a hard and fast deadline for every major assignment and allow no make-up or extra-credit alternatives to meeting course objectives. That way, if the baby-sitter doesn’t show up or the student has even a flat tire (let alone an accident) and misses a test, they have a permanent zero. That’ll teach ‘em! Instead, never let them off the hook; let the assignment remain due at least a week or schedule one make-up day for giving alternative forms of all tests (or, better, use the on-campus testing/learning/tutoring

center for alternative proctored tests). The fundamental question is “Do you want students to pass your course?” If yes, then maximize ways to avoid zeroes, and assume that most students are honest (or at least want to save face) and want to pass the course. –Eric Hibbison, Program Head for Reading, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, VA

36. Forgetting that every new term brings new students who have not learned your material already. Just because YOU have repeated the information a hundred times (throughout all your years of teaching) does not mean that THEY have heard it before or should know it! Yes, you DO have to start all over again at the beginning every time. **This mistake results in impatience, condescension, and irritation on the part of the faculty, and a general squashing of new students’ desire to learn and self-confidence—not to mention a “students these days don’t learn as well as they used to” attitude which I get REALLY tired of hearing from my colleagues!** --Ruth Rodgers, Teaching & Learning Specialist, Centre for Academic Excellence and Innovation, Durham College/VOIT, Ontario, Canada

37. Ignoring the Affective Domain. Bloom's famous committee defined three major learning domains, but 95% of college instruction addresses only the cognitive and (when appropriate) psychomotor, or hands-on, domains. Yet many courses list affective outcomes; research and our own experience as learners confirm that emotional reactions powerfully influence how much is learned. **Teaching strategies, course content and teacher personalities may stimulate motivation, boredom, resistance, confusion, and so on. Teachers should monitor the factors that produce learning-relevant affective reactions, and evaluate learning in areas like attitudes. Those who ignore their students' emotions during classes are unlikely to fully engage their students, or refine their own strategies to make them .** –John Oughton, Professor of Learning and Teaching, Centre for Organizational Learning and Teaching, Office of Organizational Learning, Centennial College, Ontario, Canada

38. Failing to allow enough time for discussion, exploration, practice, and innovation for students while they are discovering/learning a new skill or revisiting an old skill. Teachers/trainers would benefit best by allowing students to discover answers, rather than "giving" all of the answers. –Terry Toman, School of Adult and General Education (SAGE), Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), NM

39. Telling students you don’t care. Of course no teacher would say they don’t care if students learn, or they don’t care about the students. But as a wise man once told me, if you tell a student that you don’t care if they attend class, what the student hears is “I don’t care,” even if you meant to say that attendance does not directly impact your grade. **The words “I don’t care” should be banned from the classroom in any context.** –Steve Frye, Professor of Mathematics, Polk Community College, FL

40. Practicing a “do as I say, not as I do” philosophy. If students catch you making mistakes, and you try to cover up for them, they lose all respect for your authority. Since they don't know the subject matter as well as a qualified faculty member, they don't know what else you've said that might be wrong. And why should they spend time/effort learning stuff that's potentially wrong? So, this means do your own homework, study and learn the material you're teaching, practice working the problems, look up the answers in the back of the book - whatever it takes to master your own curriculum, before trying to teach it to others. –Margaret (Betsy) Ott, Biology Instructor, Tyler Junior College, TX

41. Relying too heavily or only on exams as a means of assessing student learning. Some students do not have solid testing skills. There are other ways to have students show if they have learned what we hope they are supposed to learn in a class. Projects, papers, group presentations, etc...

Shifting the learning focus away from tests also requires students to be more actively engaged in the learning process. They rely less on the mindset of “tell me what I need to know for the test” and this is where I’ll place my focus. –Karin Rivers, Harper College, IL

42. Asking a closed-ended question and then having students try to guess the exact wording of the answer you are looking for. I’ve watched teachers do this and have wanted to mime charades-like clues (sounds like..., second syllable...) --Susan Andrien, Director, Learning Resources, College of Marin, CA

43. Failing to give students immediate feedback on completed assignment before assigning a related task. I have observed that students need immediate feedback on short-term assignments because feedback facilitates information processing through working memory, reinforces efficacy, and provides specific directions for improvement. Also, immediate feedback provides self-assessment. This means that the student can recognize strengths and challenges and use that information to improve academic performance. --Esther E. Berry, Social Science Department, Palm Beach Community College, FL

44. Not following up on the policy to correct inattentive or negative classroom behaviors. For example, on day one instructors go over the syllabi with students, quickly informing them about what would happen if they are found texting during class sessions. However, students still text during class and completely ignore what’s going on in class. The instructor is too chicken to tell the student to leave the class. --Tanisca M. Wilson, Delgado Community College, LA

45. Providing a syllabus that lacks all / many / some of the following features.....actually this is a rubric for evaluating syllabi:

- * A Course overview, behavior and grading policy as well as pre-requisite courses, skills and fulfillment standards are clearly articulated
- * Topics are clearly stated
- * Text and reading assignments are clearly denoted
- * Chapter(s) section(s) and articles are clearly referenced
- * Assignments, especially Laboratory assignments are modeled and / or templated
- * Exam and Quiz dates along with their respective topic constituents are clearly denoted
- * Assignment initiations and due dates are clearly denoted
- * The syllabus is current within a weekly or better yet a daily resolution of accuracy
- * The syllabus is available via the internet for 24 / 7 reference.
- * The syllabus is reviewed routinely with the students as a dynamic pacing calendar
- * There is an individual syllabus for each section of each course
- * The syllabus is reviewed routinely with other instructors in the same or related discipline and is continually upgraded for inclusion of "best practices," i.e. new information, new methods, new evaluation techniques....etc.

--Bruce Alex Riddell, Biology Instructor, Solano Community College, CA

46. Not allowing time to discuss expectations: students’ and the instructor’s. Students and the instructor come to class on day one thinking that each to the other will meet expectations; not so! Some individuals within the student body are ill-prepared and hope the teacher will mitigate the gap; likewise the instructor is prepare to present at level 4 or 5 only to determine too late that very few members of the student body in class are prepared to receive at that level. **Day one is like a 1st dance with a new partner: are we both prepared for what is to follow.** --George Green, Adjunct Faculty,

47. Invalidating students' opinions and viewpoints. Nobody likes know it all's. Especially students with their instructors. If a student shares a viewpoint that is based on opinion, conjecture, extrapolation or observations; the quickest way to cut off further sharing is to invalidate the students opinion by saying something like "I fail to see how that factors into or applies to....." Instead a simple "That may be so....." followed by your assessment defuses the appearance of an outright rejection and allows the possibility of the students opinion as valid which will encourage further discussion. –Chuck Manuel, Adjunct Art Faculty, Graceland University, IA and MO

48. Coming to class unprepared and without passion!! I shudder to think of teachers who start class by asking Where did we stop last class? Teaching is like theater: a teacher should start his/her performance with passion. A bored teacher results in an uninspired, boring class. Also, each class the teacher must 'refresh' himself/herself by reading into source materials. This invigorates the teacher and the students. I learned this from my English Civilization professor many years ago. Each lecture day he would arise at 5:00 a.m. and read into source materials. Over half of his lectures received a standing ovation from nearly 100 rather jaded Yale students. –K. Wheelock

49. Yelling at students. I say this because I did it once early in my career and basically lost the class—even though they'd admit I was a decent teacher. But in the end, when you yell at them, they see that you have lost control. So they lose respect for you, and then it's over. Again, the disciplined students will work for grades, but others lose motivation. The solution is your own personal development, and I mean at a spiritual level. Meditate, pray, exercise a lot, or develop a hobby that broadens you. The long run aim of these practices would be to develop a healthy sort of detachment about what you do. A modest teacher is actually a better teacher, especially if it is coupled with the truer forms of confidence that comes being truly comfortable in your own skin. –Brian de Uriarte, Asst. Professor of Economics, Middlesex County College, NJ

50. Making all students pay for the misbehaving of one or two students in the group or class. – Susan Easton, Learning Services Instructor, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, Saskatchewan, CN

51. Gluing students to their chairs. The brain can only absorb what the butt can stand. I take the students outside every so often, and walk them around the campus while talking about whatever subject I'm teaching (Physical, World Regional or Cultural Geography). I have a class size of 40-60, so they have to get close to hear me talk. They can't sit in the back row and chatter, they can't open their laptops and write (read here: play games and chat with friends online). Funny thing, they remember most of what we talk about. So many of them are still in the kinetic stage of growth and change that sitting still for an hour and a half is nearly impossible. Rather than let their minds wander, I get their feet to wander and their minds to focus. –Lisa Chaddock, Dept. of Geography, San Diego City College, CA

52. Never allowing students to assess their own work. I'm not sure this qualifies as a number 1 mistake for all –but it was for me! I have found that giving students the opportunity to self assess is one of the best tools that I have to jumpstart group and individual discussions about classroom performance. Reflective writing helps students use analysis and problem solving skills to not only identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, but also to propose solutions. Group discussions let students articulate their assessment of classroom activities and their role in creating a positive learning environment As we prepare students for the workplace, self assessment skills will help them

with performance evaluations and promotional opportunities. I did not provide any references – partly because our semester starts in 2 days and partly because there is plethora of supporting information. I would be happy to forward some to you at a later date if you would like. –Pat Sorcic, Bryant and Stratton College, Milwaukee, WI

53. Making incorrect assumptions about student engagement has been my worst teaching mistake.

The student with his head down on the desk may be listening intently, not dozing. The student who is deeply absorbed in poking the controls of a handheld electronic device may be surfing for information related to the class activity, not texting a buddy or game playing. The student who is chattering so animatedly with her best friend may be involved in peer tutoring, not discussing party plans for the upcoming weekend. The student with the “oh so totally” bored expression may end up rating my class as one of the most interesting educational experiences of his life. My solution is to regularly remind myself to avoid jumping to conclusions. I create frequent opportunities for individual student/teacher engagement. From these, I can get past perceptions to reality. –Cynthia Greyraven, CA

54. Responding with “You should know that” when a student asks a question. –Margaret Latimer, Montgomery College, MD

55. Assuming students know academic language. Professors assume that students are familiar with the vocabulary of the discipline. Similarly, math professors believe that math is a universal language, so foreign students won’t need extra time to solve the math problems. At our community college, I teach developmental reading and writing and ESOL courses. Unlike many of my colleagues, I do not assume that my students know academic language, the specific vocabulary of the discipline, or are familiar with historical (or other famous) names. Teachers will lecture under these assumptions; later, these same professors are frustrated that the students did not understand or follow through. Even though today’s students are electronically connected, many students are not connected to the culture of academia or knowledgeable of current events or procedures. This does not mean that instructors need to lower their standards. During the first week of classes, professors need to find out about their students’ background: How connected are they? Do students have the skills needed to pass the class? I believe professors and students can benefit by learning about the professors’ expectations and the students’ readiness. –Dolores Quiles, SUNY Ulster, NY

56. Failing to assess learning objectives. Daily lesson plans should include student learning objectives. When you identify a student learning objective for a day’s lesson, assess it. For each objective, identify how you’ll teach it (i.e. hands-on activity, lecture, demonstration) and how you’ll determine whether the students have learned it. If you continue teaching lessons without assessing them, students may not learn content necessary for successive lessons and compound learning. **As a result, students may disengage, avoid participating, give you blank stares, avoid letting you know they’re falling behind, or perform poorly on periodic tests or projects.** Waiting until the end to assess learning (i.e. through an exam or project) may not provide you enough time to re-teach, thus students may miss content they should carry into the next course or apply elsewhere. **One way to assess daily objectives is through activities found in Classroom Assessment Techniques** (CATs: by Tom Angelo and Pat Cross). –Pam Weigand, Professor and Director, Business & Marketing Education and Plan 2 Certification, Eastern Washington University, WA

57. Getting too familiar with your students. In order for students to respect you as an educator, it is necessary to maintain a line between your personal relationships and your professional relationship with your students. Too many instructors, in their desire to be liked by the students, give up the need

to be respected by the students. It is possible to have a good working relationship with students that is both friendly and professional, and it is necessary to maintain that boundary if you expect to continue teaching for any length of time. –Lynn DuPree, Faculty Professional Development Coordinator, Herzing University, WI

58. Asking a question which seeks the answer without the process. As teachers, we should care whether the students know how to answer the question, not what the answer actually is. All questions should include a “how did you get that?” component or it become a useless drill rather than a learning opportunity. –Virginia H. Rich, Business Division, Caldwell College, NJ\

59. Destroying the students’ inborn, natural desire to learn through competition and grades. The best reference on this is to the work's of the late Dr. W. Edwards Deming . You can begin with a review of the "management of people" chapter from The New Economics. There's so much good stuff in there, including the 14 rules/guidelines for a manager of people to follow. You can read that online at google books (for free). There's so much that's re-stated, from Deming, in many of the more recent books about Toyota. You definitely see the Deming influence coming through. So it's sometimes interesting to go back and re-read earlier books. In the chapter, Deming rails against business schools, pointing out what they SHOULD teach, which is, of course, the opposite of what's taught. Deming says business schools should teach students about the "evils" of short-term thinking and the "evils" of the merit system and ranking people. There's also a somewhat bleak chart on page 122 that makes the case that schools and management systems do nothing but demoralize people throughout their lives until they die. Deming then, on page 145, rails against grading students and grading teachers or schools. Deming's argument is that grades (especially forced ranking and grading curves) rob students of their intrinsic motivation to learn (and probably robs teachers of their joy in teaching). Deming recommends:

- * Abolish grades (A, B, C, D) in school
- * Abolish merit ratings for teachers
- * Abolish comparison of schools on the basis of scores
- * Abolish gold stars for athletics or for best costume

He writes, "Our schools must preserve and nurture the yearning for learning that everyone is born with." In recent years, the trend has been toward "merit pay" for teachers and schools which only replaces collaboration with competition, totally harmful to the students. I had the good fortune to learn the basics from Dr. Deming in the late 80's and dropped grading from all my classes through my retirement. –Del Nelson, Retired Prof. of Management, American River College, CA

60. Not knowing the material in your discipline or passing on incorrect or fallacious information to students. Acting as if you are God, i.e.- omniscient, and refusing to admit when you are wrong or have stated something incorrectly. –Cathy Della Penta, Mesa Community College, AZ

61. Letting students get you to change your mind about a grade when you know in your heart that the grade they have received is the grade they have earned. Students learn very quickly how to work the system and they will sometimes pull out every trick in the book to get you to change their grade, including crying, lying and threatening. This "going along to get along" often results in you feeling bad about yourself, and the sad part is that even if you do give in to the student, he or she will lose respect for you anyway because giving in is seen as a sign of weakness. – Lawrence McClain

62. Saying “okay” about thirty times a class—once I realized I was doing it, I consciously tried to

stop because it was just blather wasting time and sent the message that “none of this is really important, okay?” Also, college teachers are people who never say anything just once. And that constant repetition also sends the wrong message—“You can’t possibly get this in one try. I’ll say it again.” --Sander Zulauf, County College of Morris, NJ

63. Realizing you have made a mistake that adversely affects students’ academic success, self-esteem, or respect for the academic discipline and then not admitting the mistake, making an apology, and correcting the mistake as best you can. –Judy Luckett, University of Central Florida, FL

64. Sitting behind a desk or podium and speaking at the students in a monotonous tone of voice from a stationary position. In a conversation with a colleague I discovered that he did that on purpose because he thought that moving around or varying his voice would distract the students from what he was saying. I pointed out to him that the human sensory system is designed to stop paying attention to constant stimuli so that failing to move at all meant that he might become invisible! –Nathalie Cote, Department of Psychology, Belmont Abbey College, NC

65. Believing that you are the answer person for the students, that you should never admit that you don’t know something, because students might lose respect for you as the professor. Every teacher is fallible and doesn’t know everything. You aren’t there to be the answer person for every question in your field. You are there to direct learning and guide students to good study habits and valuable tools and resources. Be ready to admit that you don’t have all the answers, but there are tools and resources that can be used to help discover answers, and you can help them find the answers. The students will respect you more for your honesty and helpful guidance. They will learn how to find the answers for themselves and be comfortable not having all the answers. –Edwin Reynolds, Professor of New Testament, Southern Adventist University, TN

66. Teaching evening classes and not realizing that most of the students have already put in a full day and are tired. Solutions include 'get up' activities that pertain to the subject matter. Having a 'get up' exercise every 30 minutes is very helpful to keeping students alert and focused. These exercises can be small group discussions, close up examinations of posters or pictures, demonstrations around a table, etc., etc. A second help is a late break with sugar to help wake up their brains for a bit longer. Both seem to work well no matter the subject. –Mike &/or Lynne Schafer

67. Trying to be a friend to the student, providing the student an easy A, without the student really learning the material. –Dianne Beedle, Metropolitan Community College, MO

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