

These 'top tips' have kindly been written by a number of winners of the DMU Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award between 2004 and 2011. This is a highly competitive student nominated award for up to 12 staff per year.

These have been classified under the following headings:

Teaching Philosophy

Accessibility to students

Supporting Student Learning

Assessment and Feedback

Problem-based Learning

One to one (personal tutoring/studio based learning)

Part-time students

Teaching diverse students

Enthusiasm for your subject

Student focus

Lecturing

Seminars

Labs and workshops

Enhanced learning through technology

Supervising dissertations and projects

Developing Employability

Teaching Philosophy

I think the most important [thing] is the hardest to classify and quantify – I really think that it helps the students if they see you as a pretty genuine, uncomplicated person who, like them is completely flawed and perfectly ordinary human being who will involve them in decisions about their learning, fight their corner, support them when they need it, leave them alone when they prefer, remember their name, deal fairly with both successes and failures and help them understand how their time at university relates to their life now and in the future – aherm....where does that fit???

Mairi Watson (BAL)

Be positive, enter the classroom with a smile on your face, engage with students before class starts (how was your weekend, did your team win, how was your weekend away, where are you going for your holidays) and be interested in them as individuals, listen to what they have to say about their learning, how things could be made better for students to learn effectively, be positive and encouraging, be polite and helpful, have a good sense of humour, encourage student participation and engagement, never be grumpy or discouraging or abrupt, appreciate the difficulties they are having, put yourself into their position to see the problem from their point of view, treat students as adults and as though tutors and students are equals with the tutor just having more knowledge and experience, remember that someone is paying a lot of money for their education.

Peter Scott (BAL)

[...] get to know your students as people. Work hard at learning their names, their personalities, what makes them laugh, what they are good at, what fellow students think of them. All of this helps you to motivate them, because they will naturally respond better to someone who they feel is genuinely interested in them. And it helps motivate you if you can see them as individuals, not just as a mass of young people with indeterminate names. You are more likely to care about their success, and to find ways of coaching them to succeed, instead of just delivering material to them. And the reward is not just that they may achieve more, and be more aware of what they have achieved, but the journey there may also be more fun for all of you.

Steve McRobb (TEC)

My aim is always to try and develop trusting, open and supportive cultures of learning, where students feel confident about expressing themselves, that their viewpoints are valued and listened to, and that they are making a positive contribution to the course.

Will Curtis (HLS)

I always ask myself - will any of what I'm teaching be of use to students in 10 years time? Students do need some up to date contextual information, but in the long run improved thinking skills and adaptability will still be useful when knowledge of an obsolete piece of legislation or similar has long since ceased to be useful.

Greig Mill (IESD)

Always take pride in what you do, take time to prepare a lecture thinking about the teaching strategies and why you are utilising those particular ones. Encourage the participation of student input, always value the experience that they bring to a lecture / workshop or session. Ensure that your lecture preparation is relevant and adheres to the curriculum and module templates. Encourage students to value the process of learning and not focus on the assessment.

Penny Tremayne (HLS)

Do not be scared to show who you are - be human, genuine and authentic to your students. If you cannot answer a question say so but that you will attempt to find the answer. Encourage a caring attitude within class and it will be reciprocated to you as the teacher...it is about embracing the principles of humanism.

Penny Tremayne (HLS)

Evaluate your teaching -devise an informal evaluation tool to see how effective a session is.

Penny Tremayne (HLS)

Enthusiasm for your subject

Be enthusiastic. If everything you do reinforces the fact that you love your subject, know a lot about it and want to communicate that passion to your students, there's a good chance they will pick up on it. My nominations always mention my enthusiasm, but it's not something I deliberately have to do. I am enthusiastic about what I do, as we all should be. I honestly don't see much use in being 'cool' or understated. If you enjoy it communicate that and they will too.

Peter Scott (BAL)

Obvious interest in and enthusiasm for a subject is contagious - the simplest way to engage students' interest is to be enthusiastic yourself!

Greig Mill (IESD)

Enthusiasm for the subject and good sense of humour!

Lynne Ross (BAL)

If you have professional or industrial knowledge of what you're doing weave it into everything you teach, even if that just involves a funny anecdote. It makes it more real for them and reinforces your own professional credibility. In my subject area our professional track records are important to our students and to emphasise that we have to make our experience tangible in what they are doing.

Tor Clark (ADH)

Be passionate about your subject - in order to engage students' interest in a subject you can only be successful if you are genuine. If the teacher is bored they won't engage, appreciate or care what you are teaching them and why should they?

I find having a sense of humour helps lots. One of the subjects I teach is very abstract and being able to tell anecdotes to try and make the concepts real is often successful. Of course the other subject I teach is very science based where a lot of SALT students have enrolled primarily for the social aspects of the programme. It is very demanding for them and they get very anxious about it. Some students need a great deal of support but I think it's my job to promote my subject and enable those who are learning it. There's no-one else at DMU who teaches my subjects so there's no escape for the students but equally there's no-one other than them to chat to about phonetics so they have to get involved!

Pip Cornelius (HLS)

I am not sure if this is helpful or not, but my teaching is strongest when it is something I really love and research myself. My Poland module tends to go very well because I have done many relevant oral history interviews and can bring this material into the lectures. The students then have real confidence that you know your stuff and the enthusiasm you have for the subject rubs off on them.

Kathy Burrell (ADH)

Accessibility to students

Let students know you are on their side – be available.

Will Curtis (HLS)

It seems a simple thing, but general accessibility and good communication is considered by the students to be very important. It isn't necessary to be 'here' all the time, but answering emails promptly, keeping the surgery hours you promise, helping them make the contacts they need to make in the university to solve problems quickly, communicating with them through Blackboard and email regularly, giving them little updates about small things as well as big things, all builds a sense of effective grown up communication.

Mairi Watson (BAL)

Be accessible and positive. Lots of praise and encouragement for learners never did anyone any harm – but be accessible and personable – in the seminar, during office hours when students can visit for advice or a tutorial, and by email.

Barry Dufour (HLS)

Be yourself! Students respond well if you are open and friendly with them.

Will Curtis (HLS)

Just being available and accessible and being open and honest with students – they knew I was on their side. I started off concerned that as a practitioner returning to academia the students might 'catch me out'. But they didn't want or need a talking textbook – far from it. In fact just taking the time to think about different ways to present more complex concepts or to address concerns and questions one-on-one afterwards ... or even being on the end of an email was really very much appreciated I think. Also as the year progressed I found I *taught* less and less and became more creative in lesson and even lecture planning so that the students were increasingly discovering the 'rules' themselves, finding their own explanations and forming linkages within and between different subjects. I think probably it's really important to enjoy yourself too, I'm pretty sure that if students see you are having fun, they're more likely to sit up, and join you for the ride.

Nichola Phillips (BAL)

Be approachable and accessible. An extra surgery or two before an assignment deadline is often something appreciated by my students. Be flexible and responsive to students' needs too. Students appreciate this. A quick and prompt reply via email is also often appreciated by many students.

Chris Odindo (BAL)

Student focus

Remember [...] that each student is an individual; be sensitive to student needs e.g. be flexible in delivery of material with opportunities to review etc.

Lynne Ross (BAL)

Clear guidance/boundaries - students should be fully aware of what is expected of them in terms of studying the subject, and behaviour in class.

Lynne Ross (BAL)

It all works better if students feel that you respect them - there is no such thing as teaching, only learning, which happens differently for each individual, but can be facilitated.

Greig Mill (IESD)

Students often have so much to combine in their lives, some of them are parents, carers, dealing with major life events or may be homesick - this can all impact on their academic life. We need to care for

that student in the form of advice and support that can be offered through the numerous services that we offer at DMU.

Penny Tremayne (HLS)

Student engagement is important as is Identifying ways in which to encourage participation, in particular bringing the theory to life with interesting and relevant practice from the real world. This is one way to improve performance, striving to constantly link theory with practice and demonstrate that everything learnt and skills gained can enhance a student's employability. Feedback is also crucial, blogging with students and sometimes even holding a surgery in the cafe can break down barriers between lecturer and learner. Always listen, never pre-judge or give up, each and every student has something to offer as finding that spark to ignite is one exciting aspect of the role.

Miles Weaver (BAL)

Supporting Student Learning

Be challenging and supportive.

Will Curtis (HLS)

Communicate your high expectations to students, but also be prepared to meaningfully and individually support them in one-on-one coaching, tutorials and informal meetings.

Tor Clark (ADH)

Encourage each student to identify and work towards realistic aims/objectives.

Lynne Ross (BAL)

Be available to help with problems, be there when you say you will be there, respond promptly to e-mails, listen to what students are saying and help them think round a problem to devise a solution, give them the time they deserve, post handouts, lecture slides and other relevant material to Blackboard promptly to ensure it is available and ready for students to access when they need it.

Peter Scott (BAL)

Involving students in decisions that have to be made about the course, and generally collaborating with them on issues where you don't have to have the definitive answer helps to build a sense of a learning community, rather than a sense of them simply being an 'audience'. This can be done in lectures and seminars, through blackboard and other informal opportunities, simply asking their opinion or experience, or to recommend a guest speaker, or a relevant website or anything that encourages collaboration between you and the students.

Mairi Watson (BAL)

If you teach a 1st year module put a link on your Blackboard site to

http://www.dmu.ac.uk/study/student_services/lss/diversity/strategies.jsp

It is called 'What Strategies Can Help Me Cope with My Course?' and is on the Learning Diversity Support web page. What it suggests is good for many students not just the "Learning Diverse", by virtue of brain functions, but for the great social diversity of students we get. I've called the link "Lots of ideas for helping you learn at University" and quoted myself as a comment on the link: "I wish this kind of thing had been available when I was first at university" - Frances Wright (I'm dyslexic but this would be good for anyone).

Frances Wright (BAL/LIB)

Keeping things topical and entertaining: I really made an effort every week to find some new news story or an event or celebrity scandal (nothing too high brow) that I knew the students would have read about or talked about amongst each other to illustrate key points in tutorials and to stimulate debate. With a subject like Public Relations, it's so important that students stay abreast of what's happening in the media and are encouraged to adopt 'PR thinking' beyond the classroom. Using lots of links to articles and other online forums and blog posts on BB really seemed to help, and I think encouraged some of the more able students to look beyond the standard texts for information and inspiration.

Nichola Phillips (BAL)

Lecturing

A good lecture doesn't just present information - it tells an interesting story about the subject, and links to past and previous lectures to provide an emerging whole.

Greig Mill (IESD)

With a new class explain about good listening and offer a 'deal'. They listen well for 20-25 minutes and you stop for a timed 5 minutes. Take in a kitchen timer and use it. If there is not quality listening, don't make an issue but don't give 'golden half hour' as one of my groups called it. Students text, make calls, talk to neighbours, yawn, rush to the loo etc. You start again as soon as the timer rings. Second session is again quality concentration from them. Always thank them for good listening.

Jenny King (BAL)

Put [...] subject material into context e.g reference to related issues in the press/media. By using current events as the vehicle for promoting awareness, this usually helps with understanding of the subject matter.

Lynne Ross (BAL)

Using analogies of everyday situations which students can relate to as an approach for explaining more complex theories always seems to be well received by students.

Claire Orwin (ADH)

Be organised, provide easy to follow handouts, do not try to cover too much in lectures but keep coverage realistic in terms of what can be achieved in 50 minutes, stick to the key points, do not wander off task, provide an easy to follow guide as to what will be covered at the start of each lecture, set problem based learning questions in lectures to engage students and enable them to structure and apply their learning, fit learning into a framework for the overall subject, go round the class and help them with problems, encourage them if they have got it right, explain where they have gone wrong and guide them to how they should approach the problem, link points to previous learning to put current subjects into context of overall learning, adopt a student centred learning experience rather than a tutor centred experience, make learning fun rather than a chore or something that has to be done.

Peter Scott (BAL)

My students clearly appreciate receiving full lectures notes in advance by email via Blackboard. In lectures they do not have to take detailed notes but can add in extra observations by me into the margins of their lecture notes – they must bring the lecture notes with them to lectures. [Most staff are unwilling to do this and even say if they do this students will not turn up to lectures. In five years of my teaching in this way, I have never seen this to be the case in any significant degree].

I try to make my lectures active and engaging. I start with a series of jokes, mostly educational, and OHTs of crazy little things that children have said in class e.g. asked to say something about Saturn (the planet), a little 8 year old girl piped up – 'Sutton – I know all about that – my granny lives there – it's in Surrey'. I also, half way through my lectures, give the students a short task where they work with the student next to them and one behind (so it's group work) and then ask them for their responses when I conduct the debriefing, for the whole lecture theatre, to see what they have come up with. This whole task takes no longer than 7 minutes overall. It keeps the students attentive.

Barry Dufour (HLS)

Stay current and relevant. Always find ways to engage the students and make them as interested in the topic as possible...nothing does that more than connections of theory to real world examples and issues. Seems obvious but students can spot lecture material that have not been updated and just recycled through the years. I always make an effort to find something in the news that week which has particular relevance to what I am teaching. That often helps bring the topic alive and makes students realise that it is not just about dusty old textbooks and staid concepts. The Sunday business papers and Radio 4's Today programme have always been a rich minefield for discussion topics for me, and are yet to let me down.

40 second randomness. Recognise that undergrads will get restless and try build in a small break from your delivery. In some of my classes I have a 40 second break during which I ask students to talk about anything random with their neighbour, then ask for feedback from a couple of students – be prepared for some 'interesting' feedback. In some classes, I restrict the randomness to the lecture topic or sometimes just call it a 'relax and stretch' break. This all takes a couple or so minutes but gives good payback in terms of more attentive students for the rest of the lecture.

Music and humour. Depending on the class, a bit of music or humour as students settle in can help set a good mood for the rest of the lecture. Make sure you start the actual lecture itself strictly on time on the hour, though. Don't start it late.

Chris Odindo (BAL)

Assessment and Feedback

Take time to read and comment on their work thoroughly, point out where they have done well and where they have done not so well or where arguments are weak or omitted altogether, advise them on how they can improve, take time to discuss comments with them and elaborate on where they have gone wrong and why they have gone wrong, guide them into the right path for the future.

Peter Scott (BAL)

Full and prompt feedback – obvious again, but really full, detailed written feedback on written assignments which starts with what makes the written assignment effective, and then builds onto areas where it could be improved for next time. This is time-consuming on one level, but means that constructive conversations can be had with students who are unhappy about their marks and on the whole students feel fairly dealt with.

Mairi Watson (BAL)

To enable students to gain their own personal understanding of a new assignment brief I provide an opportunity for students in class to reflect on the task either as individuals or in small groups. Students are able to identify any concerns, comments or questions by writing these down on paper and then submitting them to me. I can then address any issues collectively to the whole group thus saving time and ensuring a consistent message is put forward to all students. As the queries are submitted anonymously students are willing to be more honest in demonstrating their level of understanding.

Claire Orwin (ADH)

Make feedback clear, useful and a bridge on which to build further learning.

Tor Clark (ADH)

Seminars

I publish seminar tasks in advance, attached to the lecture notes – so that after a lecture the relevant tasks for the follow-up seminar are known in advance and can act partly as an agenda for the seminar.

Barry Dufour (HLS)

Problem-based Learning

For one assessment in *Contemporary Poetry*, I ask students to compile an anthology of poems organised around a theme (such as estrangement), issue (such as the democratisation of poetry, the cross-over between poetry and other media), region (poems about the north east of England, for example) or sub-genres of poetry (lyric, sonnet, performance poetry). Students are then required to write an introduction justifying their choice of poems and topic. We look at models of anthology introductions so that they can devise the most suitable one for their project. The assessment has produced some strongly independent and imaginative work.

Jane Dowson (ADH)

Labs and workshops

Get them talking and doing. Teach in workshops rather than lectures if you can. Energisation (if that's a word) is the key to engagement in my book. They will learn if they want to and the teacher has to get them really wanting to learn. If you MAKE them do something they can't duck out of it and you see even the most shy and stropky students having to take part.

Tor Clark (ADH)

I use preparation worksheets (for 10 weeks) as part of a course assessment. In advance of each workshop, students download from Blackboard questions (of various kinds – some yes/no, some more interpretative, some testing their ability to follow an argument carefully) about the set theoretical essays/literary texts. They are required to bring their completed worksheets (word-processed) to workshops. The worksheets ensure that students have read the texts carefully and form the basis for a

(usually) decent level of discussion. It also shows me where they need help. At the end of the workshop, they complete a final question: 'Which (if any) of your above responses would you rethink in the light of the workshop? Give brief reasons if possible'. This demonstrates to them (and me) the usefulness (hopefully) of the workshop.

Andy Mousley (ADH)

One to one (personal tutoring/ studio based learning)

Beware of stereotyping students. Not every 18 year old can send an email. Some 18 year olds look much older and we can sometimes assume life experience they do not have.

Jenny King (BAL)

Us[e] coaching techniques: Sometimes when students arrive at your door they want you to 'give them the answers' to whatever is pressing for them. I try to avoid giving the answer where I can tease it out of them by asking questions. For example, easy questions like 'What do you think?' 'What were you planning to include in the essay?' 'What have you done so far?' 'What do you need to do to complete the task?' 'What resources do you need?' etc... Then they leave with an action plan they have designed themselves and are far more likely to stick to.

Mairi Watson (BAL)

Recognise if a student requests a tutorial that this is important to them - so always ensure that you give them 100% of your attention. Encourage students to identify what they want out of a tutorial and it may help to request a reading list from them indicating their reading to date - if relevant. Also if it is tutorial support for an assignment, ask for a plan to review.

Penny Tremayne (HLS)

Enhancing Learning through Technology

Staff should think about learning technology (eLearning) from the perspective of what would make their life easier? Never use technology just because it is there, but think, "What do I need to achieve for myself and my students?" "What problem am I experiencing and is there a technology solution?" I had a series of histology practicals where students stained slides and these were assessed. I now take digital photos, place the work on Picassa and the students have to interpret what they see. This has taken their level of engagement and knowledge gained to a new level.

Vivien Rolfe (HLS)

Staff and students have access to a vast amount of free learning materials on-line now in the form of open educational resources (OERs). Staff can access Jorum (www.jorum.ac.uk) and look for the Creative Commons licences that allow them to freely reuse and adapt other people's materials. There are even entire modules on Jorum!!

Vivien Rolfe (HLS)

Two things have revolutionised my life this year? Using Doodle (<http://www.doodle.com/to>) arrange meetings! Using Screenr which allows you to create a 5 minute screencast that is great for quickly capturing feedback or information for students. (<http://www.screenr.com/user/DMUViv>). The file you create can be shared on Twitter or you can download it and place it elsewhere (so you have a permanent record if the service ever dies). I created some screencasts and shared them on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/SCOOTERDMU>) - easy for promoting your teaching or research interests.

Vivien Rolfe (HLS)

Technology is a servant not the master – don't let it obstruct delivery of information.

Lynne Ross (BAL)

Don't let technology get in the way. Things like Blackboard and even Powerpoint should support the flow of information and the critical discussions that are needed for students to learn. With this allowing an element of 'organic development' in a lecture is important: be aware that technology can act as a straight-jacket if you let it.

Alistair Duffy (TEC)

I use a wide range of technological tools, sometimes quite innovatively. However, don't let it become the focal point of, or more important than, your teaching.

Chris Odindo (BAL)

Part-time students

The stakes are very high for many of these learners. They sometimes believe that asking for guidance is tantamount to cheating. Offer help regularly especially at first until they find their feet. Utilise their life experiences wherever possible and always start with an ice breaker for a new group. I get them to introduce their neighbour in class then we have a quiz. Who has 6 cats? Who is getting married this year? Who works for the Crown Prosecution Service? etc. This helps increase their listening skills.

Jenny King (BAL)

Supervising dissertations and projects

Try to encourage independence in student learning: where possible try to look for ways that will help students build the confidence to ask questions, present ideas, research independently, critically appraise the work of themselves and others, etc. and not rely on being told what to do next.

Alastair Duffy (TEC)

Request a draft prior to a tutorial....this is far more productive than reading text - and it means that you can be more thorough and comprehensive in the feedback that you offer. Always ensure there is a summary at the end of each chapter.

Penny Tremayne (HLS)

Feedback: This is essential for the students to improve and therefore take time to identify strengths and areas that require development. Students value this so much and precise detail is sometimes required especially initially to promote 'best practise' - this is often the case in the use of referencing technique.

Penny Tremayne (HLS)

Students appreciate detailed feedback and comments especially on their coursework. I write lots of comments on the paper and it can sometimes be time consuming but again there is good payback as student realise why they got their given marks and how they can improve future work. Be positive and supportive in your comments.

Chris Odindo (BAL)

Teaching diverse students

Remember 'spans of attention' and break the hour into smaller units of time with some short brain-rest time in between (could be a story, joke, discussion about what's in the news, sport, last night's TV, etc. but preferably something unrelated that will regain their interest).

Alastair Duffy (TEC)

Developing employability

Enthusiasm and energy: As a newcomer to teaching (my first post) and perhaps because I was still actively involved in consultancy projects I found that relating worksheet exercises and textbook theories to *actual* tasks and situations that I'd been asked to tackle that week or even that day ...or indeed that *they* might be asked to tackle on the job really brought things to life.

Nichola Phillips (BAL)

Relate whatever you can to the wider world: in my case industry, my research and the research of others. And relate the current module with the modules that students are currently studying, have studied or will study to help students to start asking about how what they are doing fits into a broader picture (a broad knowledge of their course and other modules can be very worthwhile).

Alastair Duffy (TEC)