

NEXTcast 3.1: Teaching Tips

We thought we'd do something a little different to kick off our third season. We've compiled some great teaching tips from our faculty and students for new faculty who are just starting out in the classroom.

We'd like to thank Arun Dhanota, Cheryl Mitchell, Mark Rector, Naeema Farooqi, Christine Zupo, Lexa Castellan, Alex Evans, Dan Rowe, Daniel Bear, Laura Page, Ranya Khan, Leanne Milech, Sarah Feldbloom, and Maya Shah for contributing to this episode.

Nathan Whitlock: Welcome to *NEXTcast*, a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. I'm Nathan Whitlock, an editor at Humber Press. Every episode on *NEXTcast* we talk to faculty and staff at Humber who are leading innovation both inside and outside the classroom. This is the start of our third season of *NEXTcast* and we thought we'd try something a little different. We've compiled some great teaching tips from faculty and students, especially for new faculty who are just starting out in the classroom this week. We'd like to thank Arun Dhanota, Cheryl Mitchell, Mark Rector, Naeema Farooqi, Christine Zupo, Lexa Castellan, Alex Evans, Dan Rowe, Daniel Bear, Laura Page, Ranya Khan, Leanne Milech, Sarah Feldbloom, and Maya Shah for contributing their tips to this episode. If you've got a great tip of your own, please tag us at Humber Press and use the #NEXTtip.

Arun Dhanota: It is totally okay to be afraid. Completely, completely, okay to think that you have no idea what you're doing and you're not even sure why they brought you here. Because those were the exact same thoughts that I had my first day in class. I feel that was the best thing because that's what drove me to at least try better or do better and be where I'm at now. It's okay to be afraid and it's okay to fail.

Cheryl Mitchell: Be passionate. Keep your passion alive and try and keep that as ongoing as you can. Have fun in the classroom. I think if you make learning fun, even though if there's a little aspect of fun incorporated in there, students don't even realize that they're learning. I think also another tip I would give them is to use the resources that are available. There's many resources here at Humber, for instance, that a new faculty member could reach out to, to help to support, or even other faculty members. So the resources are a huge component I think.

Mark Rector: For new teachers or any teacher, I would say one of the most important things is do real-world projects. By that I mean, in my class, my labs as much as possible, I bring in real-world events, real-world examples. I take them on tours to real-world places. A half an hour tour is worth 15 lectures, 20 minutes of video, a real-world project building something they're actually going to do in industry. You can't beat that with a stick. You can buy that kind of learning. So, the more you can do that, I think, the better off your courses will be and the better your students are going to be prepared for the industry.

Mark Rector: That's what we're here to do is prepare them for industry. So, the more we can show them what happens in industry, whether they're building a piece of test equipment, testing an antenna exactly as they're going to do it at a cell site, testing a modulation scheme, measuring RF wave propagation off the air with a real-world signal, that's what they're going to do out there. Simulations, videos and math on the board, it's a total waste of time. You're putting them to sleep. Show them what they're going to do and they'll be engaged.

Naeema Farooqi: It's a Monday 8:00 AM class that you've been gifted with. What do you do? Well, my tip coming up, because I'm a professional 8:00 AM Monday class person. I don't know why I get it all the time. But anyway, how you can make it work is be there at least 30 minutes before time. I know it's too much to ask for, but trust me, it's going to create such a great ambiance in the class when you're there before. You've had that moment of zen to collect your thoughts after that commute, however long it is. Have some music on. Put some music on. If it's winter, have some snowflakes showing on the screen with those free music, which is on YouTube. Or if it's afternoon class, you could also put some coffee shop music.

Naeema Farooqi: But for Monday 8:00 AM, have some music playing, be there before time and greet everybody with a smile. Not everybody would have had a nice restful Sunday. They could have been working. These students are stressed. We could just do a little bit to make their stress a little bit better. Also, if you can, bring some Timbits either on the first day or on the last day as a little bit of welcome and thank you.

Christine Zupo: I would suggest helping students create a real positive narrative of themselves.

Lexa Castellan: I would probably say to form meaningful relationships with your students.

Alex Evans: I'm going to say be very confident in your abilities and your training.

Dan Rowe: One thing that I, and maybe it's because I teach in journalism, but if I say something that I hadn't prepared for or give a fact, or make some kind of statement that I hadn't prepared for, I am constantly then anxious the rest of the class. And so I often keep notes to myself about things that I said. So, I check them. But I also tell the students to do that. I'm like, "Fact check me." Like, "If you think that I'm incorrect on something, let me know." Which I think puts them at ease to some extent. And also I think makes the students realize that this is a conversation. I think it makes them feel a little bit more comfortable about it. Say like, "I'm going to make mistakes. Let me know when I do and I will let you know if I've made mistakes about things that I've said so that I'm following up on the things I said, and actually care about them."

Daniel Bear: My tip to new faculty is don't overthink it. There is a ton of great information about pedagogy out there. There's a lot of resources in whatever field you're in and it can feel like you want to get everything out to the students all at once. And what I would say is keep it simple. Stay within your boundaries, have a few innovative or fun engaging activities with them, but don't try and make every moment the best moment. Don't try and make moment perfect. If you have some good activities in there and you allow the students to build the relationship with you and know that it's a safe space to engage in whatever topic it is, they will help create that momentum. You don't have to be the person trying to create all the momentum all the time. You just need to create a bit of the inertia, probably using the phrases wrong non-engineer but you just need to create a bit of it and give the space for them to help build on. And every once in a while, you just keep pushing it along.

Laura Page: So, one of the things that I really tried to keep in mind when I was just starting out as a teacher is that I really wanted to create an atmosphere of mutual respect in my classroom. So, respect was one of the things that I valued really highly. And so, there was a couple of things I did to establish that. The first thing is on the first day when I walked in, I smiled at everyone. I tried to be really positive. I thanked them for coming. I thanked them for their time. And I also tried to acknowledge that there would be varying levels of expertise among the students that some of them might have a background in the area and some of them didn't. So, in order to let them know that it valued everyone's voice, I defined all the acronyms. I told them that we'd start off by creating kind of a shared vocabulary that we'd use across the term to make everyone feel included.

Laura Page: And one tangible tip that I know other teachers who do this too that really helps establish mutual respect is to have the students fill out some kind of little questionnaire on the first day or sometimes the second day if that works better. And these are the sorts of questions that I would include. Your name and what you want to be called in class. A few words about your prior experience in the field, especially for one of the technical fields. I think that if there's someone in the classroom who is an expert, they would probably value being able to share that with the instructor. What helps you learn best in the classroom setting? So, over your time at college, what have you found that works for you? And what do you find challenging about college learning, and is there anything I can do to help you? And the last question I usually ask students to tell me is, is there anything about your life going on this semester that you would like me to know about?

Laura Page: And I think that they really appreciate that as an alternate route of communication because some students can come up and talk to professors and say, "You know, this is going on, blah blah blah." But other students find that a little intimidating, or maybe they don't have time to come and talk to you after class. So, it opens up a way for them to communicate anything that they want to tell you. And I've gotten some really interesting things from that. It also primes students to start thinking about their own learning and think about what works for them and what doesn't work for them. And so, the last point about that is that most importantly before I asked the students to complete this little questionnaire, I tell them a bit about myself and that establishes the mutual respect part.

Laura Page: I tell them where I went to school and what I studied in graduate school. What areas intrigued me the most. I told them what challenged me in university. So, it was the '90s so managing time, which is still an issue now. And I told them how I solved that, how it took a little time to get it right and then I solved it. And I found that just by respecting them to tell them a bit about myself creates that mutual respect. So, I'm the person they're going to have to listen to for 12 or 13 or 14 weeks. They don't have a choice. So, here's a little bit about me. You share a little about you, and then that kind of makes them feel freer to just be themselves and embrace the idea that we're in this together and we can have a positive atmosphere.

Ranya Khan: Create partnerships with other faculty. And what I mean by those partnerships is to really try to find people who have a love of teaching and to cultivate those relationships and to have those conversations related to teaching. And so talk openly about it. Talk about what's happening in your classroom, concerns you have,

challenges you have, but also successes you have. Teaching can oftentimes be very isolating. And while we are with our group of students and we are engaged with our content and the people around us, again you are alone in terms of the teacher situation. So, consider having those relationships and having those conversations with other faculty to ensure that you are engaged within your profession, that you have opportunities to be reflective in what you're doing. And also to move away from those feelings of isolation and working in a silo.

Leanne Milech: I have a very practical tip for the first day. I like to do community building and I have an activity that works really well that gets the students talking to each other and also to me. So, I put them into groups and ask them to discuss their best classroom experiences ever of all time. It can be in school, out of school, it could be like a yoga class, and also their worst classroom experiences. And just talk about what made those experiences so good or so bad. And then we talk about it as a group and we record the answers in this mind map tool and we put it up on blackboard. And I say, "So going forward, this is kind of our gold standard. This is the classroom that we want to have the best classroom ever. That takes all the different attributes from your past experiences, and we'll try to avoid the bad."

Sarah Feldbloom: One thing that I think is really, really important, and it's kind of obvious and also easy to forget, is that you should always put yourself in the shoes of your student. So, if something doesn't seem fun to you, it's not going to seem fun to them. If it doesn't seem interesting to you, it's not going to seem interesting to them. And there's a term that lots of folks might be familiar with, which is student-centered learning. So, the is that you're always thinking about what the students are doing as opposed to what you're doing. And that's a really important thing, especially for teachers who are used to being in post-secondary classrooms that are not college classrooms. Very, very important to be thinking about how to allow the students to be learning through being active, and doing most of the work in the classroom. So overall, I guess this is a tip not to lecture.

Maya Shah: Just come prepared and be more confident when you're in the classroom. It might be very intimidating when you're in a classroom and you're teaching students. It could be mature students, so it might feel sometimes that, "I might do something wrong, they might notice." Don't worry because the students are as scared as you are, and they're over there just to learn, so they can smell the fear. So, my advice would be come prepared and if you feel that there's

something that I don't know what to say, or I am stumbling on some questions or some answers, so don't worry, just fake it until you make it kind of thing.

Nathan Whitlock: NEXTCast is produced by Kristin Valois for Humber Press. To listen to previous episodes of NEXTCast, and to read issues of NEXTCast magazine, go to humberpress.com. You can also find free downloadable transcripts of every NEXTCast episode at humberpress.com. To suggest stories for future episodes of NEXTCast, or to just let us know what you think, email humberpress@humber.ca. That's humberpress, all one word, @humber.ca. Thanks and see you next time. That is still not a pun.