

Nathan Whitlock: Welcome to NEXTcast, a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. I'm Nathan Whitlock, a professor at Humber College and an editor-at-large at Humber Press.

Nathan Whitlock: On NEXTcast, we talk to some of the faculty and staff who are leading innovation at Humber, both inside and outside the classroom. As you may remember, the first episode of this season was a collection of great teaching tips from Humber faculty, staff, and students. So, to mark the beginning of the winter semester, we thought we'd put together another collection of teaching tips, this time aimed not so much at professors who are new to the classroom, but also with those who have had years, perhaps even decades of experience. We hope you find these useful.

Nathan Whitlock: Special thanks to Shirantha Beddage, Sarah Feldbloom, Dan Rowe, Arun Dhanota, Kristin Valois, Christine Zupo, Alex Evans, Lexa Castalan, Daniel Bear, Ranya Khan, Cheryl Mitchell, Laura Page, Leanne Milech, Jessica Freitag, Jennifer Winfield, and Matt Ramer.

Shirantha Beddage: One tip that I would have for teachers who have been teaching for a significant amount of time, is to look at the types of examples that you use in your classes, if they involve case studies or something that is relatively recent. And just look at them for currency.

One of the most impactful things that I've ever experienced as a student is when a teacher brought in examples from real world, things that were happening in their lives or in their professions, that were recent, that were current, that were in the news, that were things that had value now.

And sometimes when we've been teaching a course or a subject for a long time, we might rely on things that we've been doing for 10 years or 15 years or 20 years. But I think it's good periodically to look back on those case studies and real-world examples, and just ask yourself if those things are still current now, and whether those things need to be updated. And if so, I think it's going to have real value for your students.

Sarah Feldbloom: One thing that I have realized about myself as a teacher, and I imagine this probably applies to lots of folks, is that I'm a better teacher when I am also a student in some role, because it helps me stay connected to what it feels like to be a student, what it feels like to learn, what it feels like to be not the person in charge of the space, all this kind of stuff.

So one thing that I've been incorporating into my teaching practice is I regularly will ask other professors if I can go and sit in their classroom.

And I sit there. And often these are in classes that I teach, so I'll often observe people in a 100 or 200 classroom. And even though I teach those classes, every time I'm in somebody else's classroom, I'm really learning the material.

And even though it's material that's for folks are just coming to language with less experience than myself, I also work as a professional writer, it's still hugely transformational for me, both just in terms of my general knowledge and also in terms of what I understand about what it means to be sitting in that seat. So I really recommend that everyone try and do that as much as possible, because it's a way to feel much more connected to your work.

Dan Rowe:

When I'm teaching, especially first years and final year students, fourth years in the degrees, I tell them stories about things, about how I was feeling at the moment they were at when they were an undergrad, because I think there's a sense of nervousness. I have a bunch of students this year who are in... They're four weeks away from graduation and they're like, "Why do I care about this breadth elective?" But they're also incredibly nervous about whatever it is they're going to do next.

And so before class started, I could sense this kind of weird malaise, and I was just like, "Are you guys feeling this way?" And as I described it, thinking back 20-ish years to how I felt at that same moment, they were like all nodding their head, and I think just acknowledging what they, some of them not all, obviously, but might be thinking about, and that it's a common experience, even if they're not talking about it amongst themselves, can be helpful.

And it helps, I think to, for me at least, when thinking about extensions and their own concerns, to just remember what it was like when you were in their spot.

Arun Dhanota:

Do something that people will *remember*. And I say that because if they can remember that five seconds in that classroom with you, whatever that moment was, it'll remind them that they can also do something completely different.

Kristin Valois:

I would say don't be afraid to share with students your own mistakes, your own failures, in your chosen field, but your personal examples.

Christine Zupo:

So I would think throw away the timelines, throw away the due dates, throw away that whole stress that comes around learning. I don't think

we need that. I think that we could create projects and assignments with students' abilities and capabilities and ours that don't stress them out.

Alex Evans: I'd say involve students more collaboratively, letting them guide their own teaching, and so involving them in discussions and having students share their own opinions, so that they're comfortable sharing their opinions, and they don't feel like if they share something it's going to be rejected or turned down.

Lexa Castellan: I would say to create assignments that invoke passion in your students, because students are going to do their best work when they care about what they're learning about and what they're doing. So when the assignments that you create make your students proud of what they've accomplished, those are the kind of assignments you want to implement.

Daniel Bear: My tip would be use voice feedback. All right? It's one of the greatest things that I've found as a teacher. So often people say, "I love teaching, I hate grading." And I think that's because we want to provide good feedback to our students. We're not just grading them, we're assessing them. And they need to know what that assessment is so that they can improve and move forward.

And voice feedback allows you to do that, because within about three to five minutes of audio... And you can do this on Turnitin, they've got a voice feature, and Blackboard has a voice feature. You can just record it on your phone and email it to the student. Whatever it is, you can get out a lot of material very quickly and give a thorough feedback to them in a way that really connects. The research shows that audio feedback resonates much better with students.

And it's because it is a one-sided conversation but it's a conversation. And so I always tell students at beginning of the term, you can get happy Daniel, who's like, "Oh, I'm so glad that you did this paper like this. It was really insightful. I really enjoyed that." Or you can get angry dad Daniel, who is going to come through your computer speakers and say something like, "I'm not really sure you read the instructions before doing this."

And students, they resonate with that, and they've told me that they take their laptops to their family and they'll play the feedback and say, "Listen, this is what my professor says about me." And it works quite well. And I think even beyond the quality of the assessment, it saves you time. You can speak 200 words a minute, no problem. But think about writing 600 words, right? Three minute audio feedback, incredibly thorough,

detailed, you can really go over a lot. Can you try writing 600 words? That's going to take you forever. Now do that with a class of 60 students. And if you got four classes that size, you're never going to be able to do it. So it allows really good quality feedback, while also not taking 30 hours or 40 hours to do.

Ranya Khan:

So for a faculty who's been teaching for more than a few years, one thing that I would have them consider is engaging in something called teaching squares, so again, finding out if there's opportunities to learn from other faculty around them, so talking to faculty about the opportunity of collaborating in terms of observations, so asking if there are three other faculty who might be interested in observing each other's classrooms, learning from one another.

Go into those observations with an open mind, considering your own teaching pedagogy, your own teaching style, what you're doing, what's working for you, what maybe you're having challenges with, and then really taking this as an opportunity to learn from your colleagues and saying, "You know what? I've been doing this this way for a few years, now I want to change things up a little bit."

And again, I can learn from my colleagues and really have a very productive and hopefully collaborative conversation, post-observation, to find out what's working, what might I be able to tweak in my own classroom, and gaining some insight into the teaching profession and what other people that are doing.

Cheryl Mitchell:

Change it up every once in a while. So don't keep doing the same learning activities over and over again, because I mean, it's easy. We get into a routine. But changing it up not only changes it up for the students within the classroom but yourself. It keeps things fresh, and keeps things going and, and then you can really see your passion coming out there. So I would say use a variety of learning activities in the different classes that you teach.

Laura Page:

A lot of us have heard the funny term, "the sage on the stage", so the professor at the front who has all the answers, and we're handing them over to the students and they write them down, and then they give them back to us on a test as random trivia. And I really want to, in all of the classes I run, to focus on the importance of what I talk about as collective cognitive responsibility.

So I have a bit of the responsibility for the learning and the students have a bit of the responsibility. So what that means is that we both share the

burden for building competency, but it's kind of more than that. It also means that I have to leave space for their contributions in class. I can't barrel in with my lecture completely, perfectly planned, and regardless of what the students come up with, keep steering them back in the direction of, "Well, my next slide had this, so I guess we have to go back to that."

I literally tell them around, yeah, the first or second class that I see a lecture, because I teach in more of the social science area, I see a lecture as a living, breathing creature, a sort of choose your own adventure, something that can change direction if someone brings up a more interesting point than I had. Or if the conversation gets really good, we may go off in a different direction.

So some of the tangible things I do are leave lots of blanks on slides, and we fill them in together. And that helps the students to get experience for what they're going to be doing out in the so-called real world. They're going to be trading in the knowledge economy you hear people talking about these days, buying and trading in the world of ideas. Which ideas are good? Which ideas can be improved upon? Which ideas maybe they hold too closely? Can they put themselves in other people's shoes? And we really need the classroom to model that sort of trading in ideas that they're going to be doing.

Leanne Milech:

A tip that I love, and I recently started doing this pretty much across the board, is to have students self-evaluate their work before they hand it in. So something I've always done is hand out a rubric to students when I give an assignment, I say, "Here, this is how I'm going to grade you. Make sure you look at the rubric." We look at it in class together and then I say, "Make sure you look at it before you hand in your work."

But I don't think they're doing that. So recently I started saying, "I want you to literally use the rubric. Put check marks. Give yourself a grade. Use it the way I'll use it, and hand it in with your assignment. And I will take your grade that you give yourself into consideration when I grade you." And I actually do.

So I do the grading. But let's say I'm on the fence about something like, should they get a four out of five or a three-and-a-half out of five on one section? I'll look at what they gave themselves, and if I'm really not sure and they gave themselves a four, I'll give them a four. If they gave themselves a three-and-a-half, I'll give them a three-and-a-half.

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And you'd be surprised. At first I thought students would gloss over it or just give themselves perfect. But a lot of them actually take the time to really evaluate themselves and think critically about their work. And I've noticed it gets them to do better on their assignments, not because I'm raising their grades, but because they might notice, when they go through that process, that they need to go back and change something in order to give themselves a higher grade. So I really love doing that.

Jessica Freitag: So one teaching tip that I would offer someone who has a decade or more of experience would be to make use of the resources that Humber has available. I mean, there's so many workshops and other great offerings going on all of the time, and sometimes we get stuck in our pattern of just teach and mark and teach and mark, and we work in silos a little bit. But if you can make a little bit of time every once in a while to attend a workshop, or something like that, and reach out and interact with other people from other faculties...

I've been to some workshops from the CTL, and they've been fantastic in terms of just refreshing your ideas for your practice with the people who run the workshops as well as other faculties.

Jennifer Winfield: Try something new, especially if it's starting to feel a little bit stale in the classroom. And a good way is to really look at some of the TIEE research that has been done here, because this is research that's done by teachers for teachers. And there's some really great tips to follow.

Matthew Ramer: I'm not really sure that I'm a great person to be offering advice, but I would say that, for me, I think it's really important to keep in mind that no matter how many times I've taught a subject or a course, that this is the first time that the students are experiencing this content or this course. And so, for me, the enthusiasm and the energy that I bring the 8th time or the 12th or the 20th time that I teach this course, it needs to be at the same level as what I brought the first time that I taught.

Nathan Whitlock: This episode of NEXTcast was produced by Kristin Valois for Humber Press. To listen to previous episodes of NEXTcast, and to read issues of the 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's still not a pun.

Nathan Whitlock: I like that one and we can leave it out or put it in if you want.

Christine Mitchell: Go ahead. I'm all right. I've got a union. [Laughter]