Finding Your Teaching Style

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Describing yourself
• Promoting yourself as a teaching assistant
• Promoting your course
• Impacting your students
• Students impacting you

Reflecting on your teaching
• Developing a teaching philosophy
• Connecting with your students & others
• Creating democratic classrooms
• Discovering your voice
• Documenting your teaching
• Continuing personal & professional development

Developing your teaching style
• Adapting to different teaching styles
• Recognizing different learning styles
• Identifying teacher-/student-centered approaches
• Balancing your role as a teaching assistant
• Co-learning with your students
• Using technology to diversify teaching
• Trying new approaches

Planning formative feedback
• Self-assessment – Reflective Journals
• Student-assessment – Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)
• Peer-assessment – Classroom Observations
• Outside-assessment – Consultations & Tutorials

Recalling indelible memories
• Describing your personal educational experiences
• Making new memories
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Selling Your Course and Yourself
You have been asked to create a promotional bulletin for the course you are going to teach this fall. Following the prompts below, “pitch” or “sell” your course and yourself as a teaching assistant.

Selling my course:

Selling myself as a teaching assistant:

Reflecting on my Teaching
Aim to reflect on both what you believe you are doing well (or have done) as well as those things which you feel could be improved. Consider a cycle of plan, act, review, and adapt, which can be an effective strategy when reflecting on your teaching.

Things I am doing well in my class as a TA:

Things I could improve upon in my class as a TA:

What challenges do I see ahead for the upcoming semester?

What solutions will I implement to overcome these challenges?
Step One: Clear your mind.
Set aside a block of time — 20-30 minutes is usually plenty — when you won’t be interrupted. Silence your phone or computer notifications, and have something to write with nearby. Sit comfortably, and just close your eyes and breathe for a minute or two.

Step Two: Travel to the utopian future.
First, just imagine this fall semester as your ideal semester. Your life, your work, your teaching are all going well. Try to feel that in your body and picture it in your mind while considering the following questions, and write down whatever comes to mind.

It’s one month into your ideal semester.
- How are you spending most of your time?
- How do you feel (physically or emotionally)?
- What’s happening in your classes right now?
- How are your studies/research going?

It’s two months into your ideal semester.
- How are you spending most of your time?
- How do you feel (physically or emotionally)?
- What’s happening in your classes right now?
- How are your studies/research going?

It’s the last week of your ideal semester.
- How are you spending most of your time?
- How do you feel (physically or emotionally)?
Step Three: Travel to the past.

After picturing how you would like this semester to be, take a few minutes to look through your calendar or journal from last fall and focus on those same points in the semester: one month in, two months, the last week. Without getting bogged down in the details of each specific class, jot down answers to the same questions. See if you can discover how you were spending your time, how you felt, and what was going on in your teaching, your studies, and your research.

One month into last fall…

- How were you spending most of your time?
- How did you feel (physically or emotionally)?
- What was happening in your classes?
- How were your studies/research going?

Two months into last fall…

- How were you spending most of your time?
- How did you feel (physically or emotionally)?
- What was happening in your classes?
- How were your studies/research going?

During the last week of the semester . . .

- How were you spending most of your time?
- How did you feel (physically or emotionally)?

Step Four: Conscious planning.

Finally, take a few minutes to reflect on these questions:

- What differences do you see between your vision of this ideal semester and how things went for you last year?

- What three specific things could you do differently this year to help bring your ideal vision into reality?
If you’ve taught before, or even just been a student before (which I trust all ProfHacker readers have been), you know that the first week of the semester (or quarter) is not like the rest of the weeks to come. This means that, however your first week played out, it is not predictive of the next three months.

But it’s easy to forget that you’ve been through the first week of the term before. Maybe a better one, maybe a worse one. But you got through it and probably don’t even remember it all that clearly any longer. Here are a few of the reasons why whatever happened last week (or will happen next week, depending on your calendar) is unique to the first week of the term.

**Everyone’s routines just changed.**

Chances are pretty good that even if you live a very structured life, your daily routine changes during the semester according to your teaching schedule. You might be waking up, commuting, eating, and working at different times than you did all summer. If you live with other people (especially children), their schedules have probably changed as well.

Your students, too, are experiencing schedule changes during the first week of the semester. The kind and scope of those changes may vary depending on whether your student population is largely residential or commuter-based, but either way, students are adjusting to new routines just as much, if not more, than are faculty.

**Something will malfunction.**

I think it’s a rule that some piece of equipment will not work as expected during the first week of classes, whether it’s your car, the department photocopier, the gate in the parking garage, or the classroom media projector.

But whatever malfunctions, it’s also true that you’ve got a couple of months to recover from whatever mishaps occur in your classroom during the first week. So just breathe deeply and figure out a temporary work-around.

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**Five Reasons the First Week Is Not Like the Rest**

by Natalie Houston

“Should I stay or should I go?” is the first week’s theme song.
Although some students have been registered for your course since the spring, others have only decided to try to get into it five minutes ago. Those who attended the first day may or may not reappear on the second day. The second or third day of class may bring you yet more new faces. This can be frustrating or confusing for all involved, but soon add/drop will close and you’ll know who is actually going to stay in the class.

You didn’t sleep well.
Whether it’s from excitement or anxiety, many instructors don’t sleep very soundly the night before a new class. Some don’t sleep soundly the night after. Just recognizing the fact that you’re not the only person who has that dream about walking into class and not having your materials (or realizing your students are all squid-like extra-terrestrials) can help you relax about it.

You’ve just met a bunch of new people.
For some people, suddenly being immersed in a chaotic, busy, social environment is invigorating after long summer hours in the library or lab. For others, it’s kind of overwhelming. In either case, you’re busy trying to learn student names and reconnect with your colleagues. But just think: in about three months, you’ll be counting down the days until the term ends and you can get away from everyone again.

The first week has a bright energy all its own. Just hang on and enjoy it. The term about to unfold is full of possibilities — all of them undecided right now — and the one thing you can be sure of is that the weeks ahead will not be just like the first one.