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University of Cincinnati–College-Conservatory of Music–Pedagogy of Theory
Some Basic Principles of Good Teaching

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1. Good teaching requires a combination of good communication skills, good psychology (learn to know, care for, understand, and interpret your students), good organization, and a good balance of compassion and rigor (friendliness/authority, availability/distance).
2. *Come prepared* to each class. Display good organizational skills.
3. *Enthusiasm* is essential and contagious. Students will appreciate (and respond to) your enthusiasm for teaching, music, the materials you are studying, the students and their progress, the quality of your theory program, etc.
4. Low energy classes may often be slow, boring, long, and unproductive. *Be energetic*, or at least as much as your temperament and personality allow. Actual teaching is tiring, sometimes exhausting. We usually need to put a lot of ourselves into teaching (physically, emotionally, rhetorically, psychologically, sometimes dramatically or even theatrically!) in order to motivate, challenge, and convince students, and in order to have satisfying, successful classes. Yes, coffee, ginseng, yoga, jogging . . . they can all help.
5. It is always healthy to keep a good balance in class between disciplined, serious work and discussion (which you should control) and a light, fun atmosphere (some laughter is always a welcome relief) which makes both teaching and learning much more pleasurable.
6. Keep a *lively class pacing*. Do not “lecture” too much. Do not spend too much time on a single task to the detriment of other important and necessary class items. Do a *variety of tasks* in each class.
7. *Involve the students*. The Socratic approach is still one of the greatest pedagogical tools.
8. *Get involved with the students*. Take time to *help students* (in class and out) that need it. Be available and open to questions, but avoid spoon feeding. It does not really help the student, and it takes a disproportionate amount of your time.
9. Students will respond to the standards you set for the class. If you set high standards, they will rise up to them. *Keep your standards high!!* Remember: Students are here to learn, and they *want* to learn. They *want* to be challenged, and they like it!
10. Never lose a chance to explain (or discuss with students) the *relevance* of what we do. Understanding music (how it works, how it is built, what forces make it move forward) is an essential element of good musicianship. Good aural and sight singing skills will help the students to be better listeners, to understand music better, and to be better musicians. Stress that a good ear and a good mind work together as a unit, and that our goal is to develop this type of unity.
11. As much as you can, try to relate what you do to “real musical life.” Have the students ask themselves questions such as: How does this affect the way I hear the piece, and the way I might perform it? As a performer (or composer, theorist, musicologist, music educator, etc.), am I interested in knowing this about the piece? Are there other pieces in my repertoire to which I might apply this knowledge? Can I perform one in class and illustrate how this knowledge affects my hearing of the piece?
12. Always explain things in a musical context. Begin by showing an example from the literature, or show an example immediately after you have introduced the concept. Avoid 1- or 2-measure examples. Show your concepts in a broader musical context (at least a phrase or a period), and explain the effect of your new concept in the context of this broader musical unit.
13. We all make mistakes--we all have occasional bad days, tired weeks, sleepless nights! When you do, acknowledge it gracefully (a joke about it helps), correct it, and keep moving. If students correct you rightfully, accept the correction and praise them on their good perception.