Teaching Messages Collection 2025-26

12 Teaching Messages from 7 Institutions

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Fostering Feedback and Fluency: A Peer Review Approach in a Speech-Intensive Practicum

The senior practicum in exercise science is designated as a speech-intensive course, requiring students to deliver three formal presentations. These presentations challenge students to communicate clearly, speak with confidence, and articulate disciplinary concepts effectively. Topics center on their senior internship experiences, offering students a chance to reflect on their time in the field, integrate knowledge from their undergraduate coursework, and express their professional goals.

To support both presentation quality and peer learning, I implement a structured peer review and feedback process for each round of presentations. This approach serves as both a learning tool and a community-building exercise.

I begin by framing peer feedback with two key prompts:

- For presenters, I remind them they've spent years watching others give presentations and they know what works and what doesn't. I encourage them to apply the strategies they've found engaging or wished others had used.
- For audience members, I use a simple yet powerful feedback structure: begin with a compliment, then offer a point of confusion, disengagement, and/or constructive criticism, and conclude with a concrete suggestion for improvement. I emphasize the importance of giving specific, actionable feedback rather than broad generalities. Importantly, students may not repeat feedback already given by others, which keeps the class attentive, focused, and creative in their responses.

I occasionally step in during audience feedback to prompt deeper discussion or model how to expand on an idea. For example, if a student says, "I had trouble following you when you switched from topic A to topic B," we might discuss as a class how presenters can use visual cues, adjust presentation flow, or alter physical delivery to better guide the audience's attention.

To ensure accountability and reflection, students take notes during each presentation and submit their feedback in a Canvas discussion forum after class. These posts are graded pass/fail for timely submission rather than content. This process gives presenters something tangible to review and helps them track their growth across the semester.

I've observed six major benefits from this approach:

1. Students remain more engaged during peer presentations.
2. They become more comfortable offering constructive feedback in a professional manner.

3. They also learn to receive feedback with maturity and openness. When needed, I pause to discuss strategies for responding to feedback productively.
4. Their presentation and public speaking skills improve measurably.
5. They can observe progress, both their own and their peers', by revisiting earlier feedback.
6. A strong sense of classroom community emerges, fostering professional relationships and collaboration.

In this environment, students are not just learning how to present, they're learning how to listen, evaluate, support, and grow together. For a course that bridges academic learning and professional experience, this feedback culture reinforces the collaborative mindset they will carry into their careers.

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Using "I Can" Statements for Student Self-Assessment, Instructional Improvement, and Program Evaluation

You've got a class reunion coming up and you'd like to lose six pounds. You feel confident that you can do it by cutting out junk food snacking, exercising four days a week, and eating more fresh fruits and vegetables. Reviewing the small steps you must take to achieve your larger goal, you wake up Monday morning and say to yourself, "I can do this!"

In a classroom setting, we refer to desired long-term outcomes, such as losing six pounds, as learning objectives – what students are expected to know and be able to do by the end of the course. Every course syllabus lists the course learning objectives; and everything we teach, assign, and assess should directly align with one or more objectives. If not, it's time to revisit either the learning objective or our instruction.

The problem with learning objectives is that we rarely communicate them explicitly to our students, which makes day-to-day instruction seem random, or in colloquial terms, difficult for students to see the forest (a given learning objective) through the trees (the constant flurry of instruction, assignments, and assessments). In addition to providing a sense of purpose for students, "I can" statements can help you, the course instructor, as well.

What is an "I Can" Statement?

Sometimes referred to as "can do" statements, an "I can" statement is a course learning objective, often deconstructed into a foundational component of the objective (such as eating more fruits and vegetables), that is rephrased into an affirmative sentence that begins with the words "I can." Most "I can statements can be answered with a simple yes or no. "I can" statements should be written in student friendly language that describes precisely what students should know and be able to do (Many, 2021). For example, if the learning objective is to apply classical conditioning as a strategy for marketing a new product, possible "I can" statements might include, "I can define classical conditioning," "I can provide an example of classical conditioning," and "I can identify elements of classical conditioning when I view television commercials."

Especially when engaging students in open-ended inquiry or problem solving tasks, "I can" statements set clear expectations for student learning, direct students' learning efforts, facilitate students' self-assessment of what they have (or have not yet) learned, and "provide a common language for students to give and receive feedback" (Eisberg, 2024, para. 5). "I can" statements that are deconstructed into a specific component of a learning objective, such as "I can explain the difference between classical conditioning and operant conditioning," can be presented at the beginning of a class session to communicate exactly what students should know and be able to do by the end of the session. “I can” statements that align directly with the course learning objectives, such as “I can apply classical conditioning as a strategy for marketing a new product” may be presented to students on a study guide to focus their preparation for an upcoming assessment. In these ways, “I can” statements provide guidance for both students, in terms what they are expected to do; and for the instructor, in terms of exactly what needs to be taught, practiced, reinforced, and assessed.

Student Self-Assessment
In addition to regularly and directly communicating course learning objectives in a student friendly way, student self-assessment is a primary purpose of “I can” statements. For simple yes/no checklists, Many (2021) identified three follow up questions that empower students to reflect more deeply on their learning in a forward-thinking manner: 1) Where do I need to go? 2) Where am I right now? 3) What do I need to do to close the gap between where I need to go and where I am right now? For more complex skill sets, Kobayashi (2012) found that using a Likert scale “can-do” questionnaire three times during a college course resulted in higher motivation, autonomy, and metacognitive awareness among college students. MacDuff et al. (2010) found that, over time, students’ responses to “I can” statements grew more confident, even as course learning objectives became progressively more difficult. However, Summers et al. (2019) reported a weak correlation between student self-assessments and placement test results, suggesting that “I can” statements are useful for promoting students’ self-awareness and responsibility as learners, but they should be used alongside more objective forms of assessment.

Instructional Improvement
Comparing student self-assessments to objective assessments such as skill demonstrations, written assignments, and test scores enables course instructors to assess how well the instruction they are providing is increasing students’ knowledge and skills. Eisberg (2024) delineated three progressive levels of student understanding. *Surface level* includes foundational knowledge and skills; *deep level* encompasses “more sophisticated understanding of concepts, encouraging students to analyze, compare, and infer” (para. 4); and *transfer level* occurs when students are able to apply what they have learned in new or different situations. Regardless of subject area, course content should be designed to scaffold instruction from foundational to complex. MacDuff et al. (2010) provided a detailed example of step-by-step lesson plans focused on progressively difficult learning objectives supported with “I can” statements. Monitoring students’ “I can” responses allows instructors to speed up, slow down, re-teach, present material in a different way, offer precise feedback, provide extra practice, and so on to ensure that students ultimately achieve mastery of the course content.

Program Evaluation
Beyond individual students, instructors, and courses, “I can” statements are useful in evaluating entire academic programs. As part of systematically examining standards, operations, and outcomes to increase program effectiveness (Giancola, 2025), department faculty can compare student self-assessments and objective assessment outcomes over time to identify patterns, gaps, and overlaps. For example, if students in all sections of a course consistently self-assess a particular skill as weak regardless of who is teaching the course, it may be time to update the

course materials, increase the instructional time and student practice devoted to the skill, or disperse instruction and practice of the skill across more than one course in the program. On the other hand, if students are earning As and Bs and consistently rate their knowledge and skills as strong, but employer surveys indicate that graduates are not adequately prepared, revising course learning objectives and instructional practices across the board may be necessary.

Whether you're trying to lose six pounds, positively impact student learning, or both, "I can" statements can provide the extra guidance, motivation, and insights you need to stay focused until you – and your students – achieve the desired long-term outcomes.

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A Novice Educator's Reflection on Wisdom Gained Throughout the First Four Years of Teaching

In the first four years of teaching at the graduate level I have learned many lessons that improved my teaching effectiveness.

Year One: Respond to emails even if you don't know all the answers! Often student concerns during my first year were exacerbated because of my choosing not to answer their emails until I had the best answer. Students became frustrated waiting for my response, and unmotivated to engage further in the class. My tardiness in responding gave the message that I was not invested in their learning—so why would they be invested in my course? Once I made a commitment to respond as soon as possible to student inquiries, they were more likely to continue reaching out for clarification and guidance.

Year Two: The power of weekly Canvas page announcements! What an exciting year. I was feeling connected and accepted by my students just as they were beginning to feel safe with me. This year students began to email me not only about course content but also to share their lives. More students were showing up for the weekly class drop-ins and these sessions involved lively conversation and debate both on course-related topics and professional ethics. I have added weekly class announcements emphasizing respect, support, and inclusiveness, reviewing assignments, connecting course content to student career goals, and linking to drop-ins and office hours. Student emails became more about how much they appreciated my timely response to emails and the structure provided by the weekly Canvas page announcements.

Year Three: Everyone belongs, and everyone's beliefs are respected. At the conclusion of year three, I realized that I was not doing my best to uphold a safe environment for online discourse. It was at this point that I made a commitment to be intentional in reading every student discussion post, not only for evidence that the student was understanding course content, but also to ensure that their comments were respectful of their peers' experiences, personal beliefs and values. What I found was that a few students were so excited about their own learning and passionate about their ideals that they left little room for the views of their peers. If a student's comment to a peer or myself came across as disrespectful, my personal feedback to the student would begin by highlighting the student's insights on the forum topic, then clearly share my concern. I would provide acceptable alternative responses that would help ensure that everyone felt safe in our class and I would end my feedback by voicing my confidence that the student would consider my concern, reach out to me with any questions, and adjust future class communication. This approach was effective in coaching students on online communication etiquette and it enabled the voice of previously silenced students to join the discussions.

Year Four: Encourage lasting peer relationships so they may support each other through graduation. In year four, I found myself impatient with the lack of progress I was seeing in student attendance at the weekly class drop-ins. A few regulars showed up to ask me questions about the course and they left as soon as their questions were answered. After much reflection, I expanded the weekly course Canvas page announcements. I emphasized that these drop-ins were a time where students could socialize, talk to each other about where they are in the program, explore their career dreams, and share resources. I encouraged students to drop-in for any part of the hour to say hi or to get the support they need from their peers and myself. As the weeks went by, I witnessed students showing up each week, supporting each other, and enjoying the opportunity to feel like they belonged and were a part of the group. They took over—leading not only the socializing but also the discussions related to class content and assignments. My role became gatekeeper, listening to ensure learning was taking place and occasionally adding information or stories, modeling healthy communication, and ensuring that the students were meeting the course learning objectives.

Year Five: I hope my reflection on how I have been intentionally growing a sense of community in my online classrooms proves helpful. As I look to my fifth year of teaching, I have set a new teaching goal: This year I plan to turn to peer-reviewed literature to guide my teaching style. Like many, I have limited formal training in teaching. I plan to continue my own education through the help of journals that share both the tried-and-true methods as well as the new and innovative ones. May we all have a successful start to the new academic year!

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Using Tiered Mentorship to Broaden Undergraduate Research Participation

Many faculty want to involve undergraduates in scholarship but face a familiar challenge: we want to offer meaningful experiences, but our time and capacity are limited. Tiered mentorship can help. This approach provides students with multiple mentorship touchpoints and with opportunities to practice leadership skills, while minimizing the workload burden on faculty.

In MY LAB, we've implemented A THREE-TIERED MENTORSHIP STRUCTURE designed to increase both the breadth and depth of student engagement. This model can be adapted to fit a wide range of disciplines and works particularly well in scholarship that involves recurring tasks, team-based inquiry, or long-term projects.

How this works:

In brief, students maintain their connection to your scholarship over multiple semesters, with advanced students providing some training and oversight to less-experienced students.

Students are organized into tiers based on their level of experience and responsibility within the scholarship. New students (Tier 1) begin with structured exposure: they learn lab or project routines, participate in reading groups or meetings, and contribute to foundational tasks such as transcription, coding, data entry, or literature reviews. These tasks are selected to be low stakes but authentic: students know they're doing real work and not busy work.

Tier 2 students, with at least one semester of experience, begin to take more initiative. They might co-lead subprojects, train new students, or manage the workflow for a shared task. This tier is critical for development: students learn to take ownership for the work, building their professional self-image as a future leader in the field.

Tier 3 students, who have been embedded in your scholarship for a year or more, serve as project leads and peer mentors. They can help design protocols, facilitate communication, and provide feedback to students in the earlier tiers. Faculty remain actively involved, but the mentorship is distributed, allowing the team to grow without becoming overwhelming.

Note that this approach mimics the typical tiered structure of many labs at research-intensive universities (with post-docs supervising PhD students who supervise undergraduate students) but can be implemented with near-peer mentoring entirely at the undergraduate level.

Getting Started:

Start with just two students: one more experienced, and one new. Give them a task they can work on together. Ideally this would be something tangible, repeatable, and connected to a real scholarly outcome. Start with smaller tasks than you would normally hand off to a highly supervised and well-trained mentee; small tasks that an inexperienced student can handle with limited oversight and minimal training. Remember that students value exposure to real scholarship, even when only given tasks that are relatively small contributions!

Meet frequently (weekly or monthly) as a group. Clarify roles and expectations early. As the group grows, begin to formalize the structure, documenting student roles, responsibilities, and task protocols.

Once set up, the structure itself becomes a teaching tool. Students learn not only the content of your field, but also how to mentor and to manage complex projects, skills that are substantially valuable in their future careers.

Instead of limiting research opportunities to only a few top-performing seniors, this approach can open the door to students earlier in their college journey, when they're most uncertain and most in need of guidance. It also creates a stronger sense of community, where students support one another and grow into leadership.

With this kind of intentional scaffolding, mentorship becomes sustainable and scholarship becomes more accessible. Tiered approaches like this can help us redesign research spaces to be not only rigorous, but also relational and inclusive.

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Muddiest Point/Clearest Mud

For many years now I have wrapped up lessons with the "Muddiest Point" assessment in which students anonymously record the part of the lesson they need further clarification on or ask a question they have about the material. For in-person classes, I typically use index cards (I invite students not to sign their card) while online I've used an anonymous Google form. I typically respond to the most popular muddiest points at the start of the next class and/or add something to the learning management system to cover as many points as I can get to.

This activity provides valuable insight into where my students might be stuck and gives me the opportunity to intervene prior to the start of the next lesson. However, as structured, the Muddiest Point only surfaces the known unknowns, i.e., the students have to realize their learning is incomplete for these gaps to become visible in the assessment. So, how do we reach the unknown unknowns, those concepts that the students think they understand but don't?

That's where the "Clearest Mud" comes into play. Ask students to flip the index card (or provide a second question on a Google form) and ask them to explain/summarize one thing from the lesson they learned, i.e., ask them to share something they understand. Or think they understand. Encourage them to focus on key takeaways and/or the hardest part of the lesson.

A Clearest Mud addition to this assessment provides several advantages:

- The exercise is no longer solely about student deficits; they get to share what they know as well as what they don't know. This supports student self-efficacy.
- If the prompt is worded to focus on the harder parts of the lesson (hence the term Clearest Mud), the results should help the instructor better understand students' opinions on what material is difficult. As experts in our respective fields, we can't always see the students' pain points, especially when teaching introductory or gen ed courses.
- Finally, the Clearest Mud will surface those concepts that the students only **think** they have mastered. When multiple students provide incorrect explanations of a key concept, that's a big red flag calling for an instructional intervention. Maybe the topic merits further in-class activity or a new resource (video, podcast, reading) could be added to the course's learning management system.

Addendum – Large Classes

Doing even a basic Muddiest Point in a large lecture course creates the problem of too much material for the instructor to reasonably review and respond to. One way to incorporate this sort of activity in a large course is to use a three-step approach. The first step involves individual writing on index cards (or a word processor). In the second step, students are given time to discuss their written responses with peers in groups of 4-6. Some Muddiest Points concerns and Clearest Mud misconceptions will be addressed through student-to-student interaction. For the final step, ask one member of each group to share (either digitally or using another card) the Muddiest Point they found most difficult to resolve and the Clearest Mud they think is most important to the course. This method takes extra in-class time, but it will give you actionable data and challenge the students to think about the material one more time.

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Engaging Students with Creative Thinking and Experimentation in the Studio Art Classroom and Applying these Ideas to Other Disciplines

"Creativity takes Courage" – Henri Matisse

How do we foster creativity in the studio art classroom? How do we foster creativity in other disciplines? In the Visual Arts, students need to develop works that show their innovative thinking and their unique vision. Students also need to develop what are often called "soft skills" or better known as the "power skills" such as problem solving, critical thinking, adaptability, communication, time-management, and collaboration. How can a more playful approach to project development help students to develop these skills, allow them to experiment with materials and ideas, and help students apply these skills to all their coursework?

Teaching studio art classes, I often find students are unable to come up with unique ideas for projects. Despite requesting 3 – 5 or more preliminary sketches for ideas, I find students do not always have a way to develop their creativity. Once they have an idea, they often are afraid to deviate or experiment beyond their initial ideation. In many foundation classes, the assignments are teacher led, with a specific prompt created by the instructor. While the results may all be unique, students are still bound by specific guidelines that they are assigned.

In order to help students to develop their creative skills, I developed a series of assignments that were derived by the students themselves and had a playful element of chance. Students came up with the prompts for assignments, or a die was thrown in order to leave the parameters to chance and therefore develop their critical thinking skills. These assignments also allowed students the opportunity to experiment with both materials and ideas. By allowing the parameters of the assignments up to chance, students had to develop and use higher level thinking skills. They also are more engaged in the process as they are a part of the decision making. While these were successful in the studio art classroom, all of these assignments can be changed to fit other class assignments and can work across the disciplines.

- **Dice Decisions:** Using a set of dice (Dungeons and Dragon dice were appealing to my students), students rolled the dice to discover the parameters of the assignment and leave it up to chance. For example, one set of numbers represented a type of art material, while another may represent a topic or a style of work. The students came up with the list to match each die, and then they created a work based on what the dice represented when thrown. This could easily be used in other disciplines such as creative writing or a theatre class.

• **Create a Work Based on a Title:** Each student writes a sentence of a few words which will be a title of an art work. Another way to do this is to pull a sentence from a novel or other book. Each student writes the title down on a small piece of paper and each student picks one of the titles out of a hat or bowl. Using this random title, students must create a work of art that fits what was written by their peers.

• **Random Materials:** In order to help students develop skills and experiment with unfamiliar materials, place a unique material in a closed paper bag. Have Students randomly chose a bag or number the bags and have students choose a random number out of a hat. Students must create a work of art using the material found in the bag. Another variation on this is to start in one material, and then they are allowed to trade with one other student to use the traded material to finish their work.

• **Round Robin Drawing:** This project was done in a drawing class. Students started a drawing and when I called "switch," they moved to the right and worked on the next drawing. Each time I called "switch" they moved to another drawing and contributed to the work. After a few moves, everyone was asked to return to their original drawing and complete it with the changes from their peers.

• **The Exquisite Corpse:** Based on a game developed by the Surrealists, students are divided up into three groups. Group one draws the shoulders and head, group two draws the torso and group three draws the lower body and legs. Drawings are randomly placed together to create complete figures. The three sections could be on separate pages and put together or one paper, where each section is folded so the next artist cannot see what their partners drew. This would also work well in a creative writing class where each student creates a part of a story and then they are randomly placed together. Once put together, the artist or writer can use the work as a starting point to develop another work or revise the work based on their own creativity. These are a few ways that you can use chance and gamification to help foster creativity and a willingness to experiment in the studio classroom. While I have used these pedagogical approaches in my studio classes, with a few modifications, they can be applied to courses across the disciplines.

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The Application of Knowledge & Preparation for Careers

The importance of preparing students for their careers is one of the foundational purposes of higher education. The teaching tips below focus on preparing students for their careers after graduation by setting clear learning objectives and helping students apply the knowledge they have learned. As an educator guided by the word of God my teaching tips are based on the following scripture, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, *he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed*" (Holy Bible King James Version, James 1:25). Let's teach students how to be doers and not hears only of what we teach. I hope these teaching tips will be helpful for you this school year.

1. **Write actionable learning objectives.**
   Write and communicate clear, actionable learning objectives for every lesson or lecture. Actionable learning objectives are extremely valuable, as they state to students exactly what their instructors expect of them and the skills they can expect to learn. Utilize Bloom's Taxonomy to support writing actionable learning objectives.

2. **Aligned all assignments to learning objectives.**
   All assignments and assessments, formative and summative, should be aligned with the learning objectives from the lessons or lectures for which they are providing practice. Be sure rubrics and feedback also align with the learning objectives.

3. **Help students master new skills through consistent, actionable feedback.**
   Provide students with consistent feedback on low-stakes and formative assignments. Doing so helps students master new skills and become better prepared for applying their newly learned skills on summative assessments, papers, and case studies. "Providing students with clear, actionable feedback can help bridge educational gaps by empowering students with knowledge regarding their academic strengths and weaknesses" (Gabriel, 2022).

4. **Utilize Case Studies**
   Incorporate active learning experiences aligned to learning objectives that allow students to *actively* apply their knowledge and newly learned skills to their careers. Utilizing at least one case study in your course is a great way to present students with realistic career-based data and challenges they could face. Case studies are also ideal because they provide students with the opportunity to problem-solve about these career-based challenges, both collaboratively and independently.

Remember, the goal is to prepare students for their future through your instruction. Preparing students for their future career begins with creating clear learning objectives, aligning all activities to learning objectives, providing consistent feedback on assignments, and creating opportunities for active learning. Let's prepare our students to be doers with what they learn from us, and not hearers only.

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"Life Be Lifin' " A Case for Compassionate Pedagogy

This semester, I'm leaning into compassion in a different way. I'm intentionally embedding compassionate pedagogy strategies into my classes.

Compassionate pedagogy in higher education is about creating and sustaining a learning environment where students feel seen, supported, and valued not only as learners but as human beings.

By fostering trust, validating student struggles, embracing diverse needs of learners, and modeling empathy, we can help our students navigate their academic journey with greater confidence and resilience.

For this semester (and beyond) I want to show up in my classroom as someone who uses a pedagogy of kindness. This approach, attributed to Catherine Denial, includes many strategies, ranging from making intentional connections with students, to offering student choice in course design or assignment elements, to modeling empathy, to building in flexibility in course components and assignments deadlines.

I can point to examples of how I've used most of these over the years and I know that many of you can too. These are just good teaching practices! For me, that flexibility one has been the hardest to integrate.

Why? Because we often experience teaching as a transactional model. We give students knowledge and in return, they give us a paper that demonstrates that they have that knowledge. If they can't submit that paper by the deadline, they lose points. Why? Because we're preparing students for the professional world, which *is* transactional, thank you capitalism (see this think piece for a deeper connection between capitalism and higher education).

I know I'm not alone in explaining to students that my rationale for rigid deadlines is because in the "real world", deadlines matter. Of course they do…AND, I myself have missed a bunch of deadlines. In every situation where I had to explain that I couldn't meet the deliverable within the original time frame, I've been met with grace and kindness. Sometimes it was possible to extend the deadline, but not always. Even when a colleague, journal editor or organization needed to move their process forward without my contributions, they treated me with empathy and understanding.

If I'm truly committed to preparing students for their professional lives (which I am), I need to model being a kind human.

Enter: my Life Be Lifin' (LBL) policy. This is a policy for late assignments that takes into consideration the many life events that can impact a student's ability to submit high quality products by deadlines. Under this LBL policy, students are allotted a *total* *of 24 additional hours* to be used for late submission of any of the individually graded assignments. This is a no-excuse needed; no-advanced notification needed option. The LMS portal will remain open 24 hours beyond the due date and time. The time stamp will indicate the number of hours that the assignment is late. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of their LBL bank of hours. As an example, if a student submits their first assignment 12 hours after the deadline, they have 12 hours remaining in their LBL bank for submitting other assignments after the due date.

As has always been my policy, when students are facing difficult circumstances that require more than a short extension, I work individually with them to offer longer extensions or other supports.

I selected a 24 hour LBL bank, based on the structure of my courses and assignments. You may want to offer even more hours. I suggest tracking your students use of the hours and checking in with them to determine if your allotted extensions are sufficient.

This flexible deadline approach has strong evidence in support of student learning experiences. Undergraduate students in this 2023 study reported that the proactive extension policy enabled them to improve the quality of their work and to better manage their academic workloads, acting as self-regulated learners. They also frequently described reduced stress as a benefit. Similar findings occurred in graduate and professional programs, in fact, offering no-penalty extensions may be even more important for graduate students, given the significant number of other factors that adult learners experience.

Want a deeper dive into the approaches and benefits of a pedagogy of kindness?

- Pedagogy of Kindness – 2020: Learning Together - 10 minute video by Jeff Janowick, History Faculty at Lansing Community College
- Pedagogy of Kindness - 1 hour webinar by Catherine Denial

Here's to a semester of teaching with kindness!

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Academic Accommodations and Universal Design for Learning Practices

This tip is designed to review some strategies for supporting students who receive academic accommodations for a learning disability, sensory, or physical disability or other impairment. Even more importantly, this teaching tip includes some ideas for structuring your course and class sessions to be inclusive of all learners, using a model called Universal Design for Learning.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) requires universities to provide reasonable accommodations when a student's disability has been verified. Your university has a Disability Resource Office which is responsible for working with students to ensure that they have access to appropriate accommodations. They likely have online resources for faculty; I encourage you to start your deep dive into support at that website.

While accommodations can vary, they typically fall into one of three categories:

- Learning accommodations (e.g., notetakers, reduced courseloads)
- Testing accommodations (e.g., extended time for exams, reduced distraction testing location)
- Access accommodations (e.g., physically accessible classroom, alternative formats for textbooks)

The American Psychological Association (APA) has compiled a useful list of examples of accommodations by type of disability and a list of accommodations for specific academic activities.

Here are some practical strategies for how to work with a variety of academic accommodations.

- **Review the accommodation notification letter** (emailed directly from Disability Resource office or from an individual student) for the specific accommodations that have been approved by the Disability Resources office. Consider how these accommodations may impact your current class and assignment structure. Keep in mind that these accommodations are not specific to the department or program or to your course so an accommodation for extended time on an exam may not be relevant to the assignments in your course. Be sure to review the accommodations carefully, for example: extended time on a timed exam is not the same as extended time to submit all graded assignments.
- **Meet privately with the student** to discuss how they would like to proceed with their approved accommodations. *Please note: it is never appropriate to ask a student to identify their specific disability.* The notification letter provides all the necessary information for faculty to proceed with adjusting course structure and materials. However, many times, students will have several approved accommodations, but they don't intend to utilize all of these on a regular basis. It is appropriate to ask them to describe more specifically which

accommodations they anticipate being the most utilized, given the structure of your course and assignments.

- **Ask them** if they've utilized these accommodations in other educational settings in the past and if so, which ones were most beneficial for them. They may have an accommodation for a notetaker but may describe that they found that having access to the instructor's lecture notes was more useful than a fellow student's notes.
- **Discuss how you think their approved accommodations will interface with your course content and structure**. As examples: if you plan to have spontaneous quizzes and your student has an accommodation for extended time on timed exams, you will want to talk with them in advance about how they can utilize their extended time accommodation during quizzes. If they have an accommodation for a front row seat, you will want to talk with them in advance about whether this seating is necessary during small group work, if you typically move students around the room for these in-class small group activities. If they indicate that remaining in their front row seat is the most beneficial, ensure that you provide instructions for how to arrange into small groups in such a way that the student with the accommodation isn't singled out for their inability to participate in a particular manner. (Don't invite students to organize themselves anywhere around the room, for example).
- *If there is an approved accommodation that will substantively limit their ability to learn and/or impact other students' ability to learn due to the necessary elements of your course, you will need to explicitly describe the essential course requirements, with your syllabus as a supporting document, and how these would be impacted by the accommodation.* For example, in a class with weekly practice simulation activities, an accommodation for adjustments for attendance expectations would likely negatively impact the student and other students' ability to build their skills. Almost every time I've discussed these situations with students, we've been able to find a reasonable work-around. For example, I once had a student who had an approved accommodation to "leave the classroom as necessary". When I met with them to discuss what exactly this meant and described how at times during the class, their leaving without warning could disrupt an interactive activity with their classmates, I learned that they've mostly used this accommodation to take a medically necessary restroom break, lasting only a few minutes and that they've never had to do so in the middle of an interactive activity. They reported that they were able to use my (stated up front) class agenda to cue for what content and activities were upcoming so they could prepare accordingly. This was easily supported throughout the semester in my class.
- In situations where an accommodation would not be easily supported without disruption to the learning for this and/or other students, you may need to consult with someone from Disability Resources, or with administrators in your department or program to determine how to proceed. I encourage you to reach out for support as proactively as possible.

And now, let's talk about how you can structure <u>all</u> your class sessions to be inclusive of <u>all</u> students, without having to make significant numbers of accommodations for individual students (recognizing that you will, of course, need to follow all approved accommodations as well).

Here are a few examples:

- **Include detailed lecture notes in the "notes" view in PowerPoint.** Once I realized that students who had approved accommodations for a peer note-taker preferred to have access to *my* lecture notes instead of a classmate's notes, I started putting the content of my lecture notes into the "notes view" in my PowerPoint slides. I post the slides to our LMS as PowerPoints (not as PDFs) so they have the option to view the notes view. That removed the burden for the student with the accommodation to have to request these from me, it also removed the burden for me of having to separately provide notes to individual students and now, every student can read my lecture notes, which likely benefits students for whom English isn't their primary language as well as other students who just can't scribble notes as fast as I can talk.

- **Have multiple ways for students to participate in interactive classroom components.** For students who have limited mobility, I use a peer coach or observer role that doesn't require being highly mobile. I assign a peer coach or observer role to several students, so the student with limited mobility isn't singled out for their inability to participate in a particular manner.

- **Review and then revise all of your written and audio course elements for accessibility for students with visual or hearing impairments.**
    - Use Closed Captioning on all videos and use PowerPoint's "Real-Time Subtitles" option when you are lecturing.
    - Use the "Accessibility Checker" in your LMS, make sure that your Word documents are accessible and use an OCR (Optical Character Recognition) program to ensure that images of text in your PDFs are machine readable. All of these are helpful for individuals who use screen readers.

These are examples that broadly align with an approach called Universal Design for Learning. The UDL framework is designed to ensure that all learners can participate in meaningful and challenging learning opportunities. The guidelines (at this link) provide concrete suggestions for how to approach everything from alternatives for visual or auditory information to how to provide graphic organizers, templates, and note-taking guides to help students keep information organized.

If you want to learn more about how we can make our courses accessible, these resources are thought provoking and provide useful information and frameworks.

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Happy teaching!

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AI Assisted Case Studies

Because we're now living in the age of AI and some employers want students to know how to use it both reasonably and ethically, I decided this past year to integrate AI-Assisted Case Studies into my graduate leadership ethics course. Students by and large enjoyed using the chat bots in this way (2 "I didn't really like it" out of ~30 students so far), and as I revised the course further for Fall, I developed more activities and assessments that integrate AI use.

In my mind, the main reason that AI use by students is dangerous is because of two things. First, they don't know what they don't know and whether the bot they are conversing with is giving good or bad information. And second, AI very much operates on a "garbage in, garbage out" model of the information it delivers. It takes time to craft a good query in order to get the best output that the bot is capable of. With these two things in mind, I created the AI-Assisted Case Studies in order to allow students to practice using AI and crafting good questions for it and also for them to see what it does or doesn't know about certain topics.

Our ethics text has 3 cases per chapter, all real events within the last five or so years, and each chapter focuses on various ethical concepts and/or theories. Because answers to the questions in the text are readily available online should someone choose (even in an ethics course!) to search for them, I develop my own questions and select certain cases for students to choose 4 from across the semester. Once they have chosen and read their case and the chapter from which it came, using the AI chat bot of their choice (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity, etc.), they ask their bot questions to help them to answer the questions I provided. From their instructions:

> You should ask it to identify the case (e.g., What do you know about the college bribery scandal in 2019?) or even copy/paste the case in from your text before asking questions to get the best results. Save and submit a copy of this transcript.
>
> I will not require a certain number of interactions. You might have to define some of the terms for your bot or ask if it knows about what they mean in an ethical context before it is able to answer your question(s). The significant points for this assignment are meant to encourage you to take your time, as using AI well isn't always quick interaction.

Once they have completed the AI Chat, they have to write an analysis of the case and critique the chat using this guidance:

> In essay format (which means and introduction with thesis/point you want to make about the case) and conclusion and APA style headings for each section), write an analysis of the case that does the following:

1. Write a summary of the key facts of the case.
2. Address the questions I posted for your case. Remember to cite key concepts from the text in addressing the case and question(s).
3. Analyze the case in light of Bolman and Deal's Frames model to identify ethical gaps
4. Critique the answers that AI provided in relation to the case and why you think they were appropriate or not. Remember to cite key concepts from the text in support of your stance.

Students so far have been good at picking out the subtle differences in what our course materials say and what the bot has shared, and they're also good at recognizing when their questions weren't getting them the types of answers/correct information that they were wanting. Most comment on how they hadn't realized how limited AI can be on certain topics. A handful of industrious students have done the case chat with multiple bots and then compared their varied outputs.

I resisted using AI in classes at first. Now I'm playing catch up with the innovative ways that my colleagues are using it. If you've been hesitant to use AI, maybe try AI critiques and see how they'll work for your class.

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Source Cited: A Simple Trick to Boost Transparency and Student Confidence on Exams

Life is a test and this world is a place of trial. Always the problems – or it may be the same problem – will be presented to every generation in different forms.

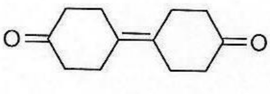
--Winston Churchill

I remember being a student in my organic chemistry and often finding myself struggling through certain test problems, wondering if I had seen them somewhere before. It was usually only once the test was completed that I realized that I had indeed seen either that exact problem in my studying, or problems that were quite similar. Overall, I think that the test-taking experience is usually quite stressful for most students, and students should not also have added stress as to whether they missed a certain problem or concept in their studies.

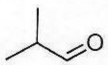
Once I started teaching and crafting tests of my own, I had the idea to include where the test problem came from on certain problems. I started doing this for a few reasons…

- Reinforce the idea that the "optional" book problems I assign are important to understanding the material.
- Promote good note taking.
- Provide more transparency on the exams and practice exams.
- Boost student confidence through recognizing that they had seen specific concepts or problems.

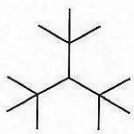
An example of this in practice is shown below.

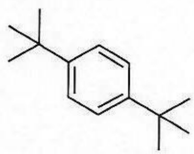


Problem 15.39



From Exam 1 (FA22)





Similar to Problem 15.35

At first, I saw this as a small, thoughtful gesture that was a minor addition to the exam to help reduce student anxiety whilst taking the exam. What I did not anticipate was the overwhelmingly positive student response. Students repeatedly express that they appreciate the increased transparency, clarity, and fairness during the exam. They often note that while the material is still extremely challenging, it is nice to not stress over whether they have seen similar problems prior to the exam. As an instructor, it is incredibly rewarding that such a subtle change could lead to such a powerful impact on student confidence.

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