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“What advice would you give a graduate TA or a new faculty member when it comes to good teaching?”

Good teaching does not just happen. It requires a good amount of effort and commitment. Always plan your class—never go to class unprepared. When in doubt about how much to prepare, always over-prepare. Put aside some additional materials or information that you can share with students if class time permits. Students can easily discern between instructors who prepare, put in effort and add value to the learning process and those who wing it.

My approach towards teaching is best guided by the 3 F-words—FRIENDLY, FIRM and FAIR.

Students learn more effectively and enjoy the learning process when they feel comfortable, especially when the class environment is congenial and supportive. A friendly instructor who is able to inject some fun in the learning process through the use of humour helps to create an environment where students feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts and are unafraid to challenge other people’s ideas.

That said though, it is very important to be firm—stick to your syllabus, maintain high learning standards and do not be afraid to hold high expectations of the class. Sometimes, colleagues make the mistake of being overly fun and friendly, diluting course content in an effort to be popular. Such an approach does not earn one respect and imperils the integrity of the learning process. Maintaining a firm hand while remaining friendly helps to ensure that standards are not compromised.

Last but not least, always try to maintain a sense of fairness. All of us are susceptible to biases. At times, we may not be aware that these prejudices show up in our interaction with students, affecting class dynamics and the learning environment.

Maintaining a friendly, firm and fair approach forms the basis of a good instructor-learner relationship, making the learning journey more enjoyable for the learner and educator.