

Microteaching: An Introduction

As a TA, regardless of the nature of your appointment, you will at some point be placed in a position of imparting the knowledge that you have to others. This may take the form of a traditional lecture, a discussion, perhaps as part of a break-out session, or an individual one-on-one or small group study session. Whatever the occasion, as a graduate member of the academic community, you should be prepared.

As a first step in meeting that challenge we are asking all of you, regardless of your previous teaching experience, to prepare a mini-lesson—let us use that term for now—in which you demonstrate the principles of effective teaching. Since there is a considerable range of talent and abilities represented by any incoming cadre of TAs, we have decided that the best way to maximize the potential represented is to divide you randomly into groups in order to allow the group as a whole to benefit from the lessons that can be learned from participating in such learning and teaching experiences.

Each group will be led by a faculty member (or a seasoned graduate TA) who will function as the group facilitator. This group leader, as you will see, will spend much of the time during your first meeting going over the basic requirements of the mini-lesson. Since we are aware that you will undoubtedly be employed in different teaching modes once you get to your departments, we encourage diversity in selecting the style of your presentation. The range of possibilities stretches from the more traditional lecture presentation, to directed discussion, to what is often called tutoring, which for our purposes includes such things as instruction given on request as part of office hours, for example, in one-on-one sessions or in small study group situations.

Your first step will be that of choosing a topic; this topic should be one in your discipline, preferably one that is straightforward and one that you know well. Remember that this is not a graded exercise, so don't worry about choosing the absolute right one, but do select one that allows you to work with foundational skills and processes, rather than sophisticated content. Although your current "class" consists of your fellow TAs, who are obviously good students, they are meant to represent—and probably are—students who have little knowledge of your subject area.

Having chosen the topic, your next decision will be the manner or modality of its presentation to the class. Do you plan to simulate an actual lecture, a discussion, or an active interactional learning experience? Your choice will depend somewhat on the topic, but this choice is also designed to allow you to structure the microteaching experience around what you anticipate most likely to be involved with when you get to your separate departments.

Although the form of your presentation will differ to a certain extent based upon the mode selected, we believe that any good teaching session, regardless of its form, benefits from a consideration of some basic principles, and with that in mind we have put together a Lesson Worksheet that you might find useful in the conduct of your mini-lesson. You should expect to begin working on this worksheet during your initial group session and should submit it to the group leader on the second day. (This may require more space than what you see here; feel free to add another sheet of paper, as needed.)

Here are a few things to consider in selecting the mode of presentation:

Lecture: Often the lectures that have the most appreciable effect on the learning of the material are those that incorporate student interaction. As one of our colleagues from CELT has observed, interactive lecturing is a technique that intellectually engages students as active participants by having them interact with the content, the instructor, and their classmates.

In terms of microteaching, this might suggest some form of exchange as part of the lecture presentation. Remember that there is always a trade-off in terms of time required. This is an important lesson for those of you who will be asked to present lecture-based classes.

Discussion: Discussion classes may appear deceptively spontaneous, but like good lectures,

discussions should reflect your intention, thoughtful planning, and design. Good discussions, regardless of form, should be active and encourage student engagement with the course material.

For microteaching, this might involve the reading of a brief passage before the discussion, although time will be very limited. Discussion in a microteaching environment might best address issues that class members believe themselves to have some knowledge about but about which they may well be misinformed.

Individual/Small Group Sessions: Often the best way to engage students in the learning experience is to ask them a series of open-ended questions surrounding the topic in an effort to bring them to a point where they may be best situated to learn. You will have undoubtedly heard this referred to as the “Socratic Method,” and while this technique may be used to advantage in a larger class, it is especially suited when working with students who have read the material but are having trouble assimilating this knowledge.

For microteaching, this simulation will involve role-playing on the part of the student or students who are being tutored, so one of your first decisions, should you decide to use this form of presentation, will be whether to use one or several “students.” Our suggestion would be to simulate a small study group, perhaps of three students, chosen at random from the class. These students should be told to role-play the part of interested (if somewhat confused) students. Remember that the Socratic Method is a good tool for educating knowledge that the student has but can’t quite formulate, but there will indeed be times when you will need to provide new bits of information, if only formed as part of a following question. Such interventions often have the appearance of free-flowing, and to a certain extent they are; however, as we said of discussion, this technique is *deceptively* spontaneous and its success depends on the level of preparation of the facilitator.

NOTES:

Name _____

Mini-Lesson Preparation Worksheet

LEARNING CONTEXT: In what course and in what unit within the course would this mini-lesson occur?

PRE-INSTRUCTION PLANNING

What is the topic and is it sufficiently narrow for the limits of the mini-lesson?

What mode of teaching will you be simulating, and what is your pedagogical purpose in selecting this particular method of presentation?

Will you be asking students to role-play? How so?

Will there be handouts for the students to see or read as part of your presentation?

What is the learning goal? By the end of this lesson, my students will be able to . . .

To what degree will interaction inform your method of presentation? When will it take place in your lesson, and how long will it last? Explain.

If you are using discussion techniques, will you break the students into small groups or use think-pair-share (see the *Quick Guide* to educational terms in your TA Handbook)? Why?

Will you use an engagement trigger, such as a graph, PowerPoint slide, or image to capture the attention of your students? Describe.

LESSON STUCTURE

Opening:

How will you present the learning goals you hope to accomplish?

How do you plan to make your topic relevant to the students? What academic need will it fulfill?

Body:

What are the key points you hope to cover in your presentation? How many do you plan to present?

Are you planning to summarize these as you move through the lesson? What manner of transitions are you planning to use?

Have you planned any specific activities that will require set-ups or handouts? Explain.

Conclusion:

What kind of summary or review do you have planned? Do you plan to mimic the opening statement or structure your conclusion around the discoveries of your presentation? Why?

If you are using one of the interactive techniques, do you plan to evoke the concluding remarks from the students in their own words? Explain.

How do you plan to bring the session to a close? Will you be asking for feedback from the students as part of the conclusion? Explain.

Post-Instruction Feedback

Following your simulation each of the students in the group will have a chance to comment on your presentation, both on the **Student/Peer Feedback Form**, which will be distributed by the group leader, and verbally in discussion as time permits. This generally leads to valuable observations and insights from the other TAs, so don't be surprised if the discussion leader asks the group how you did in your presentation.