

Facilitating Effective Class Discussions: A Starting Point!



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Session Overview

- *Part 1: The Classroom*
- **Q&A**
- *Part II: Personality, Frustrations, and Tips From The Trenches*
- **Q&A**
- **Final Discussion and Session Conclusion**



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Part I: **The Classroom**

Effective Classroom Techniques

- The “P&O”: “Preparation and organization” are key to running an effective class.
- *Get a good nights sleep before class!*
- *Know where and when classes are held.*
- *Be on time.*
- *Be familiar with the room (temperature controls, layout, boards) so you will know how to organize your discussions.*
- *Be familiar with and use AV aides*
- *Know what papers, books, lists, handouts you need!*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- *Remember: “P&O” will
relieve unnecessary anxiety!*



Effective Classroom Techniques

- How to carry yourself during discussion!!
- *Watch your speaking speed. Take pauses when necessary to catch your breath (digestion/thinking response time).*
- *Vary your tone—remember Ferris Bueller!*
- *Watch your gestures. Be effective and interesting, but not distracting.*
- *Change your position in the room. This not only will help you to alleviate anxiety, but will also keep students on their toes. E.g. When running circle, group exchanges, or labs, sit near a different student each time. Pop-up and walk around. Surprise them!*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- **Be prepared with relaxation techniques for nervousness or hyperventilation that work for you!**
- *Try the ten deep breaths!*
- *Give the students a task that will take the focus and pressure off of you and that will give you a few minutes to relax and calm yourself.*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- **Know your students names!!**
- *Of all the suggestions, you may feel this one to be the most difficult, but it is the foremost recommended tactic by the CTE and teachers for creating an effective class environment.*
- *Suggestions: Have them introduce one another during the first class. Have the students use name placards the first few weeks.*
- *Have the students introduce themselves for the first few weeks, before they ask or answer questions.*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- “Discussion Techniques”

Avoiding the sleep effect...zzzzzzzz



Effective Classroom Techniques

- **Instructional Discussions**
- *Define learning goals. Make these goals and points clear to the students through questions and topics. Reemphasize them throughout the discussion.*
- *Elicit students interest. Involve them in the discussion. Restate the points students made by using their name. Ask questions and give them time to formulate answers. Have students answer questions from other students.*
- *Choose a discussion style: format-focused or open.*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- Questioning Strategies: Students
- *Make it easy for students to ask questions*
- *Make time for questions*
- *Wait for students to formulate questions*
- *Ask other students to answer*
- *Have students formulate questions prior to class*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- Questioning Strategies: Teachers
- *Plan some questions as you prepare*
- *Ask clear, specific questions*
- *Use vocabulary students can understand*
- *Ask questions in an evenly-paced, easily identifiable order*
- *Ask questions from all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*
- *Use questions to help students connect important concepts*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- Questioning Strategies: Teachers
- *Use questions to give you feedback E.g. Do not ask a yes or no or single-word answer question. Ask questions that require analytic and open-ended responses. Rather than “Was the U.S. decision to drop the atomic bomb right or wrong?” , instead ask “What were the implications of the U.S. dropping of the atomic bomb? What evidence and arguments did President Truman use to make this decision?”*
- *Allow sufficient time for students to answer*
- *Rephrase questions.*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- Break it up! Remember, the average adult attention span is only fifteen minutes!!
- *Discussion*
- *Group work*
- *Q&A*
- *Labs*
- *Student presentations*
- *Debates*
- *Use your imagination!!*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- Keeping Them Interested
- *Capture interest early.*
- *Use illustrations and examples.*
- *Pace yourself.*
- *Summarize and emphasize important points.*

Effective Classroom Techniques

- Foster student participation through your discussion strategies and by creating accountability!
- *Changing positions in the room helps keep them on their toes.*
- *If you know their names, you can call on them at will. They may grumble at first, but it creates responsibility on their part.*
- *Keep track of participation and let them know that it counts.*
- *Be an interactive discussion leader. Challenge them to think outside the parameters of rote material or questions.*

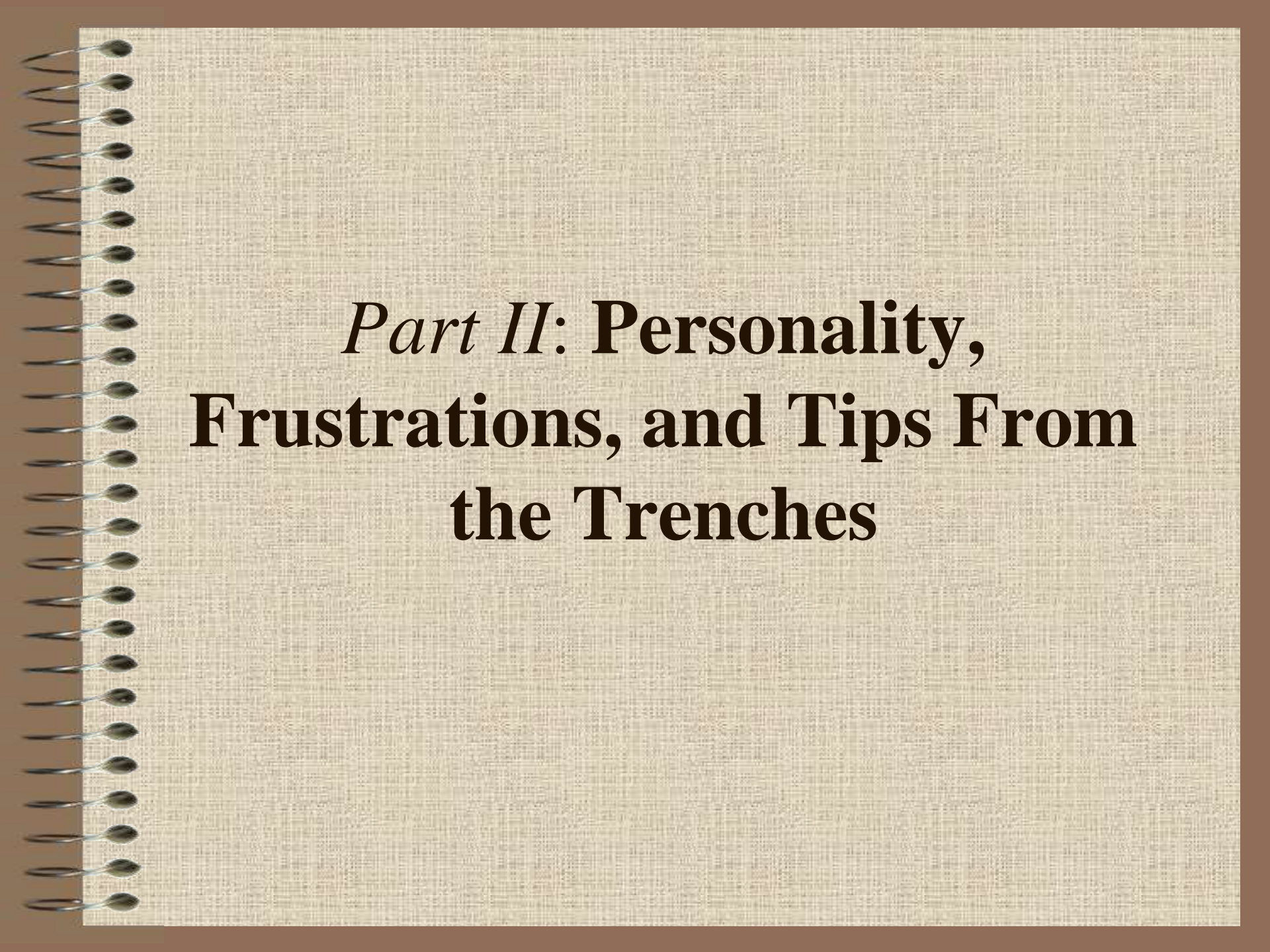
Effective Classroom Techniques

- Interactive skills take time!
Don't give up!
- *Observe other TAs and talk with other TAs about what works for them and what they do in their classes.*
- *Lecturing at them is easy, but interactive listening is a learned skill!*



First Q&A Period



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Part II: Personality,
Frustrations, and Tips From
the Trenches

“Why Is My Style Different From Theirs?”

- Knowing your personality.
- *Use the discussion style that suit you best, but do not be afraid to try new things (see “Break it up!”).*
- *Try out your tactics on other people (trial runs); practice public speaking; attend a class or workshop on teaching or speaking skills; work on those teaching qualities in which you are naturally strong while working on those in which you are not so strong.*
- *Talk to other TAs!*
- *Get student feedback. E.g. Ask students how they liked a previous session. Ask them in which class did feel like they learned the most. Students will often be more than happy to share what they liked, didn't like, and what peaked their interest. Assess the success of a discussion by students' reactions and retaining of material.*

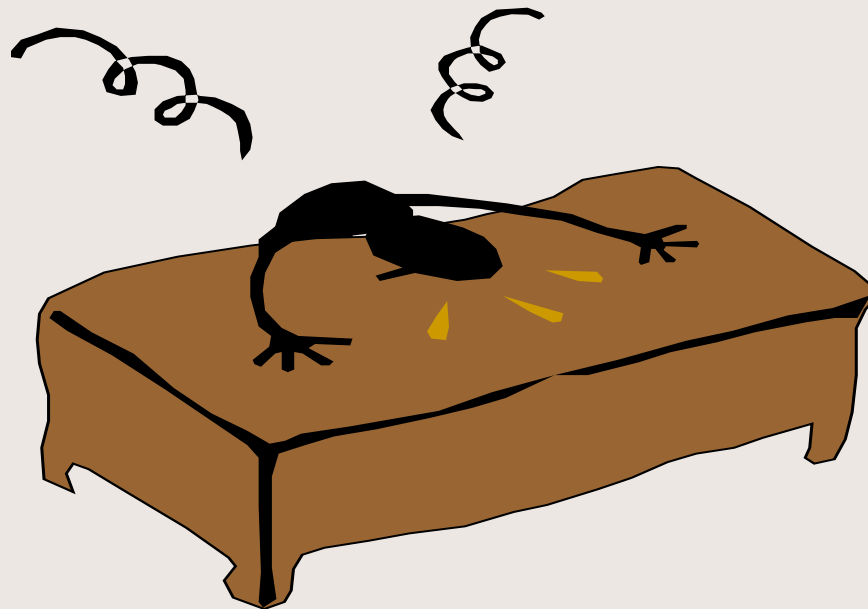
Whatever your style, remember these tips...

- *You are not expected to know everything, but you are expected to be enthusiastic, organized and well-prepared!!*
- *Communicate, make eye contact, and listen—interactive learning is the key!!*



Frustrations and Tips From the Trenches

*What To Do When All Else
Fails!*



Frustrations and Tips From the Trenches

- Drop from sight and never return to class.
- Ask your department if you can be put on the do not TA list.
- Leave school altogether—you will never be a great teacher!

But seriously....

Frustrations and Tips From the Trenches

- Teaching and learning work like a spiral. You will have some good days and some days when nothing works and the class just does not respond.
- The most important thing to remember is: ***DO NOT TAKE IT PERSONALLY!***

Frustrations and Tips From the Trenches

- Tips to follow when all else fails:
- *Reflect critically on what did and did not work. Reflect on your methodology.*
- *Rethink your methodology. Remember your strengths and review strategies for effective discussions.*
- *Talk to TA's and to your professor about tips and suggestions.*
- *After you've done all this, put it away—forget about it. Do something fun, and start fresh another day.*

Final Q&A Period: A Finish Line and a Starting Point

Thanks for attending!

For more information, talk to senior TAs and view the TA guidebook at:

<http://www.udel.edu/cte/TAbook/>

Or view best practice teaching methods at:

<http://www.udel.edu/cte/bestpract.htm>

