

Successful teaching requires hard work and a willingness to adapt. I internalized this lesson during my early experience teaching business English to call center representatives and executives in Guadalajara, Mexico. Teaching economics at the graduate level has emphasized it for me in a new way. Technical proficiency is necessary, but it is not enough. A teacher must always be ready to hear the questions and concerns of his students, and learn with them.

Macroeconomics II is a course in the first year of the economics PhD sequence at UAB which covers concepts such as the life cycle model, general equilibrium under uncertainty, and dynamic programming, and introduces the computational tools that are used to apply these concepts in the practice of modern Macroeconomics. It has been my privilege to be the teaching assistant for this class three years in a row. This has given me the opportunity to become more deeply familiar with the material and to explain the nuances of the more difficult problems more effectively. It has also allowed me to listen carefully to student feedback year after year, and adjust my practices accordingly.

During my first two years I conducted TA sessions using slides. I was very proud of the quality of the slides I had produced. They helped me to be organized and methodical in my teaching sessions, and this showed in positive feedback from students. But although many students appreciated this structure, some found the slides distracting, and had difficulty following the steps in the derivations I had so carefully written up in LaTeX. After observing this undercurrent of discontent two years in a row, I knew that I had to try something new. In the third year, I still prepared typed notes for myself, but wrote everything on the board in chalk for the students, step by step. The positive response from students was obvious to me from the first session, proving to me once again that a key strategy for success is to listen carefully and push outside my comfort zone.

Another lesson I have learned from teaching economics is the importance of building and maintaining personal rapport with students. A confident, friendly introduction on the first day of class goes a long way to getting the students on your side. After this, the positive relationship can be maintained by doing the job properly in terms of preparation, grading, and feedback on assignments, and also by showing students through small actions that you are available for their questions and sensitive to their concerns. If, on the other hand, students feel you are distracted, the environment in the classroom can become palpably more tense. Busy researchers chronically feel short of time, but many of the things that help the most in improving a student's experience are not really time-intensive--they just require the right attitude.

In addition to serving as a teaching assistant, I have also had the opportunity to develop and teach a 10-hour introductory course in Matlab for first semester UAB PhD students. The reviews were positive for this first course, so I was also called upon to teach the same thing the next academic year as a refresher course in the second semester. After that I was also called upon to adapt the course for students in the Barcelona GSE one-year Macroeconomic Policy and Financial Markets masters program who were struggling with programming. I appreciated the opportunity to develop and teach this course because it gave me a small taste of what it means to be responsible for developing and conveying the content of an entire course. I also enjoyed developing and guiding students through the practical programming exercises.