



Top 10 Teaching Errors

(I've Made Them All!)

By **Debashis “Deb” Aikat**,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
Scripps Howard Foundation Journalism
Teacher of the Year 2003

Some Mistakes Teachers Make

- ❖ **1. Boring lectures:** Delivering boring lectures with amazing regularity! Reading aloud verbatim PowerPoint slides (*instead of capitalizing on the visual/auditory synergy, adding more than what's already on a slide -- the students can already read their slides on the screen*). Being insensitive to mannerisms that distract students and compete for student attention.

- ❖ **2. Discouraging students:** Like most people, students rise to the level that you expect of them. Create high expectations and they'll reach for the stars and awards. On the other hand, if teachers set low expectations, most students will perform accordingly. For instance, some teachers announce on the first day of class: “*No one gets an A in this class. You should consider yourself lucky to earn a C. Most will not.*” Besides prejudice, that announcement reflects bias and saps student motivation. Not empowering the students ((in computer lab situations) to troubleshoot their problems by hijacking their keyboard and mouse and saying, “*Here, let me show you how it's done.*”

- ❖ **3. Playing favorites in the classroom:** Allowing an individual or a selected group of individuals to dominate the discussions (*instead of engaging the whole classroom, if possible*) or extending project deadlines for some students while ignoring others. Sharing personal contact information to only a few students and not abiding by an open policy or establishing a protocol for office hours or times.

- ❖ **4. Unfair and/or tardy grading:** Resorting to “*dubious grading*” practices including not setting the ground rules, using confusing grading policies or providing evasive explanations relating to the rationale for grading deductions.
- ❖ **5. Multimedia madness:** Playing long (*15-20 minutes*) videos at a stretch (*instead of pausing the video every 5-7 minutes for a discussion and then continuing on with the footage*). Ignorant use of multimedia capabilities; Not using images, audio, and multimedia to break the monotony of dense information in a long lecture.
- ❖ **6. Teacher apathy:** Not learning the names of the students by the third or fourth session of the class. Not expressly stating on the first day of class important matters (*such as the classroom decorum*) and protocol (*such as cell-phone usage, tardiness, consequences, penalties, etc.*). Ignoring criticism in student evaluations.
- ❖ **7. Sloppy interaction:** When asked a tough questions, some teachers fudge an answer instead of admitting that they don’t know the answer and will get back to them later. Repeatedly finishing sentences for students and, thereby, ignoring the potential for enriching discussions with student inputs and participation. Not staying back 15 minutes after class, so that students who are more passive or shy may ask questions about the class session.
- ❖ **8. Not engaging students** by calling them by name and asking for their participation (*instead of an impersonal, “You in the plaid shirt, what do you think of Rogers’ study of Iowa farmers with regard to diffusion of innovations?”*)
- ❖ **9. Rampant and persistent procrastination:** Waiting till the last minute every time to share project details. Late arrival in class, tardy grading, past due responses to student questions, unanswered emails.
- ❖ **10. Failing to judiciously plan class time.** Some teachers get done early and find themselves at a loss of words and wisdom. Most teachers plan to cover so much in a class that they never get done on time. Other teachers make a habit of never starting or ending their classes on time (*students often have back-to-back classes on the other end of the campus*).

■ **Debashis “Deb” Aikat**, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, Scripps Howard Foundation Journalism Teacher of the Year 2003.