What makes a good teacher?

General tips

From www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/resources/shortguides/demonstrators.pdf

- Read up on the topic and ensure that you that you can provide enough information and explain the relevance and theory behind the practical work
- Arrive early for teaching / demonstrating sessions
- Encourage the students to ask questions and seek the answers through their own reflection instead of systematically providing the answers to them
- Ensure that students are aware they can ask for further explanations
- Be confident enough to say you don't the answer, and find out or point the students towards further resources
- Ask for feedback on your teaching and reflect on how you could improve
- Talk to other teachers / demonstrators about their experiences
- Find out if further training courses are available to you (within your institution's graduate or staff training unit)

The skills of the class teacher

From 'The Handbook of Economics Teaching Assistants'
www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/gta/3

- Effective listening: by listening to a student's questions, or ideas, you may actually realise that he/she did not fully understand what you have tried to communicate. It is also a way of gauging how the students are focused on a particular subject, and whether they have your full attention or they are getting bored!
- Questioning skills: these are essential to encourage students to ask questions and to open up discussion. There are a few points to consider when asking students questions:
    - The use of well constructed open-ended questions generally gets students to think laterally, instead of using their basic knowledge on a particular subject
    - Think of how to address the class, whether by asking individuals or group (some students may not feel at ease being put on the spot)
    - In all circumstances, questions should be constructed in such a way that they are relevant to the subject taught, they should help in making students understand an important key point and they should always be at appropriate for the level of the class
    - Whatever the answer given, the students' comments should always be taken into consideration, without being laughed at!
- Clarity of explanation:
    - Structure your point so that you have a clear beginning, middle and ending
    - Signpost your explanation to make the structure clear to everybody
    - Stress key points
    - Make use of thoughtful examples, by drawing comparisons and by using analogy
- Teaching diverse classes: students may not all be 'equal' in their abilities to assimilate new teaching material. Be aware of students with learning disabilities or students coming from international backgrounds (whose first language is not English) so they do not fall behind the rest of the class

Encouraging participation: Motivating and sustaining student interest

From 'Supporting Postgraduate Students Who teach Mathematics and Statistics'
www.mathstore.ac.uk/index.php?pid=23

Although targeted at Mathematics, advices to postgraduate students are still relevant to Bioscience

- Be enthusiastic about what you are communicating
- Be self-aware and recognise when a particular teaching session is not as exciting to you: this should not be passed on to the students!
- Keep the students interested:
    - Make it easy for them to realise the key points by using relevant examples and analogies
    - Always listen and respond positively to a student's comments
    - The use of short 'amusing' stories or anecdotes can be a powerful tool to reinforce a key point

Supporting and advising students

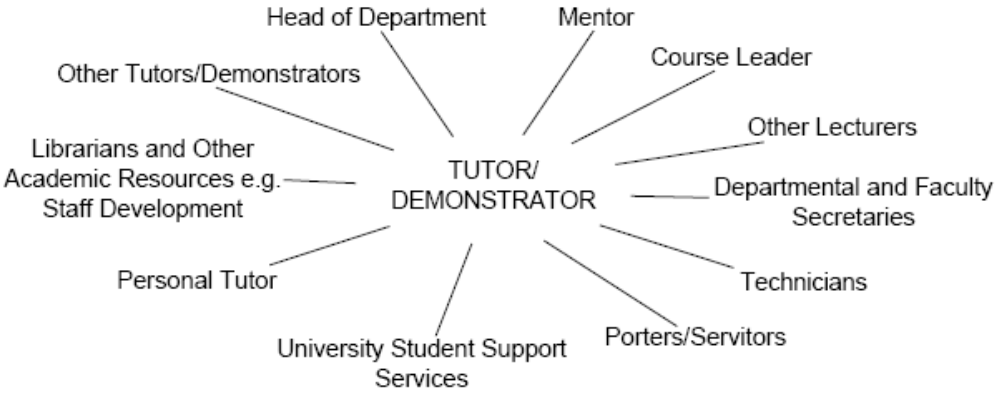
From www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/tut-dem/Chap7.pdf

- Because of the reluctance of students to impose, it is for the teacher / demonstrator to be pro-active and explicitly encourage students to consult with them
- Undergraduates may find their first time spent at the University overwhelming: new environment, increased independence in learning (they have to do in-depth research outside the classroom and learn how to find information for themselves), organise the amount of time spent studying various subjects, find a healthy work / leisure balance…..
- Teachers should encourage students to consult them if they require support or help (whether of an academic nature, or a more personal subject)
- Diagnostic help involves listening to the student's problems, and ask various questions such as *how, what, who, where* and *when* to identify the matter (as opposed to asking *why*, which can put the student on the spot)
- When the matter cannot be resolved immediately, the teacher should aim to instill confidence without promising an elusive quick-fix, to offer support (but not open-ended assistance), and to clarify with the student their respective roles in tackling the problem(s)
- In all circumstances, the teacher should respect the student's privacy, but avoid getting too friendly with students or gossiping and grousing
- Tutors and demonstrators are a vital two-way bridge between the undergraduate students and the academic staff involved in a course

Working with others

From www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/tut-dem/Chap9.pdf

- As part of their everyday work, lecturers, tutors and demonstrators alike are in frequent contact with a wide range of university colleagues on whose knowledge and experience they rely in carrying out their responsibilities effectively



From www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/tut-dem/Chap9.pdf

- Working with a mentor (who is a senior academic), whose function is to offer guidance and support to a less experienced colleague, can help by sharing their experience, and may be of valuable information for the new teacher
- Meeting other demonstrators and tutors regularly to share experiences can also be a good source of advice and support, for you personally and for them
- When possible, the tutor / demonstrator should make the best of the academic resources available (see above figure)

Self- or group assessments

From www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/tut-dem/Chap10.pdf

- The three main sources of feedback that part-time teachers can get are themselves, their students and their academic colleagues (see figure below)

SOURCES AND METHODS OF FEEDBACK

Feedback from Self

- checklists and pro formas
- logs and diaries

Feedback from Academic Staff

- previewing and reviewing
- scrutiny of teaching materials

Feedback from Students

- structured group discussion
- simple forms of questionnaire

From www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/tut-dem/Chap10.pdf

- Generally, the students will be asked to fill in a questionnaire at the end of a teaching session (whether lectures or practical labs) which provides some feedback on the overall impression of the effectiveness of a course. Although not specifically targeted to individuals,

this feedback can help the tutor / demonstrator in gauging the general quality of the course perceived by the students

- Also helpful to tutors and demonstrators are the informal impressions that accumulate during the process of running sessions. These impressions can be recorded and logged by the tutor / demonstrator, and could provide further information regarding the students' attendance patterns, how well prepared they are, their willingness to get involved in the class and to contribute to the tasks in hand
- You could also take note at the end of each teaching session of any observations that could help reflecting on your teaching (an example is set in the figure below)

REFLECTIONS ON YOUR TEACHING[2]

As soon as possible after taking a tutorial or practical class, write a short account of what took place. Concentrate on what actually happened, rather than attempting to evaluate it:

Now try to categorise your observations using the following headings:

Planned things I did – before and during the session – which helped students learn.

Anything unplanned I did during the class which seemed to be helpful.

Anything – planned or unplanned – which may have hindered students' learning.

From www.tla.ed.ac.uk/resources/tut-dem/Chap10.pdf

- By getting feedback from academic staff, you may either have a *previewing approach* (consisting in running through the possible problems likely to arise during a teaching session and how to address them) or a *reviewing approach* (consisting in debriefing what happened during a session, and gathering information which may be useful in a following session)

Question: **Reflecting on the various points above, can you think of further actions you can take to help you become an even better teacher?**

SWOT analysis

Can you identify your **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats which apply to your teaching skills?

Strengths
e.g.: Patient, enthusiast, good communicator…

Weaknesses
e.g.: Lack of confidence in front of a group of students…

Opportunities
e.g.: Possibilities to improve teaching skills by engaging in small group teaching…

Threats
e.g.: Difficulty in organising time between postgraduate studies and teaching activities, lack of support from supervisor …

Authored by: Angelique Stalmach, University of Glasgow
Available from: UK Centre for Bioscience, www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/events/glasgow240210.aspx

By identifying your strengths and weaknesses, try to think of the steps to take further to improve or enhance your teaching skills. Think of a few steps that you can take immediately, and think of a more long-term approach.

- Actions that I can take immediately to improve my skills, and how I will implement them

- Strengths that I have identified and how they can help me overcome my weaknesses

- Medium-term actions that I will take to improve my skills (it could be by applying for a course…), and how I will implement them