

Looking back on five lessons learned

Following on the heels of my colleague Dan LaSota's recent teaching tip, "[Music practice offers insight to improve teaching](#)," I thought I'd share a few of my own teaching insights from the last two decades with those of you who may be new to the profession:

- 1 Spend your favorite hours of the day on what makes you feel alive:** I love the wee hours of the morning. I get up at 4:30 am each day to spend two hours in my studio making art *before* I give my time to the institution. My art students get the benefit of learning from someone who is still in love with *what* she's teaching. Passion is contagious.
- 2 Remember that teaching is a practice:** Not every day can be a winner, and even an entire semester can be a stinker. But that's normal. You just show up again the next day and do it again, weaving your previous failures into the larger tapestry. Eventually, it all begins to make a gestalt kind of sense.
- 3 A little bit of feedback goes a long way:** Of all the things that can eat away at your time and your morale, grading is the most insidious. It took me years to learn that students can only respond to a certain level of feedback anyways, and exhaustive notes for improvement can take the fun out of learning. Learning is a practice. Let them fail and try again just like you do.
- 4 Ask questions. Try wonder:** Asking other teachers for advice isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign of respect for your fellow humans working in the trenches. Even someone you don't respect might have valuable input that makes a difference. Rather than complaining about what's not working, allow your curiosity to take over. Marvel at what we do here at UAF; it's extraordinary really...warts and all.

- 5 Teaching is an art and learning is magic:** Outcomes and objectives and measures have their place, but never forget that a huge chunk of what we do in higher education is immeasurable, ineffable and more like improvisational jazz than like machinery. And like the entire mysterious universe, there will always be factors outside our field of awareness that have the greatest impact on students' learning. Relax. You are enough.



"The Art of Falling" by Madara Mason