

# **Eight Years of Business School Teaching: Personal Reflection and 47 Pieces of Advice**

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I had the immense privilege of teaching at two institutions: three years at NYU Stern School of Business and five years at the Desautels Faculty of Management. Over these eight years (2016–2024), I taught the core Operations Management (OM) course for undergraduate business students. My teaching journey began earlier as a teaching assistant (TA) for the same course at MIT Sloan School of Management. During this time, I had the opportunity to engage with over 1,000 students from diverse backgrounds, an experience that enriched my perspective and teaching approach. Stepping into the role of instructor was both exciting and challenging. I vividly remember my first day of teaching, experiencing an intense sense of impostor syndrome. A Ph.D. may prepare you for research, but it offers little training for the demands of business school teaching. Learning to teach effectively came from hands-on experience and many insightful discussions with senior colleagues, whose guidance and support I deeply appreciate. Among my proudest professional achievements are earning high teaching evaluations (ranging from 4.6/5 to 5/5) and fostering meaningful relationships with many of my former students. These milestones remind me of the impact and joy of teaching—a privilege I truly value.

With this in mind, I decided to dedicate time—as part of a New Year’s resolution—to reflect on my teaching journey and share advice for junior faculty preparing to teach for the first time. Before diving in, three disclaimers are in order. First, my experience is specific to teaching undergraduate students in North American business schools and may not be directly applicable to other contexts. Second, my reflections are primarily based on teaching the OM core course, although I have also taught elective courses, where I believe similar teaching philosophies may still be beneficial. Third, every instructor has unique styles and preferences, and there is no universal one-size-fits-all teaching approach. This monograph is a personal reflection of the strategies and approaches that have proven effective for me, shaped by my experiences.

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Over the years, I was fortunate to engage in meaningful discussions about teaching with brilliant colleagues from 20+ universities. I also made it a priority to attend professional meetings and teaching workshops at academic conferences. These interactions fueled my curiosity about effective classroom techniques and strategies to avoid, allowing me to learn from the experiences of others. I was amazed by the generosity of my academic peers, who not only shared their expertise but also provided comprehensive teaching materials—including slides, assignments, and case studies—and took the time to discuss teaching philosophies and offer invaluable advice. While I am grateful to many, I would like to extend special thanks to Gad Allon, Mor Armony, Daniel Ding, Adam Elmachtoub, Rob Glew, Sanjith Gopalakrishnan, Daniel Guetta, Rim Hariss, Srikanth Jagabathula, Retsef Levi, Ilan Lobel, Georgia Perakis, Mike Pinedo, Josh Reed, Olivier Rubel, Wengiang Xiao, and many others for their support and guidance.

Discovering the formula for effective teaching is a continuous process of self-improvement—a concept taught in our OM course. My hope is that this reflection will serve as a valuable resource for junior faculty, helping them save time and effort as they navigate their own teaching journeys. Below, I outline 47 pieces of advice that have proven highly effective for me and many of my colleagues at NYU and McGill University:

- 1. Overinvest the first time you teach.** One of the first pieces of advice I received was to overinvest in the first year. Many faculty members teach the same course for several years, which creates an incentive to invest significant time and effort in the first year. I fully agree with this advice. In addition, performing well in the first year can boost one's confidence and strengthen their reputation within the department. I also received the (perhaps controversial) advice to not invest too much time in teaching. The reasoning behind this advice is that most professors are primarily evaluated based on research productivity, with teaching only needing to pass a certain bar. There is little incentive (if any) for most professors to go above and beyond in the classroom. While I agree that receiving good teaching evaluations (rather than great ones) is sufficient for junior faculty, I found this strategy unappealing. In my case, I invested the amount of time I deemed right to master the material and perform well in the classroom (without being on the extreme side of time commitment). To prepare thoroughly, I audited all the lectures from the same course taught by two colleagues the semester before teaching it myself, allowing me to prepare my lectures in advance.
- 2. Coordinate with other instructors.** Often, multiple sections of the same course are offered concurrently, with each instructor responsible for 1-3 sections. In such cases, careful coordination among instructors is crucial. In my experience, we made it a priority to ensure that all materials—such as the course syllabus, assignments, and practice exams—were the exact same material and were

posted simultaneously for all sections. We also aimed to use the same slides across all sections, allowing for only a 5-10% variation. If certain lectures differed between sections, those topics were excluded from the exam to maintain consistency. Any noticeable differences between sections can lead to confusion and anxiety (or even panic) among students, which could undermine the learning experience. Therefore, perfect coordination and uniformity across sections are essential. This can be achieved by holding regular meetings with fellow instructors and organizing all course materials in a shared folder.

- 3. Post the material in advance.** Today, most communication with students occurs online. I've found it highly effective to share all course materials in advance—sometimes even several weeks ahead of time. This gives students ample opportunity to review and prepare for upcoming lectures. When a lecture includes an exercise or when I plan to ask students a question in class, I create two versions of the slides: one posted before the lecture, and another updated version posted afterward, which includes all the answers.
- 4. Check regularly that students follow.** A strategy that has worked well for me is to have frequent “checkpoints” throughout the lecture, where I pause to ensure that students understand the material. I ask a few students to confirm that the concepts are clear or to let me know if something is unclear. I typically use this technique 2-3 times during each lecture, especially after covering important or challenging concepts. For particularly important concepts, I ask students to raise their hands to confirm they fully understand (I often ask the class “Can you please raise your hand if this concept is perfectly clear?”). I don’t continue until every hand is raised. Many students have shared that they appreciate these checkpoints, finding them helpful for reinforcing their understanding.
- 5. Hold weekly office hours.** It is important that regular office hours (e.g., weekly) are held by both the instructor and the TA, ideally on different days and before assignments are due. This provides students with a low-pressure environment to ask questions and seek clarification. It also offers valuable insights into which concepts students are struggling with. I often ask the TA to share the questions raised during their office hours, allowing me to identify common areas of difficulty and adjust my teaching approach if needed.
- 6. Try to connect with a few students.** In my experience, building connections with students throughout the semester is highly beneficial. I try my best to offer career advice and engage in stimulating conversations, both about the course material and life in general. These interactions often lead to long-term relationships, with some students eventually becoming my research or teaching assistants. Once a bond is established, I occasionally ask them for constructive feedback on the course, seeking insights into areas that could be improved.

7. **Importance of the first lecture.** As the saying goes, first impressions are lasting. Therefore, delivering an exceptional first lecture is crucial. It should strike a balance by (i) presenting a manageable level of difficulty, (ii) offering an engaging overview of the course (e.g., highlighting 2-3 exciting topics), and (iii) teaching a practical, intriguing concept. A strong first lecture not only sets a positive tone for the semester but also boosts your confidence as an instructor.
8. **Answer emails promptly (but not always).** As a general rule, I strive to respond to students' emails promptly. This demonstrates that you care about their concerns and take your teaching responsibilities seriously. However, if students know that you reply quickly, they may begin sending emails for every small question. One strategy is to prioritize time-sensitive, important questions with quick responses, while taking a bit more time for less urgent inquiries. This approach can encourage students to find answers on their own, ultimately enhancing their learning experience. It's essential to ensure that all emails are answered—either by you or the teaching assistant—as this shows students that you genuinely care about them.
9. **Communicate regularly with TAs.** TAs play a vital role in the teaching team. As an instructor, it's important to ensure that TAs are knowledgeable, reliable, and attentive to students' needs. Regular communication with TAs is essential for identifying students' difficulties, understanding common mistakes in assignments, and ensuring that their responsibilities are clearly defined.
10. **No mandatory attendance and participation.** After testing various approaches, I concluded that it was better not to require neither mandatory attendance nor in-class graded participation. Of course, different instructors may reach different conclusions. In my view, if I need to force students to attend class, it suggests something is amiss, and it could create a negative classroom atmosphere. Regarding in-class participation, I faced two challenges. First, it was difficult to track participation accurately, which made the grading process subjective. Second, it tends to disadvantage students who are more introverted or reserved.
11. **Recording lectures may be great.** This is a personal perspective as well. It is clear that students have diverse learning styles. For instance, some may prefer to watch multiple lectures in a row at their own pace and convenience. Recording lectures accommodates these varying preferences. Of course, there is a risk that fewer students will attend live lectures, but to me, this is not a concern as long as students are still learning effectively. One possible solution is to record the lectures and share the recording links only with students who have missed the lecture due to an excused absence.
12. **Never finish lectures late.** This one is a personal preference. I find that running lectures late creates significant pressure in the classroom. Students often need to rush to their next class, which can be in a different location, leading to palpable

stress. I strive to finish on time or even early. In fact, finishing early is appreciated by students and it provides an opportunity to stay in the classroom to answer private questions and engage in discussions with students.

- 13. Invite interesting guest speakers.** I typically invite one or two guest speakers each semester, aiming to select individuals who can inspire students regarding career trajectories and industry impact—and ideally, someone they can relate to. Whenever possible, I invite former students who took the same course several years earlier.
- 14. Make the syllabus explicit and include all the relevant information.** Creating a comprehensive syllabus is essential and required by most universities. I view the syllabus as a foundational document that outlines the course structure and expectations. Therefore, I strive to include all relevant information with as much detail as possible. This approach ensures that, if any issues arise later in the semester, I can refer back to the syllabus to clarify the matter. A well-structured syllabus should detail each lecture, include all assignment due dates, and clearly outline prerequisites and grading policies.
- 15. Publish all due dates at the start of the semester.** Building on the previous point, it is essential to publish the due dates for all assignments and projects as early as possible. This provides students with clear visibility, enabling them to manage their time effectively. Additionally, it makes it easier for instructors to handle extension requests, as expectations are set from the beginning.
- 16. No need for a textbook.** This point obviously depends on the course. Personally, I have never liked when students are required to purchase (expensive) textbooks. It is preferable to design a fully self-contained course, with all the materials provided within the course itself. One strategy could be to list an optional textbook for students who want to explore the material in greater depth.
- 17. Material should be error-free and polished.** Ensuring that all course materials are polished and error-free is crucial, though it can be challenging for a new course. I prioritize making sure that all my materials—such as slides, assignments, solutions, practice exams, and case studies—are accurate, polished, and free of typos. Demonstrating this level of professionalism helps make a strong impression on students. Whenever I spot an error, I correct it immediately and, if necessary, send a class announcement. Given that new materials are often prone to errors, it is essential to have several colleagues or TAs review any new material before releasing it.
- 18. Ask TAs and graduate students to solve the exam.** A mistake in an exam can be highly disruptive, so it's essential to have the exam reviewed (confidentially) by multiple people, such as other instructors, TAs, or graduate students. In addition, instructors may inadvertently create an exam that is too difficult (or too easy). This can be unfair to students, so it's important to carefully calibrate the

exam's difficulty to align with the course material and practice exams. Achieving this balance is not always easy.

- 19. Same format and level of difficulty.** As previously mentioned, it is important to ensure that the real exam mirrors the level of difficulty found in the course material and practice exams. Interestingly, even though the class average has consistently been between 77 and 80 (which is the desired range), some students still feel that the exam was too difficult. Relatedly, I make it a priority to design the actual exam in the same format as the practice exams (e.g., same formula sheet, same structure).
- 20. Practice exams are never enough.** This is a common critique that many instructors, myself included, face. No matter how many practice exams are provided, it seems to never be enough. In my opinion, it is better to offer a smaller number of highly polished practice exams that are free of errors and have the right level of difficulty.
- 21. Difficulty of midterm vs. final exam.** The grading structure of a course can vary, with options including one final exam, a midterm and a final exam, or even no exams at all (e.g., a final project). For courses with both a midterm and a final exam, an effective strategy is to make the midterm slightly easier than the final exam. This approach provides an opportunity to assess the class average on the midterm and adjust the difficulty of the final exam accordingly. Additionally, this strategy is likely to result in higher teaching evaluations, as students typically complete their evaluations before seeing the final exam.
- 22. Omit the last two weeks of material from the exam.** The exam period can be stressful for students, especially when they have multiple exams in a short time. One way to help alleviate this stress is by excluding the material from the last one or two weeks of lectures from the exam. For example, the last two weeks can cover more advanced material for motivated students. However, it's important to note that attendance may drastically decrease as a result.
- 23. Hold review sessions before exams.** This is valuable advice. Slowing down the pace before the exam provides students with the opportunity to ask questions and clarify difficult concepts. I often ask a few students to identify the topics they find most challenging, and I focus the review session on addressing those.
- 24. Use multiple-choice exams.** I have experimented with various exam formats, and my conclusion is that multiple-choice exams are better for a course like OM (with the caveat that a different conclusion may be true for qualitative courses). Interestingly, while half of the students prefer this format, the other half does not. In my view, multiple-choice exams offer two key advantages. First, they eliminate subjectivity in grading. Students often question their grades, such as why they lost four points instead of two on a particular question, which can be frustrating and time-consuming. Multiple-choice exams resolve this issue. Second, they

streamline the grading process, allowing grades to be posted quickly (assuming the university's grading system is efficient). However, a potential drawback of multiple-choice exams is that questions can sometimes rely on previous answers, which could unintentionally penalize students. By carefully crafting the questions and response choices, this issue can be mitigated.

**25. Avoid curving grades.** This largely depends on university policies, but most students strongly dislike grade curving. This reinforces the importance of carefully calibrating the exam difficulty level (not easy).

**26. Conduct a mid-semester feedback form.** Most universities have a teaching evaluation form at the end of the semester, but a helpful strategy is to add a second feedback form midway through the semester. It provides you with a chance to address students' feedback during the second half of the semester, demonstrating your care and commitment. I use Google Forms to run a ~3 minute anonymous survey with 4-5 questions (e.g., what is the most interesting material, the most challenging, and the changes/improvements they'd like to see) and address the students' answer in the following lecture by explaining how I will address their feedback.

**27. Give time to students to complete evaluations in class.** Our system evaluates teaching performance based on student evaluations (the debate on whether this is an effective mechanism is beyond the scope of this monograph). Many instructors struggle with low response rates. One strategy is to allocate time during class for students to complete the evaluation forms by finishing the lecture early. Another piece of advice I received was to schedule an engaging and relatively easy lecture on the day evaluations are conducted.

**28. Connect concepts to real-world applications.** A common criticism of university courses is that the concepts are too theoretical and not applicable to real-world situations. To address this, it is important to spend time motivating each lecture by connecting it to practical applications. Whenever possible, I begin my lectures by presenting a business problem—either real or fictional, but inspired by actual scenarios. I then introduce a concept or method that can be used to solve the problem. Demonstrating the real-world relevance of the concepts we discuss in class is crucial, especially in business schools.

**29. Use examples of modern companies admired by students.** Building on the previous point, I adapt the material to illustrate the practical benefits of operations by using examples from companies that students admire, such as Spotify, Allbirds, Amazon, Apple, Bonobos, Rent the Runway, Snap, Uber, TikTok, Netflix, and SHEIN. Discussing these well-known companies sparks students' curiosity. Additionally, I aim to use examples that resonate with students' experiences. For example, since many of my students are finance majors, I incorporate examples

from the finance sector. I also relate the course material to everyday decisions, such as choosing investments, purchasing flight tickets, or buying groceries.

- 30. Connect concepts to news events.** Relating course concepts to recent news can significantly engage students. Since I read several newsletters daily, I often incorporate relevant facts into my lectures. One valuable resource is Prof. Gad Allon's newsletter. Whenever possible, I try to discuss media topics that resonate with students, such as local concerts, recent movies, or popular TV shows.
- 31. Focus on problem-solving skills.** Let's be honest: students will likely forget much of the material taught in our courses. With this in mind, I prioritize fostering problem-solving skills and helping students develop a structured approach to analyzing business challenges and identifying the key tradeoffs.
- 32. Use case studies.** Case study-based teaching has been a popular method for decades. I make an effort to incorporate case studies into a significant portion of my lectures, which students seem to appreciate. Unfortunately, most students fail to read the case before class, so I typically need to walk them through it during the lecture. I also found writing my own case studies to be particularly rewarding. It gives me a deeper understanding of the material, and students value the fact that the case study was authored by their instructor. At the same time, new instructors may find it hard to teach lectures based on case studies, highlighting the importance of shadowing senior colleagues and reviewing teaching notes.
- 33. Embrace AI tools.** We are entering a new era where AI tools are increasingly influencing our daily lives. I encourage my students to use AI tools to assist with assignments and in-class exercises, while also reminding them that these tools are not infallible and may produce inaccurate information. We have discussions on effective prompting strategies and ways to implement safeguards to make the most of these tools, which will become an integral part of the future. Over the past year, I asked students to use ChatGPT for several assignments, which sparked engaging in-class discussions. Given the widespread use of these tools, instructors should consider adapting their course material accordingly. A recent tool worth mentioning is the All Day TA, developed by Profs. Joshua Gans and Kevin Bryan, which allows instructors to create custom 24/7 AI TAs to provide students with immediate, accurate answers to course-related questions.
- 34. Try to make jokes.** Who does not enjoy a good joke? While it might feel intimidating for junior instructors, incorporating humor can significantly enhance the teaching experience for students. Interestingly, I asked ChatGPT to suggest jokes related to each topic in my course, and I was pleasantly surprised to see that many of them were reasonably good.
- 35. Modernize 5-10% of the material each year.** Once you have developed a strong version of your course, it is tempting to rely on it for multiple years. However, it is crucial not to let the material become outdated with obsolete

concepts and examples. A practical approach is to refresh the course content gradually—perhaps updating one or two lectures each year. Modernizing examples and case studies can be an efficient way to keep the material relevant.

- 36. Give time to students to solve in-class exercises.** In my classes, I usually begin by solving a simple example with the students. Next, I present a slightly more challenging example and give them time to solve it independently or in small groups. Afterward, I invite a volunteer to share their solution, and then I guide the class through the solution step by step. This approach has proven effective in many of my lectures.
- 37. Infuse equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in your teaching.** EDI has always been a core pillar of my teaching philosophy. I prioritize recruiting TAs and inviting guest speakers from diverse backgrounds to ensure that all students can relate to the teaching team. Additionally, in my recent case studies, my co-authors and I made a conscious effort to include names from minority groups, which was positively received and greatly appreciated by my students.
- 38. Encourage student participation and make the class interactive.** Making lectures interactive and engaging is essential for effective teaching. To encourage student involvement, I often prepare key discussion points to prompt students to share their opinions and experiences. When a student provides an incorrect answer, I invite the class to weigh in, fostering a collaborative discussion to reach the correct answer. This approach not only clarifies concepts but also promotes critical thinking and active participation.
- 39. Show that you are passionate.** Although it can be hard to control, students can easily sense whether the instructor is passionate about the material. One helpful piece of advice I received was to connect the course content to my own research and consulting work. This personal connection not only enhances engagement but also demonstrates the real-world relevance of the material.
- 40. Arrive 5-10 minutes early.** One of my favorite quotes is, “Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable!” (coined by Eric Jerome Dickey). Arriving early to the classroom gives you the opportunity to test the equipment, set up the slides, and ensure you are ready to start on time, stress-free. It also provides a chance to engage in informal conversations with students and get to know them.
- 41. Less is more.** It took me several years to understand this, but I have learned that adding more teaching material does not necessarily bring benefits. It is often more effective to focus on less material, prioritizing the most important and valuable content. Every time I reduce the amount of material, the quality of my lectures improves. It allows me to spend more time on the remaining content, engage in deeper discussions, and avoid rushing through the lecture.
- 42. Get informed about other courses.** Students take multiple courses each semester, so it is important for instructors to be aware of the concepts being

taught in other courses. A poor experience can arise if you inadvertently teach material that students have already covered elsewhere. While some overlap (and repetition) is inevitable and even beneficial, it is crucial to acknowledge it and be mindful of how it fits into the broader curriculum.

**43. Communicate via announcements.** Communication with the class is done primarily through email announcements, which I aim to send not too frequently—roughly every 2-4 weeks—to avoid overwhelming students. I keep these announcements concise and focused, ensuring they convey key information effectively. Having an offline communication channel remains important for sharing important course updates on a regular basis.

**44. Be transparent.** For me, fairness and transparency are two of the most fundamental values in teaching. I firmly believe in treating all students equally, ensuring that no one receives preferential treatment. I also prioritize transparency in all aspects of the course, from sharing the class's average exam grade to openly acknowledging any mistakes made during lectures.

**45. Accept that it is impossible to satisfy all students.** It took me some time to accept this reality, but no matter how much effort you put into teaching, it seems impossible to please every student. A typical class will have students with varying skill levels and interests in the material. It is thus unrealistic to cater to everyone's needs, so compromises are inevitable. An effective approach is to focus on meeting the needs of the majority while remaining open and receptive to the concerns of the students who may be unsatisfied.

**46. Balance strictness and compassion.** Striking the right balance between being strict and understanding can be challenging. Personally, I emphasize punctuality in my classes and discourage late arrivals, as they disrupt both my focus and the learning experience for others. Similarly, I generally do not grant extensions on assignments unless under exceptional circumstances. While some students may find these policies strict, clear communication both in the syllabus and in class is crucial for setting expectations. That said, I strive to remain empathetic and understanding in cases where valid reasons arise. I am naturally always willing to provide support and assist students through difficult personal challenges.

**47. Remember that teaching is a privilege.** As a source of motivation, I remind myself that teaching at a university is both a privilege and a major responsibility. Not only do we have the opportunity to shape and mentor the next generation of professionals, but we also have the ability to make a lasting positive impact on many lives. It is a rewarding way to give back to the community. I still remember several professors who made a profound impact in my life, and I strive to offer that same inspiration and guidance to my students.

Once again, the points mentioned above are not intended to be universal, but rather reflect strategies that have been highly effective in my own teaching. I believe they may also be useful to other instructors. Ultimately, teaching is a journey, and each instructor develops their own style, discovering what works best to make the experience enjoyable for students and rewarding for instructors.