



"Melanie and Me Swimming" (Michael Andrews, 1978-9 © The Tate Gallery)

Ctygeht: a guide for my students

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Preface

This document is intended to provide my students with information about my philosophy and methods of teaching. It is my on-going attempt to formalise and codify how I approach my profession. Having attended the *Global Colloquium for Participant-Centred Learning* at Harvard Business School in July 2009, I have raised the standards that I try to attain. However I have also evolved my style to focus more on practice, and less on explaining what I am doing. I am writing this so that I can use class time to concentrate on teaching.

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Statement of intent¹

To become an effective teacher I endeavour to:

1. Make learning engaging
2. Demonstrate passion for the material
3. Know my subject matter
4. Be organised
5. Recognise and acknowledge student's progress
6. Treat all students with respect
7. Treat all students fairly
8. Believe that all students are natural learners
9. Enjoy being with students
10. Put priority on individual learning

¹ Taken from Nater, S., and Gallimore, R., *You Haven't Taught Until They Have Learned: John Wooden's Teaching Principles and Practices*, Fitness Information Technology, Incorporated (October 2005)

Advising

The main downside to working in a business school is that you're less likely to be in a position to spend three years working with undergraduates, and supervise PhD theses.

I think there are three ingredients for success:

1. Choose an insightful research question in an interesting topic

I consider the power of economic reasoning to stem from its applicability, and therefore take a broad and eclectic position of what would constitute suitable subject material. For a general management thesis I don't require students to work on the same research topics that I do. Indeed, there are several topics that I have thoughts and ideas on which I'd be delighted to see students run with. It is important to stress that an interesting topic is a necessary but not sufficient condition. You also need to identify an interesting research question within that topic.

2. Utilise the right methodological framework

Although I've created an online course on Analytics my methodological interests are in qualitative and comparative methods. Especially for general management students I think case studies are a great way to get an empirical background

3. Demonstrate competent project planning

This is crucial because it determines whether the experience is enjoyable or not. The following are necessary (but not sufficient) characteristics you need to have:

- Enthusiasm for the research question (and not just the research topic)
- Genuine desire to have research published
- Ability to self-motivate
- Swift communication

For links and further resources see: <http://econ.anthonyjevans.com/2015/11/thesis-supervision/>

Some pearls of wisdom:

- "The legacy of an economist is his former students"
- "Thinking without writing is merely daydreaming"
- "All writing is work and all work is work in progress"

Mises - @ 10/30/52 seminar

"Plans are good for PhD theses -- not good for anything else. Good job for a thesis is to analyze a bad plan. This is the chief job of economists -- to analyze bad plans."

Writing reference letters

I tend to be flattered when students ask to use me as a reference, but I broadly subscribe to Deidre McCloskey's claim that "the soliciting and writing and reading of unpaid letters of recommendation is a scandalous failure of common sense."² So although I dislike the practice, I am always willing to write letters for students.

My responsibility is to offer an honest and fair reflection of my opinion. I take this task seriously and will not write shallowly. I will always aim to cover the following:

1. How long I have known you, and in what capacity
2. Broad indicators of your relative performance in my classes
3. Qualified judgement regarding your personal attributes and suitability for the job

Typically your potential employer is seeking a confidential dialogue, and therefore I prefer to deal with them directly. Any correspondence I receive will be dealt with promptly and responsibly, so you can be confident that *if* you put me as a reference, and *if* the company contacts me, you do not need to manage that process. I will take care of it. But if you require a generic letter (that you can use for multiple employers) you should realise that I will be *less* likely to stray into the third area of feedback.

Recently students have begun requesting recommendations through social networking sites such as LinkedIn. My policy is not to satisfy these requests for two main reasons, (i) there are established channels for recommendation letters and I find generic and publicly available missives to be tacky and bland; (ii) these are very low cost to request but take time to complete. I simply don't have time to get into this habit.

² McCloskey, D., "The Random Insanity of Letters of Recommendation" *The Chronicle Review*, March 1st 2002; [<http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i25/25b01401.htm>]

Examinations



”Exams are poison”

David Starkey

I used to fervently adhere to David Starkey’s view, above. However reading Tim Harford’s *Messy* opened my eyes to the idea that the best form of assessment is “constructive ambiguity of randomly timed tests of arbitrarily chosen areas” (p.186-186), *and* that exams can perform this function. To be effective they require certain safeguard, such as:

- A syllabus to list potential topics
- A consistent history of previous exam papers
- Independent external examiners
- An appeals process

The problem with these safeguards is that they are bureaucratic and thus impinge innovation. So I’m still not a fan of the exam. But for routine courses, I do see usefulness.

Grading

Grade	Symbol	Comments	Fitted proportion
A (70+)	✓✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An original, thought-provoking answer that draws heavily on wider knowledge of theory and history 	10-20%
B (60+)	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competent response demonstrating an understanding of the material 	60-80%
C (50+)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turned up and paid attention 	10-20%
≤D (<50)	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oh dear... 	Not fitted

If our admissions department are effective students shouldn't be failing modules due to insufficient capabilities. If it's a personal problem (e.g. physical or mental illness, family bereavement, divorce) these are valid excuses to be allowed another opportunity to complete the program, but should not be considered as a justification for a "free pass". I expect a high completion rate (e.g. >95%) where students only fail to complete due to rare attitude or disciplinary problems.

I mark exams that ask *essay questions* in the following manner:

1. Gain experience of the appropriate expectation regarding the class (this could involve relying on previous experience or skimming a sample of the examination papers)
2. Grade each separate question as an A, B, C or D (see above)
3. Create an average of all attempted answers (/100)
4. Validate that the final grade is reflective of *the paper as a whole*
5. Try to find a colleague to verify that (i) the numerical calculations are correct; (ii) all pages have been looked at, (and if I can't I do this for a random sample myself)
6. Write to all students with general comments and proposed solutions so that they understood what would have been required to reach an 'A'.

On plagiarism

Let's say that you are writing a report on the state of the UK economy. As part of your research you read the Bank of England's *Inflation Report*, and notice the following comments (p.5):

Economic outlook

Demand and supply

The UK economy expanded by 0.8% in 2013 Q3 and business surveys point to continued robust growth in Q4. The gathering pace of expansion during 2013 was supported by an increase in domestic demand. That reflects both an improvement in credit conditions — for example, rates on new loans to households have fallen significantly over the past year — and a reduction in uncertainty. The easing of these headwinds has supported consumer spending and helped to revive the housing market: housing activity and prices increased and housing investment rose robustly in the first half of this year. Leading indicators suggest that housing activity is likely to strengthen further in the near term.

There are essentially three ways to incorporate these insights into your report. Each of them is acceptable, but require different methods of citation.

Option 1: General incorporation

Most of the information in here is general and does not require citation. You could say:

“The UK economy has grown quite strongly in the second half of 2013”.

Option 2: Paraphrase

You may wish to utilise some of the specific points being made, but can put it into your own words.

However you must acknowledge the source. For example:

“Much of the economic expansion in the second half of 2013 came from domestic demand, as a result of a recovery in credit conditions and lower uncertainty (see “Inflation Report” Bank of England, November 2013)

Option 3: Direct quote

If you wish to use the exact same words then you must show that it is a quote. E.g.:

“According to the Bank of England, “The gathering pace of expansion during 2013 was supported by an increase in domestic demand” (“Inflation Report” Bank of England, November 2013, p.5)”

Depending on the formatting required for your assignment, you might need to provide the citation details in the text, in a footnote, or in an endnote. You should always ask for further guidelines if you are not sure, and I recommend the plagiarism advice from the University of East Anglia [http://www.uea.ac.uk/plagiarism/awareness_overview].

Class expectations

“Teachers are not gods; they cannot create interest out of nothing”

Don Finkel (2000, p.12)

Lectures

“Lecture has come under attack recently. “Flipped learning” is the current buzz term among higher-education reformers. We old-fashioned chalk-and-talk professors are told that we need to stop being the “sage on the stage,” but should become the “guide on the side,” helping students develop their problem-solving skills. Lecture, we are told, is an ineffective strategy for reaching today’s young people, whose attention span is measured in nanoseconds. We should not foolishly expect them to listen to us, but instead cater to their conditioned craving for constant stimulation.

Hogwash. You need to learn to listen. The kind of listening you need to learn is not passive absorption, like watching TV; it is critical listening. Critical listening means that you are not just hearing but thinking about what you are hearing. Critical listening questions and evaluates what is being said and seeks key concepts and unifying themes. Your high school curriculum would have served you better had it focused more on developing your listening skills rather than drilling you on test-taking.”

Keith Parsons³

³ Parsons, K.M., “Message to My Freshman Students” May 2014
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/keith-m-parsons/message-to-my-freshman-st_b_7275016.html]

Being a *Wertfreiheit* teacher

In his 1884 *Untersuchungen* Carl Menger included an appendix that briefly but very clearly criticized the tendency of the German “historical” economists to confuse ethical positions with the conclusions of economics. At that time holders of chairs of economics at the German universities considered themselves social reformers. They fused their economics with their personal views on social justice and morality. In their lectures they reportedly permitted their emotions free rein. Adolf Wagner, for example, would shake his fist at imaginary opponents of his proposals. Other professors would lecture as if addressing preelection meetings, to the cheers of their students. It was with this style of economic discussion that Menger was expressing his disenchantment.

Israel M. Kirzner, “Philosophical and Ethical Implications of Austrian Economics” in Edwin G. Dolan, *The Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics* [1976]

I want to convey my passion for the material to students, but am wary of being seduced by the sort of response Adolf Wagner touted. This is why I try to structure discussions (and in particular exams) in the following way:

- Present one side of the issue
- Present the other
- Provide your personal judgment

I also attempt to do the following:

- *Don't* share my opinion, act as Devil's Advocate and get them to explore their own arguments in depth. The *instructor* should ask the questions, the *student* should provide the answers.

Statement on values:

Economics is a value free science. This means that the findings of economics are true regardless of the ethical beliefs of those who conduct the analysis. For example, we can use economics to understand the expected consequences of a particular policy, such as a minimum wage. But our economic judgment about the desirability of such a policy is based purely on whether it achieves the goals of the decision maker. Perhaps a more important issue is whether those goals are the right ones, and this requires an ethical debate. But as an economics course we won't venture into that territory. This isn't because ethical dilemmas aren't important - on the contrary they are so important they warrant attention with specialist instructors, where a thorough understanding of economics can be used as an input. In other words we use economics to inform our value judgments.

Advice for MBA students

“The best way to be successful over time is to focus on creating real value, not the illusion of value. Contribute to prosperity and make people's lives better. Be more efficient at using resources to create goods and services that are more highly valued than those of your competitors. Go in the direction of your ability and competency”

Charles Koch, CEO, Koch Industries