

Lion tamers guide to teaching

Lion Tamers Guide to Teaching¹ is a collection of resources for teachers to improve teaching effectiveness as well as rapport with students. Series editor Kevin Patton says that “all I really need to know about teaching I learned as a lion tamer,” because his early experience as a wild animal trainer and apprentice lion tamer taught him not only the core principles of learning science—it taught him how to gain the trust of students and form the kind of empathetic and compassionate bond that promotes learning.

1. <https://lionden.com/LionTamersGuide/>

Why a survival guide?

Introduction

Since you've opened this book, you probably already know why you are looking for help during this unexpected challenge as a teacher. You want some ideas. You want some support. You want to *survive* this. But to clarify my intent, let me share a few introductory points.

Effective teaching in the absence of formal training

As college faculty, very few of us are trained thoroughly in the art and science of teaching. Our training was mostly focused on our scholarly discipline—not on teaching practice. Therefore, it's often hard enough to get our teaching to be effective when conditions are ideal. But during the disruption of a pandemic, we face even greater challenges. We're just not trained well enough in teaching practice to be able to do this confidently. This book will help you quickly set priorities and meet those challenges.

Advice from a veteran educator

Besides having formal training in teaching practice, plus nearly four decades of successful college teaching both on-campus and fully remote—and sometimes a hybrid of those two extremes—I'm also an experienced mentor of college faculty. That is, I've made a study of what works in college teaching and

I regularly interact with current and future faculty in developing the mindset and skills needed to engage students effectively to help them learn for the long term.

I've been there. Sort of. This is my first pandemic, of course, but I've already had to quickly move from decades of on-campus teaching to fully remote teaching. I've made a lot of mistakes. However, eventually I picked myself up, dusted myself off, and powered through all those fumbling first tries to become successful. Sharing the results of my failure and triumphs may help you during your transition without having to suffer the trials and errors first-hand.

I teach human anatomy and physiology (A&P) and much of the content of this book is derived from my blog, website, and podcast¹ for A&P faculty called **The A&P Professor**[®] at theAPprofessor.org². Therefore, my examples tend to come from that experience. But these are just examples—the principles and practices apply just as easily to the course you teach.

There is no box

This book isn't about “inside the box” strategies, nor is it about “outside the box” strategies. *There is no box right now.*

Some of what I have to say flies in the face of what you may be used to, what your intuition is telling you is the “right” way to proceed, and what many of your administrators and educational technology staff may be advising. But I ask you to trust

1. <https://theaprofessor.org/podcast/>

2. <https://theAPprofessor.org>

me that as earnest and helpful these folks are trying to be, they have not necessarily been down the road themselves. They've not made the mistakes I've made. Besides, they're often thinking of what can work in a well-planned, pre-pandemic world that simply does not exist right now. I'm just asking you to keep an open mind with *no boxes*.

Do one thing for me as you explore my advice. Think about the advice you give your students. Don't they balk at your advice to study regularly rather than cram at the last minute? Don't they often fail to trust your experience in such things and instead go with what they feel must be right—what all the other students seem to be doing—and use the worst strategies for self-learning? Yeah, we all experience that. I'm asking to not be like that. Be open to my advice, even if it feels wrong at first.

My purpose here is to give you some strategies and tips to get you started—not to dictate exactly what you should do in your own course. I hope to spark ideas, not guide you step by step. If you find even one thing in any section of this book that sparks an idea for your teaching, or is helpful in any way, that's a win. My faculty trainees know that *Kevin's Law of Professional Development* states, "If I learn just *one* useful thing in a professional development experience, it's worth it."

Feel free to either *read* this book or *raid* this book. That's how our students use their textbook, right? Sometimes reading a whole chapter and at other times skimming to find specific topics that meet immediate needs. Same here.

Yeah, I guess you've already noticed that this book written in an extremely informal style. Like I'm sitting across from you at the café and chatting with you. One reason is that some of it is based on content from my podcast³, which is delivered in my own quirky conversational style—often derived directly from a transcript of a spoken audio segment. But it's also partly because I'm putting this book together *hurriedly*. Because, well, it's an emergency! If I had a couple of years to polish it, it'd be super sleek and shiny smooth. Probably. Possibly. But we need this this information now, so there's no time for polishing.

3. <https://theapprofessor.org/podcast/>

First things first

It had to come sooner or later: a pandemic forcing social distancing measures that include moving face-to-face courses to a remote format with little or no lead time. And now it's time. Yikes!

I've long adhered to the practice of being prepared for having to be off campus for up to two or three weeks. In case I get the flu. Or a family member gets sick. Or our campus building catches fire or is hit by a tornado or earthquake. Things happen. We hope they don't, but it makes sense to have some strategy ready to implement in case they do.

For on-campus courses, I've always had a set of either on-campus learning activities that students could do on their own in my absence, or things ready to put online for them to keep learning, or a combination of both. By doing that, even though I've seldom had to use these "emergency plans," I've developed a mindset to be able to think through this new pandemic shutdown of campuses as soon as I saw it about to be implemented.

Hopefully, you started getting prepared for this in your own ways a few weeks before your campus closed. At least mulled it over a bit. Great! Let's leverage that into actionable steps we can take now.

In the following pages, I have a lot of tips to consider when you face the situation of quickly converting all or part of your course to a remote format. In the next section, I have a series of tips and strategies to consider. A few of them may seem re-

dundant, but that's intentional. In teaching and learning, I've found that if we come back around to a concept a few different times, from a few different angles, we see it more clearly and learn it more deeply. In later sections, I come back to some of these concepts yet again, but in a broader way, to add some extra layers that you will find useful.

Tips & strategies for moving to remote learning

Don't forget to breathe

It's going to be okay. Folks will expect our best effort in trying, but not perfect results. How could they? We all understand that it's not even Plan B—it's an unplanned emergency fall-back. Stay calm—and don't forget to breathe. If you can't calm down, at least *act calm* when dealing with students. They'll need reassurance and it's up to us to put our calm faces on.

Not only will your students need reassurance—reminders to keep breathing—but they'll be disoriented. Probably more disoriented than you are right now. Yes, it *is* possible to be more disoriented than you and I are right now. We need to keep things organized in as clear and as simple a manner possible. Likewise, we need to be clear about our expectations of them. Which, honestly, should be in some ways lower in expectations than usual.

Be extra empathetic and extra compassionate. Not everyone deals with emergencies and sudden changes with the cool resolve that you and I do. Let's cut them some slack, okay?

Let's say that the conference you planned to go to was really going on anyway. What were you going to do about your courses while you were gone? Possibly, you made arrangements for student self-study or remote activities or video lectures or something along those lines. Yeah. Do that.

Less is more

You've heard this teaching advice a bazillion times, right? Less is more. And possibly winced every time, thinking "where can I cut my course—*every* concept is important." Yeah, well, this is an emergency. You can't take everything with you as you evacuate your comfortable course home. What will you take? You must decide quickly. Just do it. There isn't time to hem and haw.

Don't try to build an entire online course. Nobody is expecting that. That can take years. It *should* take years. This is sort of like moving into an RV or a tent for a few weeks—you're only temporarily abandoning your course's home. Everyone realizes that, and you should to. Take with you just the concepts and just the activities and assessments you absolutely need.

And you know what? This lightweight new thing you're throwing together—it'll all work out! I promise. You know, in your heart of hearts, the core concepts that your students really must walk away from your course with. Leaner is meaner, anyway. Trust me.

We're going to come back to this idea again and again. Why? Because it's important. And because I know that you're having a hard time trusting that it's more important now than ever. I know that I have some convincing to do!

Remote Course Quality

A lot of our peers in higher education have a gut feeling that online or other remote forms of learning are inferior in quality to classic on-campus experiences. You and I don't fall into that

camp, but it's easy for us to be influenced by that kind of thinking. It kinda creeps in without us even realizing it. Do not let it.

Quality learning has not always been by didactic lecture, nor will it always be. Quality learning comes in many forms. It's more about how effective we are as learning coaches in guiding our students and how well our students remain motivated to follow our advice and put effort in learning.

Because I sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that online learning is inferior, I catch myself trying to add more to online courses or otherwise increase the rigor of the course to compensate for that perceived inferiority. But that always backfires because what I'm really doing is taking my eyes off the central goals of my course. If we stay focused on those central concepts, then we can produce a lean, mean course in any format that really does its job well.

Ask for help

Stay in contact with your teaching peers within your department and beyond. You'll all be struggling with this, and each will have different ideas and methods and consoling words to share with each other. Your institution will likely have all kinds of help and advice for you. Your textbook publisher may have resources.

This is an especially important time to be connecting with teaching organizations and teaching groups within our disciplinary organizations. At this very moment, they are facilitat-

ing networking, conversations, and support for us as we all deal with a situation new to all of us. If you don't already belong to such an organization, now may be the best time to join.

Involve the world

Many have gone before you and me on this journey. There are a lot of free images, videos, audio, and more, available online. Ask your students to help find them. Ask colleagues to help (and share your finds with them).

Your professional organizations probably already have some curated lists. Your favorite blogger or podcaster may have such a list. Your college librarians are also likely to have a collection of resources. If not, they will be delighted to help you find resources you can use. That's their job—and they love it.

Involve students

There are several possible ways we can involve students in the process of moving our course to remote learning. Probably, both students and professors will have a blast doing so.

Invite students to provide suggestions on ways to reach your course objectives. This makes them part of the all-hands-on-deck emergency nature of the situation and provides that all-important feeling of autonomy that helps motivate learning. Consider adding online discussions of concepts/topics so that students can work things out among themselves, with your gentle guidance. This can be uncomfortable at first for those

who've never done it, but I've been surprised at how well this can work.

Students may also be able to help you with some of the technical challenges of producing media or other aspects of online instruction if you are new to all of this.

A different aspect of this tip to "involve students"—and this harkens back to some of the previous ideas I mentioned about empathy and compassion—is to try to be "extra available" to students. Stay in touch and let them know how they can stay in touch. Sometimes, just an open discussion forum where they can discuss anything may do the trick.

Your learning management system (LMS) or other institutional tools may include text or video chat or meeting capabilities. These could be used to have scheduled tutorials, or town hall meetings, or, I don't know—sing-alongs?

Okay, I know that sounds silly. And I guess it is silly, but I mean it. If you can do a group audio or video meeting, then why not get silly and have a sing along. Can't sing? That's even better! It'll be more fun and being willing to be vulnerable during an emergency can really have powerful reassuring effects with our students.

Remote is not always online

These days we often say "online" when what we really mean is "remote." Remote learning is not always online learning.

Most of us with face-to-face courses are being told to put everything "online" now. Or maybe our supervisors are saying "remote" and we are hearing "online." But you know what? You or I may not have to move anything, or much of anything, to online delivery at all. There may be assignments and readings that students were already planning to work on. We could just email them, or post an announcement in the LMS to, well, just "carry on." Maybe have them submit their assignments and grade them and give them feedback and a grade.

Do some video

Even if you've never, ever done a video clip, now's a good time to just jump in and do it. It'll be fun. The water's fine, so jump!

There are loads of YouTube videos and other tutorials online that help you do this. Your institution probably has loads of resources on how to get started—and links to institutional software and other tools to use.

Your students don't expect a Ron Howard film, a Morgan Freeman voice-over, or a heartfelt Meryl Streep soliloquy. They just expect you, being *you*. In fact, the more "like you" you can be, the more comfortable you and your students will be during this weird adventure we're all on right now.

Or maybe a slightly more laid-back and casual you might be in order, you know, to engender that all-important "we're all in this together" vibe we want to create right now.