ECR Efficient Teaching Workshop 2019
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Integrity and Development)

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The following content is based on the presentations delivered by the speakers at the 2019 Efficient Teaching Workshop for the Early Career Researcher Network at Macquarie University.

Content attributed to each speaker has been adapted to incorporate comments contributed at the time in break-out sessions and subsequently in the survey by the Early Career Researchers who attended the workshop.
Efficient Teaching Tips
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Plan your time

Use programs like Outlook Calendar, Asana, Toggl to schedule discrete teaching-related tasks (e.g. lecture slides, tutorial preparation, rubric design, iLearn set up, etc.)

AND

Keep track of how much time each requires
Planning your time

Planning **now** allows you to:

- keep to task,
- prepare for essential deadlines (exam submission, iLearn launch, etc.)
- limit the time taken for each task,
- preserve time for research and other non-teaching related tasks (e.g. your work-life balance)
- plan your time better in the future and manage your workload by understanding the true time-cost involved in each component of teaching

*If teaching for the first time, ask a colleague how much time they allocate for each task and trial their estimates. Keep in mind that everything you do for the first time will take longer, but this investment will pay off in the future.*
Efficient Teaching

Re-use and recycle for efficiency and to benchmark quality:
- Ask mentors, previous lecturers, peers here and overseas, for materials you can adapt or use

*Be respectful and aware of the intellectual property of others by being clear about your intentions and making sure you attribute original content. Don’t use unpublished research, especially of contingent researchers, from others teaching materials.*

Reflect on your materials *during* the teaching semester
- Keep notes on what worked and didn’t after each lecture, tutorial, assessment *as you go* to create a plan for any adjustments required for the next iteration of the course.

*Being able to demonstrate reflective practice is important for job interviews and for promotion.*
Your expertise is enough
- don’t try and become an expert in every aspect you are teaching

You don’t need to teach all you know
- courses deliver a selective experience of content to students
- write your exam questions before writing your lectures

What you can do in the time available is sufficient
- know the difference between what is essential and what is desirable (e.g. do you need slides? What are those animations contributing?)
Managing your commitments

By knowing better how much time teaching tasks take, you can understand your level of commitment and make more strategic choices.

Try to:
- Teach in your research area when you can
- Teach the same course or deliver the same guest lecture multiple times
- Renovate repeat course materials bit by bit, not wholesale

But just in case you can’t, remember that universities value staff who can cover more than one teaching area and are able to pursue diverse research opportunities. Use the diversity of your teaching to explore new research topics.
Engineer transparency and collaboration

Use tools like Google Forms (populated with a rubric for live assessment), QuickMarks (for repeated errors), and others to help teaching staff collaborate and to make criteria transparent and consistent.

Incorporate peer-marking for low risk Assessments.
Tips for managing teams of tutors

Collaborating with tutors on course, tutorial, and assessment content and delivery allows everyone to reduce their workloads by exploiting their strengths

- meet regularly to discuss and share content
- exchange tips on delivery
- and coordinate overall strategy

Make sure that you have budget for any compulsory meetings with tutors, they are rewarded for their efforts (prizes, teaching testimonials, and sessional staff awards), and get some account of their teaching from you at the end of semester.
Tips for managing students

Exploit iLearn to streamline communications with students:
- create a forum for each assessment and one for general problem solving
- respond diligently at first, then introduce a delay, encourage and praise peer-to-peer responding

Be upfront and consistent about expectations
- Outline expectations of behaviour, engagement, and preparation for yourself and your students
- e.g. provide an example email; specify your preferred communication media and your availability to answer emails during the day, week, and semester; let them know when they can expect marks back and your marking philosophy; forecast potential delays in responding or posting and why they might happen in advance

Explore opportunities to enhance engagement
- Flip your classroom or make use of programs like Mentimeter
Assessments

Use assessments – whether in the design or delivery – to enhance your research by:

- exploring an area, method, or technique which may complement your research agenda
- building up experience in areas known to be key in particular teaching programs or industries
- articulating the relevance of the assessment to the above so that students understand what you’re trying to achieve
Final tips

- Write the closing course summary as lecturer or tutor before starting to teach to understand how all the parts fit together and where you are going.

- When seeking feedback from students in whatever form make sure you think through the mode and timing of that feedback, e.g.
  - provide an overview of the course emphasising when and how they received feedback on their progress
  - opt for in-class online or paper feedback to maximise response rates

- Find out if your faculty / department shares rubrics, assessment models, or other resources
  - if not, consider pooling them for future use
Foster respect and manage the expectations of students & teachers alike

By maintaining an honest and open dialogue with students, with your staff or boss, and especially with yourself you can use the teaching experience to grow, experiment, and create enduring communities of practice.

by Dr Shireen Daft
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Consolidating Teaching Teams

Building a strong and cohesive teaching team means that everyone has back-up and everyone can lean on the strengths of others to minimise the impact of workload.

Three steps can help foster a strong team dynamic:

- **Create tutor guides or induction materials for large courses**
  
  *If you’re a tutor, come up with a list of things you’d need to know to tutor in the subject to help your convenor in future iterations*

- **Incorporate professional development**, through training, peer review, and support **into your conception of the job**
  
  *Though these things add to the workload, they make the experience richer for all*

- **Understand the personal demands of your team**, tutors & convenors alike, and share these
Teaching First Years

Students can learn about and adapt rapidly to the university environment, but at the beginning their understanding of university systems is murky.

Providing simple guides to reinforce information they may have already been exposed to elsewhere will save you time later.

- Provide a **road map** to how processes work, where resources (library, databases) and services can be accessed or short ‘How to’ videos.
- Specify **where they should go for particular problems** (assessment criteria = unit guide; extensions = ask.mq.edu.au; personal crises = Campus Wellbeing)
Student Queries about Assessments

Crafting of your assessment type and procedure can save you a lot of time.

- Design your assessments to be marking efficient (non-written forms of assessment are often more arduous to create, but faster to mark)

- Use different markers for different types of assessment to ensure consistency and to concentrate their workload

- Introduce a 48 hr before assessment due date communication blackout and never set Monday due dates to avoid weekend queries

- Direct students to iLearn forums as first port of call for assessment questions. Make it clear emails won’t be answered if the query has already been posted
Building Relationships with Students

Streamlining your communication with students needn’t impact their level of involvement or close down opportunities to collaborate.

- Identify areas in which students can have a say in course delivery and content *without dramatically increasing workload or compromising course aims* (e.g. would you prefer us to concentrate on case study A or B? would you prefer 2 or 4 essay topics? Would you prefer oral or written feedback?)

- Use **Mentimeter** to get real-time input from students
Repetition will save you

Choose courses you can teach in multiple times to reduce your workload and invest time now in making teaching easier and better the next time around.

Reinforce key messages on assessments, communications, expectations, and resources by repeating them in lectures, tutorials, course guides and ilearn.
Tips for teaching first year

Use the first time you teach as a way to identify areas for improvement for *next time*.

- Increase the chance of a *next time* by offering to teach on courses which are not popular with staff and by coming up with practical easy improvements for the future

  *But make sure to check with other tutors or staff what the reasons are for the course’s unpopularity. A disorganised course or impossible workload schedule may cost more than it earns.*

Reinforce all essential information through repetition

- Go over assessments in lectures and tutorials

- Use the first tutorial to provide a guide to Turnitin, Echo, ILearn, communication protocols, and university resources
Efficient Marking

Establishing checks and balances early on in your marking will head off any disasters in the future

- Use an Excel formula to minimize calculation mistakes (create a template and share with other tutors)

- Check mean and standard deviation (= distribution) of marks against other markers as you go

- Check student grades in special circumstances, e.g. when they have the same last name
Managing Teaching Teams

An efficient teaching team will be consistent, committed, and invested in delivering high quality teaching

- Meeting up together before the course starts and again before the final exam helps with consistency and community

- Create an online forum for the team to share their experiences and get informal advice

- Simple and clear guides for assessments help the team stay on track

- As a convenor, make sure the course is desirable for tutors, identify and keep great tutors, build and reward a good team, don’t micromanage but develop the strengths of your tutors
Efficient Unit Guides

Simplicity will make the information you deliver clearer and easier to retain

- minimise the information in your unit guide as it is a legal document. Focus on assessment type, due date, penalty, submission process, etc. Any detail can be captured in the assessment guide.

- never include precise dates for assessments, only day + week (Tuesday, week 7), to make updating for future iterations easy

- likewise never include precise dates for the schedule of topics
Efficient Assessment Design

Reducing the number and complexity of assessments reduces the opportunity for error and the marking burden

- Keep the number of assessments / questions on an exam to a minimum

- Keep assessment structure as simple as you can
  
  Students will always want more choice, but often perform more poorly with it

- Bank any supplementary assessments for the future, e.g. use the supplementary exam as the final exam for the next iteration.

- Build a FAQ guide for each assessment out of your interaction with students
Preparing for Grade Appeals

Make sure that your rubric is linked to your assessment is linked to your learning outcomes. Above all, make sure that everything in the exam was taught in the unit.

- Release all marks a week before the end of semester and get students to review them

- Before students look at their final exam, make sure the tutor has made basic comments on it to help students better understand why they received their mark
Online **ILearn** Training Modules for **Convenors** and **Tutors**

Online **Gradebook** Training **Module**

**Teche Training Sessions** throughout the year on key skills (see also faculty-specific resources available through the Teche site).

To customise your own training module, submit a training enquiry with your faculty learning designer by emailing **ilearn.help@mq.edu.au**

A guide to **iShare**, the university’s digital content management repository

Information about the **iTeach** system

A **repository** of information about MQ’s Learning Technologies and Spaces

Information about **Campus Wellbeing**