

# Onsite Teaching Basics

*Welcome to Academy of Art University! The information below is being provided to help you get started in the classroom. We want you to be successful as an instructor and hope that you utilize this as an easy reference guide. Please keep it handy and use it during the semester—there is a lot to remember and these strategies have worked for many instructors.*

## 1. First Day - Introductions

- **Have the following information on the board for students to see:**
  - ❖ Your name and contact information. Students will want to know the best way to reach you if needed. (AAU provides instructors with an email account. This is the email that you should provide your students.)
  - ❖ Course name, section number, day/time the class meets. This will help ensure that students have come to the correct classroom.
  - ❖ Agenda for the day. (Writing a few bullet points about the day's agenda creates a sense of structure for students to see. This is a good practice to do each week.)
- **Introduce yourself** and share a little about your industry experience and how it relates to the course. Students will be interested in knowing about your professional background.
- **Get to know your students.**
  - ❖ Consider doing an “icebreaker” activity to learn who your students are and what they bring to the class. One useful first day “icebreaker” is to pair up your students and ask them to interview each other for a few minutes. They should find out basic information from one another such as their names, where they are from, areas of professional interest, hobbies, any relevant experience they may have in relation to the course, etc.
  - ❖ After about 5-10 minutes, have each student introduce his/her partner briefly to the class, providing the “interview” information. Students tend to enjoy learning about each other and are often more comfortable introducing someone else, rather than themselves, to the class. This activity sets the tone for a more relaxed atmosphere and helps foster friendships quickly.

## 2. First Day - Course Overview, Policies, and AAU Support

- **Go over the syllabus and course outline briefly and explain the skills that students will develop by doing the course work.** If possible, show samples of projects they will be doing, or examples of professional work that employ the ideas or techniques they will be learning. The idea is to get students excited about what they are going to be able to accomplish as a result of taking your course.
- **Review your course supply list, and any textbooks listed.** Do not make changes to items appearing on the supply or text lists. The information is published on our website, and students may have already purchased items in advance. Art supplies can be purchased on campus at our 466 Townsend and 60 Federal buildings, as well as at local art supply stores. If you need any materials and or textbooks, please contact your department administrator.
- **Review the AAU attendance and grading policies on the syllabus.** Check with your department director to see if there is a department-wide policy you need to adhere to. Explain your policy for accepting late



work. For absences that are unexcused, some teachers reduce grades by one full letter for each week an assignment is late; others do not accept late work at all to underscore the need for meeting professional standards. Whatever your policy is, it is important that students are aware of it and that you reinforce it throughout the semester as consistently as possible.

- **Academic Support:** AAU offers academic support for students through department workshops and ARC (Academy Resource Center). Workshop schedules will be posted in the department or in classrooms. Please be sure to remind your students of these resources at the beginning of the semester and at crucial times, when students may need more assistance.  
<http://www.academyart.edu/students/my-academy/academy-resource-center> | (415) 618-3917

### 3. Professional Practices

- **Start every session on time; don't let your class out early.** We ask for your cooperation in ensuring that classes are not let out early, even on the first and last days of the semester, as cutting class short violates our contract with the students and may be grounds for a student grievance. Please bring sufficient material and activities, and have students start their homework in class when possible so you can be sure they are on the right track.
- **Take attendance at the beginning of each class session.** The university relies on having accurate, up to date attendance information, as it can impact a student's financial aid and outreach by AAU support services. Submit the attendance immediately after your class through the LMS (online Learning Management System). If a student arrives after you have submitted attendance, you can edit the attendance within 12 hours of finishing your class.

### 4. Lectures

- Studies have shown that students are not able to remember information that is presented in lengthy lectures. With this in mind, try to **keep lectures to 15-minute segments and break up your class with other activities and coursework.**
  - ❖ To reinforce lecture material, one idea that works well is to put students into small groups or pairs, and ask them to discuss their opinions about a variety of sample images you provide. Ask them to rank the samples from best to worst, based on criteria that you review, and have them write down elements observed in each piece that led them to their conclusions. Then, have the students share their findings with the whole class. This helps students develop analytical skills, is fun and social, and game-like in its essence. It is also a good way for you to gauge their understanding or clarify information they may not have fully grasped during the lecture.
- **Students tend to learn by doing, not by listening.**
  - ❖ Break up your lecture by posing questions to keep them actively engaged. Think about questions that students can discuss in pairs as well. (Don't make the mistake of answering your own questions. Give students enough time to process and respond to your questions.)
  - ❖ Summarize the most important points you covered and write them on the board. Have them take notes. This will help students understand what information to prioritize.
  - ❖ Get students interacting with the material and with one another to create an environment that is truly engaging and effective.
- **Your lectures should follow the course outline.** Please note that the syllabus and outline are legal documents that dictate what the student can expect from your course.

- **It is important to communicate clearly and concisely.**
  - ❖ Don't ramble on or worse, read exclusively from presentation notes. Remember the ways in which your former instructors inspired *you!*
  - ❖ It will be helpful to go over vocabulary terms with your students in class so that they can learn the concepts more effectively. This will also help them to develop the ability to utilize professional terminology when speaking.
  - ❖ For classes that have international students, remember to speak slowly and use clear, simple words to help them understand. Please be sensitive to their challenges and mindful of the way in which you communicate. You can find additional strategies here: <http://faculty.academyart.edu/faculty/help-for-students.html>

## 5. Demonstrations

- **Show students a finished example of what the demo will cover** to orient them before doing the demonstration. Additionally, take time to review the supplies you will be using.
- **Explain what you are doing, and why, step by step** as you do the demonstration.
- **Avoid doing long demonstrations;** students will not be able to remember everything if overwhelmed with a lot of information. Instead, break your demos into small segments—and have the students immediately practice each segment in class. Move on to the next part of the demo after you've seen that students understand the previous segments.
- **Ensure that everyone can see and hear you.** Some students may be too shy to let you know that they are unable to see or hear what you're saying. It is important that you address this proactively.

## 6. Homework Assignments

- **Provide clear, precise assignment requirements in writing,** via handouts, course downloads or the board.
- **Start homework assignments in class when possible** to provide support to your students and ensure they're on the right track.
- **When possible, show examples of strong, acceptable, and weak work as you introduce new assignments.** This will help students understand in advance what to aim for and what approaches are problematic. When students have clear targets, they will usually meet or exceed them. Check with your department to see if sample assignments or rubrics are available for your class.

## 7. Critiquing

- **Critiques are intended to help students improve their work** by addressing the main aspects of a piece that are working successfully, identifying areas that need revisions, explaining why the revisions are needed and providing tips that communicate how to improve. Be sure to cover these things in critiques.
- **Communicate in a manner that is thorough, constructive and respectful.** Be specific and to the point, so that the student knows what to focus on to improve. Again, please be mindful of our international students and speak slowly, using vocabulary that is clear and simple for them to understand. When possible, use visuals to help reinforce your explanations.



- **Acknowledge each student by name** as you critique their work.
- **Encourage students to get involved with the critique** by asking them to offer their observations and suggestions; this can also be done in small groups.
- **Base your critiques on objective, factual observations** related to the assignment criteria or rubric. Avoid a critique based on subjective, personal opinions. Relate your feedback to principles of design, so that students understand the broader context, not just the specifics that you ask them to fix.

## 8. Grading

- **Grade honestly.** Students need to be given honest assessments of their progress so they may know where they stand throughout the semester. Honest grading allows students to understand their level of skill relative to industry standards, and can serve as a catalyst for improvement. Please check with your department director to find out about the expectations for grading accurately and to avoid the possibility of giving inflated grades. Use a rubric for transparent, unbiased grading.
- **Grade on time.** It is required that instructors submit all progress, midterm and final grades on time. Students rely on grades to know if they are in good standing and to seek out workshop and tutoring support if needed. If grades are submitted late, it can impact a student's ability to make timely improvements. Additionally, students may not register for classes and in some cases, may impact their financial aid or not be allowed to graduate. For these reasons, we ask that all instructors get their grades in on time. Grades are formally submitted to the LMS four times during the Fall and Spring semesters: Week 4 (progress grade), midterm, week 11 (progress grade) and at the end of the semester. For the Summer semester, grades are submitted twice: midterm and at the end of the semester.

## 9. Help for Students

- The **Academy Resource Center (ARC)** provides help for students in need of assistance. Please note, it is ultimately up to each student to decide whether and how much to engage with the help offered.
  - ❖ **Workshops and Tutoring**  
<https://www.academyart.edu/students/my-academy/academy-resource-center/training-tutoring> | (415) 618-3865
  - ❖ **English Language Support**  
<https://www.academyart.edu/students/my-academy/academy-resource-center/esl/esl-support> | (415) 618-3903
  - ❖ **Classroom Services** (accessibility resources)  
<https://www.academyart.edu/students/my-academy/academy-resource-center/accessibility> | (415) 618-3775

## 10. Instructor Support

- **Faculty Evaluation & Coaching** offers support to all instructors throughout the semester via in-class observations, phone calls, and emails. To learn more, please visit:  
<http://faculty.academyart.edu> | (415) 618-3855 | [facultyevalcoach@academyart.edu](mailto:facultyevalcoach@academyart.edu)
- Please speak with your department **Director, Lead, and or Coordinator** for advice on best practices, managing student behavior, grading, examples of previous student work to show in class, additional content, etc.