NOTES FOR TEACH TEST EXAMINEES

PLEASE READ ALL OF THESE INSTRUCTIONS. EACH OF THE ITEMS IN THIS DOCUMENT IS VITAL FOR YOUR PERFORMING YOUR BEST DURING THE TEACH TEST.

I. Planning for the Test

1. **Be realistic in the amount of material you can cover in 10 minutes.** If the topic your department gives you is very long and complicated, you may want to discuss only part of it.

2. **Plan and organize your material before you take the test.** Even the most experienced teacher must organize a lecture beforehand. Know what specific information you want to communicate and what must come first, second, etc.

3. **Do not spend a lot of time preparing visual aids.** Powerpoints, Prezis, handouts and other visual aids are not permitted, although you can draw succinct figures on the board. The best way to prepare for this test is not to make complicated handouts, but to plan what you will say and practice presenting it clearly.

4. **Make simple, easy-to-read notes** - just a few cards with large, clear writing. Your notes should just remind you of your main points with a word or phrase. **Avoid writing every word of your lecture on paper.** You can glance down quickly at your notes, but **you should not be reading your lecture.** **Do not memorize your lecture material;** instead, be as familiar as you can with the main ideas and specifics of your lecture. The panelists will interrupt you and ask you questions which may take you away from your planned material. If you practice and have helpful notes available, you will be comfortable making small changes in your presentation to accommodate your listeners. But if you memorize your lecture, questions and interruptions will make you nervous and may make you forget your lecture material.

5. **Aim your lesson at beginner undergraduates, and assume your listeners have no prior knowledge of your field of study.** Remember that the purpose of this test is to see how well you can communicate in English with undergraduate students, since TAs normally assist in and teach such classes. Do not make your lecture more complicated than it needs to be, and do not use this lecture as an opportunity to impress your professor. This test is not a Ph.D. exam, and it is not a test of your knowledge in your field.
6. **Organize your lesson as a class lecture.** Do not try to create a discussion by asking the panelists questions or planning a classroom activity for them. Because the purpose of this test is to evaluate your English communicative competence, the panel needs to hear you speak and answer their questions. Although it is an excellent teaching technique to generate class discussion by asking questions, this does not meet the requirements of the TEACH Test. Remember that the panel is not evaluating your teaching skills.

7. **Avoid doing extensive research for this test;** concentrate instead on a clear presentation of the basic information about your topic. The panelists are not judging your knowledge in your field and we do not expect you to need any background material beyond what is given with the test topic. If no material is given, your department assumes you have the basic knowledge of the topic. The panel will also not have any of the material about your topic during the test. If the test topics are completely unfamiliar to you, so that you absolutely cannot speak about any of them for ten minutes, then talk to Jessica or Suzanne immediately.

8. **Be prepared to support your general statements with specific examples.** Even though the lesson is short, communicate specific information. Depending on your topic, you may find it most practical to use one large example and keep referring to it, or you may need different examples for different parts of your lesson.

9. **Think about possible questions students might ask -** are there any words, concepts, or processes that might be unfamiliar? Define and/or illustrate those items in your lecture.

10. **If there is difficult vocabulary, make sure you practice how to pronounce and spell these words before the test.**

II. **During the Test**

1. **Speak loudly and clearly.** If you speak softly, people in the back of the room cannot hear you, even if your pronunciation is excellent. If your pronunciation isn’t excellent, mumbling or speaking softly makes you harder, not easier, to understand. The panelists are not counting how many mistakes you make; they are judging whether we can understand what you are teaching. So even when you do not feel perfectly confident your English, it is better to make a mistake loudly and clearly than to mumble and guarantee that the panelists cannot understand you at all.

2. **Introduce yourself and your topic.** Some of the panelists may have no background in your subject; some may not even know what department you are from.
Do not worry about the time, and do not worry about whether you can finish presenting everything you have planned. When you are preparing for the test, estimate as well as you can how much material you should cover. But when you get into the test, we may interrupt you with questions, ask you to continue, or even stop you.

Do not rush in order to cover more material in a short time because rushing will affect how clearly you speak. Second, even if you speak clearly, people need time to understand and absorb what you are teaching them.

Use the board to help you communicate content. Use it to organize difficult material, highlight main ideas, write down new or difficult words or words someone asks you about. If the board gets filled up, erase what you do not need and keep going. When you write on the board, make sure what you write is clear and correct. Remember that students get a great deal of information from the board.

Do not talk to the board for more than a few seconds while you are writing. If you face the board consistently while you talk, you will be difficult to understand. If you have a lot of material to write, take a moment or two to face the board and write it. Then turn around and continue your explanation. Avoid writing whole sentences or excessive information on the board.

Look at the panelists’ faces while you are talking to them. You’ll engage their interest, and you’ll be able to see whether they understand you.

Do not use an angry, sharp, or authoritarian tone when communicating with the panelists. Try to be friendly and pleasant, even though you are probably nervous.

If panelists ask you to repeat a word or phrase, or if they tell you they didn’t understand what you said, write the word or phrase on the board. Do not simply keep repeating the word or phrase.
III. Question Handling Tips

1. **Make sure you understand the question BEFORE answering.** If you aren’t sure, ask the panelist to repeat the question. If necessary, restate the question in your own words and ask the panelist if your understanding is correct. If you do not understand a word or phrase that the panelist is using, ask him or her to explain that word or repeat the question using different words. Do not start answering until you find out specifically what the panelist wants to know.

2. Here are some sample questions and the first few words of the answer. **Note how the first part of the answer depends on how the question is structured.**
   
   (a) *Is the earth round?*
   
   “Yes, because...” (This kind of question needs “Yes” or “No” first. You can follow with more information).

   (b) *Why is the earth round?*
   
   “Because...” (This kind of question needs an explanation of cause and effect).

   (c) *What shape is the earth?*
   
   “It is round.” (This kind of question needs a specific answer first. You can follow with more information if it seems appropriate).

   (d) *Is the earth round or flat?*
   
   “It is round.” (This kind of question needs an answer that specifically names one of the two alternatives, or else a statement that neither--or both--of the alternatives is correct. You can follow with more information if necessary.)

3. **Be sure that you answer each panelist’s questions directly and completely.** Do not just say “yes” or begin with extensive background information. It is most appropriate to succinctly and directly answer the question.

4. When you finish answering, it is useful to say something like, **“Have I answered your question?” or, “Is that clear?”** Watch what the panelists say and how they look to determine if you have given a satisfactory answer.

5. **If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the panelist you do not know but you will find out.** Do not pretend to know the answer, and do not ever make up information because giving incorrect information as an instructor hurts your effectiveness and relationship with students.

6. **If you need to think about the answer to a question, you can wait before answering.** A few seconds of silence is fine. But it is necessary for you to signal
that you understood the question and are thinking about the answer. You can say something like, “Let me think about that a minute.” Or you can use an appropriate non-verbal gesture to indicate you understood but you are thinking.

7. There may be some occasions when a question is genuinely unrelated to the topic you are discussing. If there is a quick answer to this question, you might want to answer anyway. If the answer is long and complicated, you may prefer to ask the panelist to discuss it with you outside of class. Use your best judgment here, as you would if you were a teacher of an undergraduate class.

8. In general, do not answer a question with information that is more complicated than necessary. When someone is confused, usually the best strategy is to explain something with simple words and clear examples, rather than with high-level terminology and formulas.

Finally, always keep in mind the purpose and priorities of the test. We are testing your ability to communicate in English with undergraduates. We want to know if you can:

- Speak fluent, understandable English.
- Understand and answer questions from students.
- Interact successfully with students.
- Present information in a clear, organized way.

GOOD LUCK!