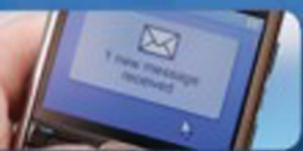


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Teaching Business Communication: First Steps

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Abstract

Mentoring is a buzzword in the education circles; yet, there is a dearth of mentoring in the context of Business Communication Teaching, as far as this researcher knows. In simple words, mentoring, experiential than empirical, could refer to the tips and strategies which a senior teacher can offer based on his/her teaching experiences to those entering the profession.

At the outset, it is necessary to clarify that this paper is applicable for those teachers who join Commerce Colleges affiliated to the University of Mumbai and the experience in Arts and Science Colleges might be different. What this paper does is help the newcomers to be more confident in approaching the subject for it is seen that there is an in-built resistance from the new entrants to teaching Business Communication for they dream of teaching literature.

Many of the aspects of this paper will be useful to teachers of other subjects as well. The scope of this paper could be extended to a community of Business Communication teachers who could network and interact with each other on a more regular basis and provide necessary support in the form of teaching materials, resources and professional development.

Key Words: Business Communication, Teaching.

Introduction The aim of this paper is to provide a pathway to the English Teachers who enter into their teaching profession as Assistant Professors in Business Communication in purely Commerce Colleges affiliated to the University of Mumbai. The earnest objective behind this effort is to help and prepare the new entrants to understand as to what are the job requirements, expectations and challenges that they might face and provide valuable tips to them so that their initial years in the teaching profession are smooth and they are able to mature into smart learners early in the profession. The tips in this user-friendly paper, a genuine reflection of classroom teaching and college administrative

experiences, can be easily implemented in the first year of teaching profession; they continue to be useful even in the later years. Although the contents are familiar to those already employed, an attempt has been to collate strategies to provide orientation to a Business Communication teacher.

Appointment - Statutory Requirements
For appointment in a degree college, the minimum requirement is to be a postgraduate in English with at least 55% and SET (State Eligibility Test) or NET (National Eligibility Test). For details, the college library can provide the necessary qualifications or one can refer to the internet which has updates of circulars of UGC-University Grants Commission and

University of Mumbai. Due to lack of availability of SET/NET candidates, many unaided colleges appoint non-SET/NET candidates on a consolidated salary. On a positive note, why shouldn't the teacher enter the job market earlier and work on clearing SET/NET? The advantage is that there are some genuinely good colleges which see education as a social than an economic enterprise and have exemplary teacher retention practices i.e. they appoint the teachers who have cleared SET/NET on the prescribed pay scales. Each college has its individual policy for the teachers appointed on consolidated basis; the qualified teachers appointed on a regular basis are sanctioned leaves as per the government circulars while the teachers on consolidated basis do enjoy similar casual leaves, duty leaves and vacations.

Workload As a full-time lecturer one is expected to take 20 lectures of 48-50 minutes every week. There are three lectures for each division and 1 tutorial for 30 learners. For instance, if there are 120 learners in a class, there can be four tutorial batches consisting of thirty learners in each batch; it follows that there will be 7 lectures per division. In order to fulfill the workload, the teacher may be allotted the additional subject of Foundation Course i.e. 3 lectures in each division. To put it more clearly, if there are two divisions, then there will be 14 lectures for Business Communication at FYBCom and 6 lectures of Foundation Course at the FYBCom or SYBCom level. In case, the colleges have additional courses like BMS or BCom Banking and Insurance and BCom Accounting and Finance, there will be four lectures of Business

Communication in the first Term and no tutorials. Before beginning actual teaching it is necessary to glance at the PBAS form and the prescribed syllabus with the question paper pattern which are available online and realize that there is many a slip between the cup and the lip.

PBAS Performance Based Appraisal System is a prescribed format normally filled at the end of the academic year. The sincere suggestion is that one should begin the academic year by taking a serious look at it for it has delineated very clearly as to what a teacher is expected to do. A new teacher can start with concentrating on the teaching and co-curricular aspects and turn to at least attending conferences and seminars to set the ground for future research.

Evaluation Scheme, Question paper pattern and the Syllabus At present there is the credit based evaluation system and for Business Communication it is 60 marks for the term end exams and two tests of 10 marks each or one test of 20 marks, 10 marks for project or journal submission and 10 marks for class participation. It was heard that this year the pattern is expected to change to 80:20, however, it will be made clear by the exam committee so there is no need to worry. The syllabus and the question paper pattern are available online or in the college library. It would be smart to have a rough plan about the evaluation scheme before launching into the actual teaching for the teacher is expected to know what aspects are to be tested to prevent confusion regarding the completion of the syllabus on time. The next part will aid in the process of actual implementation of the teaching process.

Academic Calendar and Teaching Plan

Each academic year consists of two terms the first from June to Oct and the second from November to April and in each term, a college is expected to have 90 teaching days. But with the increase in examinations, it becomes difficult for every teacher to complete the syllabus if they do not plan in advance. Relax and do your best. A teaching plan is to be submitted either to the exam committee or the Principal. For FYBCom, the classes begin only in the last week of June and exams begin in October; so it is wise to refer to the Academic Calendar which is printed in the College Prospectus or is prepared as soon as the college re-opens and provides in advance a list of the prescribed holidays. Plan for three months, keeping in mind that the actual teaching time available is three months- July, August, and September.

Maintain a logbook wherein you make a copy of your broad teaching plan and split the syllabus into small units to be covered daily and weekly. If possible, prepare a rough draft of the question paper to be set or prepare a question bank to help you cover the various units. Prepare a model answer paper for the sample question paper that you set. Prepare exercises for the Remedial Grammar section, Comprehension Section and if there is no time for it then there are workbooks available which provide readymade worksheets. Go online and you will definitely find some downloadable worksheets but see to it that they can be used in the Indian and in the context of your college. Network with other college teachers or ask your librarian to procure some sample question papers from the neighbouring

colleges. Better still, ask the exam committee as to who is the moderator who has generally been coming to the college and go and meet them up. If there is any mistake in the question paper do not hesitate to bring it to the notice of the moderator and the exam committee; all the members are senior faculty who have gone through these steps and will encourage you. When in doubt, it is vital to ask.

Handling Teaching Resources The library should definitely have a list of both reference and textbooks. If one joins in the beginning of the academic year, the publishers are good enough to give a specimen copy and the teacher receives at least three or four books which should suffice for the first year. A smart teacher can review the chapters and see how it works in the classroom and even prepare a list of suggestions for the publishers and/or writers and recommend a book depending on learner needs and interests. At the end of the year, don't throw away the books but donate it to the library and if the librarian cites space or staff constraints, start a departmental library which can be managed by a student representative. Another way is to collect old text books of the entire six/seven subjects from other teachers and donate them to the College NSS unit so that the books can be lent or given to the needy learners.

Journals If your college is very academically oriented then do suggest the library to subscribe to international journals like *Association of Business Quarterly* or the *Journal of Business Communication*. If the library is not so keen on spending so much money then for the teachers electronic

resources are available and one can use the NList membership of the college library. Meet the librarian in person to know about electronic resources.

Attendance - Lectures and Tutorials The teacher is expected to take the attendance either by calling out the roll numbers or the standard procedure of taking signatures on printed attendance sheets. Just be careful lest the smart learners might put in proxy signatures for their friends. A good method of keeping a check would be to randomly call out the numbers and count the heads. It goes without saying that at least ten minutes of the lecture time is lost on attendance and the teacher leaving a class and entering another and for the learners to settle down after a lecture. So prepare for at least one hour of the lecture so that you can handle the class for forty minutes. Keep your notes handy for if you finish the lecture early you can switch to dictating notes. Don't be shocked! Yes, the learners are expected to prepare their own notes by visiting the library, many will be disinterested in taking down notes and will ask for printed notes too which might not be possible for the college to provide. You can circulate the notes among the learners but keep a copy for your own reference. For the absentees a copy can be kept in the library, if possible. Don't worry too much, the learners are smart enough to take a picture on their mobiles and upload it on the Facebook or send it through Bluetooth rather than copying it down. This is for the tech-savvy ones. But classroom experience has indicated that nearly 50% of the learners prefer the regular dictation in the class. The creative teacher can also use this opportunity

to help learners practice their listening skills, sharpen their pronunciation, among others. Since oral communication is easily forgotten, the dictated notes help in reinforcing the learning outcomes if the learners have the habit of revising their notes.

One is expected to take at least eight to ten tutorials and advance planning is better. Making the students attend the tutorials is a real challenge. Never mind the attendance, continue with it even if a few interested students turn up and for the absentees give ten minutes during lecture hours for revising what you have done in the tutorial classes. Better still, instead of sitting idle in the staff room, if you find another teacher absent, go to a class and finish your tutorials. For the literature enthusiasts, the tutorials will give a wide scope for initiating the learners to literature. Short and interesting stories are preferable for the attention span of the learners in the tutorial batches in comparatively less as they are exhausted after four to five lectures. Please do avoid arguing with the time-table committee with regards to conducting of the tutorials in the first lecture itself with the hope that you will be able to do more for it is mere idealism!

Memberships As an English teacher enroll yourself for a three year membership of the ELTAI- English Language Teachers Association of India for one of the significant features of this association is that it holds national and international conferences throughout the year at its numerous chapters which are spread all over India and the registration charges for each conference is not more than Rs 1000. The membership charges for three years is

approximately Rs 850, you can go online and check fuller details about the organization. Visit sites like www.conferencealerts.com to see the various seminars and conferences held in your respective subject all over the globe. For every paper that you present at a National Conference, you are eligible for 7.5 marks, for International conferences it is 10 marks and if the paper is published in a national or international journal then it is 10 and 15 marks respectively. The category III research and publications in the PBAS proffers greater details of the marking scheme.

Future Prospects : Setbacks, Challenges and Opportunities Promotions are not due as the Head of the Department for English Department is not considered as separate in commerce Colleges and there is no provision for becoming HODunless you are attached to an Arts college. Put away your dreams of building a community of teachers in the University for the last attempt was handled with a masterstroke: the leading voices were put up in a committee to write a textbook and that was the last we heard of it. HODs who are in Arts Colleges mostly lead as members of Ad-hoc Board of Studies. If you wish to teach at the postgraduate level, keep on presenting and publishing papersin literature and who knows your written work may be recognized and you can teach at the postgraduate level! One very positive aspect of teaching Business Communication is that once you grasp the subject, you have time enough to catch up on your literary readings unlike the literature teachers who have to prepare for their Arts classes. So look forward to continuing your passion for

reading and writing and follow the footsteps of many seniors who have taught Business Communication but have gone on to become writers and their work has been prescribed in European Universities! BEST OF LUCK!