

# Teaching Tai Chi and Qigong

## (Desire, Skill, Patience)

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### Topics:

1. Teaching techniques
2. Class management and structure
3. Teaching the Class
4. Communication and feedback
5. Teaching opportunities

## 1. Teaching techniques

- **Safety** - remove potential hazards and ensure the space is physically safe and sufficiently large for the class.
- **Comfort** - Create a comfortable and secure **physical** and **mental** environment for students.
- **Attitude** - have a positive attitude, enjoy what you do.
- **Specialist skills** - You have spent many years training and learning Tai Chi, so utilise your skills to teach and demonstrate.
- **Preparation** - be prepared with everything you need, check that everything is working.
- **Lesson Plan** - have a lesson plan you can follow, does not have to be too detailed, but list the key elements to be taught in the class/s and the time frames.
- **Plan B** - have a plan B if something goes wrong or does not work; if the class finishes early or runs too long.
- **New venue** - allow time to check for safety and equipment.
- **Self-awareness** - are you tired, bored, distracted - compensate when you teach. Your mood will affect the class.
- **Respect** - expect from, and give respect to, students, particularly seniors. A learning experience and journey for everyone.
- **Teach effectively** - encourage, do not belittle or criticise.
- **Let go of the ego** - think of the students and their needs, not how much you know.
- **Motivation** - motivate and encourage students, focus on little successes of the class and individually.
- **Praise** in public, but correct or criticise in private. Take individual students aside during the break for a little special attention - a different one each class.
- **Be flexible** - if something is out of your control, look for a compromise solution; try not to become stressed or panic.

## 2. Class management and structure

- **Timing.** Start on time - also encourage students to come a little early, not late.
- **Attendance lists** - use attendance lists for auditing and remembering names and contact details.
- **New Vs existing students**
  - Greet, announce and welcome new participants
  - Include an easy section in the class which helps the new participants, eg. Qigong warm-up, Tai Chi walking, etc
  - Accommodate the new, but consider and give priority to the old students
- **Balance** between PRACTICE and TEACHING
  - What are the main aims of the class - practice or teaching?
  - What are the aims of the students - what do they want from the class?
  - Regular (ongoing practice) means you are the leader and provide guidance - allow space and time for errors or reduced ability
  - Teaching includes periods of intensive training and you are the instructor - use the “Stepwise Method” (see description below), but also carefully monitor the progress of the students.
- **Action not Words** - it is the doing and experiencing of movement that Chi enters the body
- **Abilities.** Be aware of your and your students’ ability - young or old, flexible or inflexible, learners or experienced, and their capacity for data retention.
- **Observation.** Observe where some student/s are having problems and focus on or review that particular movement with the whole class at the appropriate time.
- **Positioning.** Arrange students with the most experience in front and at the ends.
- **Break.** Provide a mid-class break - mental, physical and social.
- **Cool down.** Always include a regular “cool-down” or relaxation phase at the end of the class to dissipate tension which students build up during the learning phase of the class.
- **Be human.** Don’t be afraid of making mistakes or using a little humour - we are all human.

## 3. Teaching the Class

- **Learning.** Everyone learns differently, by:
  - **Hearing** (Auditory) need you to explain movements, purpose, origin, function
  - **Seeing** (Visual) need you to demonstrate clearly, eg. difference between flow and micro movements
  - **Doing** (Kinaesthetic) need to repeat the movement, as many times as necessary
  - Most people use a combination of all three for maximum effect.
- **Different.** Seniors and younger students are different, as are their motivation and abilities:
  - **Young students** hunger for **knowledge and experience** - they will push you.
  - **Mature students** are motivated by the **health benefits** - they will trust you.
  - You must **respect** them and they will respect you. Don’t patronise or ‘talk down’.
- **Techniques.** Some teaching techniques that you can use are:
  - Explain the **value** of what you are teaching

- **Be economical** - Students will not be able to absorb and learn the foot, body, arm and hand movements while trying to control the circular flow, gentle resistance, breathing, Song (gentle expansion), Jing (serenity) and Qi (life energy). Teach the physical components first then introduce the more complex concepts later.
  - Take it **slow** - take time to demonstrate and then repeat the movements with the class.
  - **Break it down** - split movements into small, easy to follow parts, give names to the movements and parts to help them remember. Use appropriate visualisation.
  - Use more **repetition**, in an encouraging way at least 3-5 times slowly - sometimes more times than you expect. Include the previous movement and transition to aid retention and body memory.
  - **Modify** the movements for the particular class - senior students will have:
    - Less flexibility
    - Less leg strength
    - Poorer memory
    - Past injuries - necks, shoulders, hips, knees, ankles
  - **Adjust your expectations** - your expectations will be effected by the students - don't set the bar too low or too high:
  - **Patience** is key - you must modify your expectations to their rate of progress and not become impatient or frustrated at a slower pace of learning.
  - Seniors will learn slower than young students, however they are more attentive. They are trying their best, but don't be afraid to push them to improve.
  - Give them **confidence** - Celebrate the small victories. Focus on the positives and what they are doing right. They will then learn and enjoy the benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi.
- **Class structure.** Students will all benefit from a warm-up or Qigong
    - Provide at least 10-15 minutes of **gentle exercise or Qigong** to start - even up to 30 minutes for some senior classes.
    - Be **consistent** - Use repetition, but with **variations** or add new exercises at times to retain their interest and motivation.
    - Include a short **break** to rest, re-hydrate and network - 1 hour of constant learning is too long for seniors. They also see the class as a social outing.
    - Use a simple **cool-down** or Qigong at the end of the class to unwind and release tension built up within the class.
    - Quietly **encourage** those who are either struggling or improving.
  - **Movements Vs Forms.** Seniors, especially those in aged care facilities, may not be able or willing to learn the intricacies and complexities of forms. Alternatives which still teach technique, rhythm, timing and balance are:
    - Teach **Qigong** - Save Tai Chi for your other classes and just teach Qigong.
    - **Tai Chi into Qigong** - Use your skills and experience to teach and repeat individual Tai Chi movements in a consistent or varying order. That is, a cross between Tai Chi and Qigong.
    - If necessary use seated Tai Chi or simplified movements.
  - **Everyone, including yourself should leave the class feeling better than when they arrived.**

## 4. Communication and feedback

- **Be seen and be heard**
  - Ensure students can see what you are demonstrating, have new students close behind you if possible.
  - Use language that can be clearly understood and avoid too much verbosity especially while practicing a movement or form.
  - Speak clearly using clear, concise and precise words to be effective.
  - Integrate the technical, philosophical and complex concepts into the practice, not as a separate component.
- **Communication**
  - Language - use the minimum words required - avoid verbose descriptions of intricate details or philosophies, ie. "lecturing"
  - Do participants hear and understand what you say? Make eye contact.
  - Consistency - be consistent by using the same words for movements
  - Repetition - saying something once is not enough
  - Imagery - use appropriate imagery to assist students understand WHY they are doing WHAT they are doing.
- **Audio aids.** Using audio aids such as music and pre-recorded voice instructions.
  - Use music for Qigong and Practice, silence for teaching
  - Use recorded voice-over instructions where possible for practice
- **Feedback**
  - Verbal - solicit comments from students on what is working or not working
  - Don't be afraid of asking for suggestions from the students
  - Non-verbal - observe if students are struggling, bored, distracted or exhibit other non-learning behaviours
  - Is the Chi flowing or is it being blocked by distractions or lack of motivation?
  - Praise publicly, correct privately

## 5. Teaching Opportunities

Here are some opportunities for teaching to seniors and others to increase your teaching options and opportunities.

- **Community venues:**
  - For seniors: Approach local retirement villages, community centres, disability, etc.
  - For Community: Approach community centres, PCYC
  - Health professionals: approach local medical centres or doctors
  - Distribute brochures
  - Offer a free class/demo
  - Follow up
- **Social** - encourage in-class and post-class socialisation with your classes, introduce them to each other and encourage them to invite friends.

- **Hired venues** - if you already own/hire a venue:
  - Offer a block of classes with long time limits in which they can be used
  - Offer free introductory classes for new members
  - Offer targeted programs where you detect a particular need - eg. Sword, Tai Ch Fan.
- **Contract engagement** - contract to community groups to provide classes on-site:
  - This avoids the overhead of renting venues and student attendance and management.
  - Charge appropriately for your time and effort.

## 6. Stepwise teaching method

The “Stepwise Method” developed by Dr Paul Lam is an effective way of teaching Tai Chi. It is most suited to classes where the ultimate objective of the students is to learn a particular form within a set period of time. See *Teaching Tai Chi Effectively* below.

1. Watch me - break down movements into sections and demonstrate each one separately.
2. Follow me - have the students follow you as you repeat the section together 3 times.
3. Show me - have the students demonstrate the section to you.
4. Repeat steps 2 & 3 if required for each section.
5. Add the next sections in the same way until learning the movement is complete.
6. Practice

## 7. Further reading

- *Teaching Tai Chi Effectively* by Dr Paul Lam and Maureen Miller, Tai Chi Productions, 2006, 2011
- *Success with teaching tai chi to blind students* by Jocelyn Watkin, 2017, <https://www.kiaorataichi.nz/success-with-teaching-tai-chi-to-blind-students/>
- *How to Teach Tai Chi* by David-Dorian Ross, 2018, Youtube.