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Supporting Coast Guard Auxiliary Instructors!

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As we look ahead to the Coast Guard Auxiliary's work in public education, we know that helping our instructors be the best that they can be is critical. A high quality education program that is effective and respected is built upon the strength and capability of its instructor cadre. With this in mind, National staff would like to take a three-step approach to Instructor Development.

The first step will be to provide you, our instructors, with a periodic newsletter that will provide tips, ideas and strategies for use in your classes. We hope that you will find these publications helpful and also hope that you will offer ideas and content for inclusion in future issues.

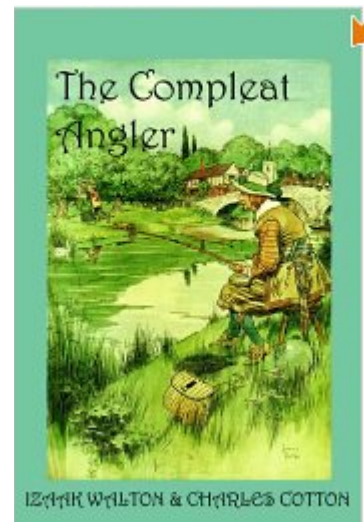
The second step will be to implement an Educational Excellence program. This program will provide an opportunity for all instructors to challenge and improve their teaching skills. An appropriate recognition will also be awarded. It is hoped that this program will be announced in the first quarter of 2013.

The third step will be the updating of our Instructor Qualification program. Our current program has not been reviewed and updated in quite a long time. As we refine other aspects of the Coast Guard Auxiliary's Education program, it is appropriate to review our qualification process. This step will probably not occur until the end of 2013 or early in 2014.

So, there you have it! We hope that you will find these efforts helpful and that you will join us as we work to save lives by strengthening our public education efforts.

The Compleat Instructor

L. Daniel Maxim, ANACO-RB



Izaak Walton wrote a treatise on fishing titled *The Compleat Angler* in 1653. (You can still purchase copies of this book.) An interesting book in many respects, it is described as 'a

celebration of the art and spirit of fishing in prose and verse.’ Walton realized that fishing (particularly what we now call fly fishing) required skill and art; patience, practice, and timing were essential for success. Although analogies are imperfect, there is much in common between fishing and instruction. There is both art and skill involved, timing is often important, and presenting an effective lure is a key objective.

We have chosen *The Compleat Instructor* as the title of this article for the professional development of our Auxiliary instructors. This issue presents a series of tips for effective instruction culled from experience and observation of great and not-so-great instructors. These are intended to be practical ideas to improve your effectiveness in the classroom as opposed to material on the theory of instruction. Subsequent issues will address such topics as use and construction of PowerPoint presentations, similarities and differences between adults and children as learners, reading body language, and handling ‘problem students.’

- Dress appropriately. If you don’t look good in a uniform or don’t have a suitable uniform, wear the Auxiliary blazer. The essential idea is to wear whatever it takes to present a professional appearance. As the commercial states, “you never get a second chance to create a first impression.”
- Arrive in plenty of time (e.g., one hour early) to check the classroom setup and verify that any audio visual (AV) equipment you plan to use is working properly. If possible, bring backup AV equipment to class to use in case the primary equipment fails or cannot be used. If time permits after the AV setup is complete, run through all visuals/video clips. This verifies that there is nothing amiss with the visuals/video clips and serves as a last minute reminder of the presentation flow and content. During this final preparation time, determine the best room lighting settings to view the materials. If the lights are not easily controlled from where you intend to ‘roam,’ make sure you assign someone in the classroom to do this as requested.
- Erase any chalkboards or whiteboards in the classroom even if you don’t intend to use them. Their contents may be distracting and, in any event, makes the classroom look sloppy.
- If possible get the room slightly cooler than you would like it—when students enter, the classroom will warm up. It is important to ensure student comfort.¹
- Start on time. It is an insult to those who come on time to have to wait for latecomers. Try to schedule hourly 10-minute breaks and stick to this schedule—do not let breaks get overlong. Announce any ground rules (e.g., shutting off cell phones, time for lunch break, etc.) before starting the formal presentation.
- If the students don’t know you (or each other), introduce yourself, and any co-instructors, and have the students also introduce themselves in the first class session.

¹ See e.g., <http://sdpl.coe.uga.edu/researchabstracts/thermal.html> for some relevant research on the topic.

You can tell a lot about a person (shyness, assertiveness, potential smart aleck) by the way he/she crafts an introduction. Try to associate names and faces. Make up name tags for future sessions if the classroom design permits. If you do this, refer to students by name in the future. Consider use of “ice-breakers²” if there is sufficient time. One ice-breaker that works is to pair the students and give them a few minutes to talk to each other and then have each student introduce the one he/she was paired with. (This does not work if the students already know each other.)

- Louise Karch offers the following advice: “**Affirm Before You Inform:** Speaking is not about you; it’s about your audience. Before you dive into your topic and deliver value make your audience feel valued. National Speaker’s Association founder Cavett Roberts said ‘People won’t care about what you know unless they know you care.’ Start with heart.”³
- Provide an outline or overview of the presentation. You should also return to the outline to inform the audience where they are as you go along. In short, tell ‘em what you are going to tell ‘em, tell ‘em, and then tell ‘em what you told them.
- Be prepared—you may not need a formal lesson plan, but you should have an outline or PowerPoint to help ensure you stay focused and cover the material completely.
- If possible, use a team of Auxiliarists to assist. They can help with the registration, take lunch orders, display graphics or other exhibits, fix the projector or other AV equipment in the event of a breakdown. Team teaching can be effective and also offers the opportunity to share particular expertise and help develop other instructors. It also provides an opportunity for a break from teaching.
- Know your material well. Presentation skills are important, but you (or whoever is teaching this block) need to know the content thoroughly. Don’t bluff if you don’t know, but get answers for the next class.
- Bring a bottle of water with you. This can be especially useful for Q&A sessions where you can take strategic sips of water to give yourself extra time to think of an appropriate answer.⁴
- Show your enthusiasm about the subject material. If you don’t care about it none of your students will either.
- Smile and be friendly. Demonstrate that you care about your students and their progress. If some appear to be falling behind, see if you can arrange for additional tutoring.

² See e.g., http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf.

³ See <http://www.louisekarch.com/5tipsforagreattalk/>. For additional tips at the beginning of a talk see <http://www.mindvalleyinsights.com/spark-at-the-start/>.

⁴ For more in this vein read <http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~lera/290/lecture5.html>.

- Students have different learning styles; verbal, visual, quantitative. Structure your presentations to appeal to each.⁵ Try saying the same thing several times in different ways. It's all new to your audience, so give them the best chance of understanding you.



- Talk informally as though you were telling your grandmother about the subject. Complexity of expression is not correlated with wisdom, intelligence, and originality; it's perfectly correlated with audience puzzlement and boredom.⁶ Moreover the grandmother model helps keep your language in good taste (unless you have an unusual grandmother!) When using unfamiliar terms remind the audience of the definitions or use these as cues to ask questions. One useful technique is to make the students add a quarter to a glass jar whenever they use a term incorrectly (such as referring to a chart as a map!). Keep it light, use the proceeds of the glass jar to buy M&Ms as rewards for particularly good answers.

- Share your personal experiences, but don't overdo it; very few people care exactly why Japanese Vice Admiral Takao Kurita chose to withdraw during the battle of Leyte Gulf in World War II when he could have made a breakthrough and attacked the transports. And even fewer would like more detail about his life.

- Use of slang can be very colorful and effective (in moderation), but make sure that it is age appropriate **for the audience** (no “Hubba-Hubba,” “23 skidoo,” or “Oh you kid” unless you are speaking to an AARP group) **and for you** (do not pander and use words or phrases you don't understand with those much younger, otherwise you will look *redonkulous*⁷).

- Maintain eye contact with members of the class and try to read non-verbal clues—distraction, boredom, puzzlement, REM sleep, etc.⁸ Keep it interactive—ask questions that require thoughtful answers, not simply “do you understand me?” If student questions are non-relevant or require more



⁵ See e.g., http://www.ndt-ed.org/TeachingResources/ClassroomTips/Learning_Styles.htm for more detail.

⁶ For more like this see <http://www-psych.stanford.edu/~lera/talk.html>.

⁷ See <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=redonkulous> for definition.

⁸ For tips on reading body language see <http://www.wikihow.com/Read-Body-Language>, <http://www.businessballs.com/body-language.htm>, <http://psychology.about.com/od/nonverbalcommunication/ss/understanding-body-language.htm>, and <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorgan/2012/10/25/7-surprising-truths-about-body-language/>.

time than is available, handle these offline, or write reminders on a “parking lot” that you plan to cover at the end if time permits. Remember to be polite in responding to questions (there is no such thing as a stupid question). Where possible ask other students to respond as in—what about that, does anyone have any thoughts or experiences to share?

- If you use PowerPoint (and I recommend that you do) ***do not read directly from the slides except for emphasis***. Students can read faster than you can speak and you lose synchronization and ultimately their attention. Choose only selected points on each slide for discussion if these are difficult or particularly noteworthy. One idea that works is to ask (at the beginning of the first hour) for a show of hands for those who can read the English language. When the students have all responded in the affirmative, then state: “Therefore, there is no need for me to read what is printed on the slides to you.”
- Consider using props as well as PowerPoint. Models of boats, buoys, charts, lifejackets, etc. can add interest to your talk.⁹ And figure out the best way to present these, perhaps by having an assistant display these at the proper place in the talk.
- Solicit feedback from your students and make revisions to the material and your presentation based on that feedback. Fine tune your presentation by making modifications in successive presentations. If an exam is included, look for patterns of wrong answers to examination questions to revise your presentation and perhaps make recommendations to course developers. This is an opportunity for continuous improvement.
- Avoid disturbing mannerisms, such as blocking the projector, jingling keys in your pocket, etc. Related to this point do not fall into the trap of filling the pauses in your presentation with, “ahs, ums, you knows, etc.” It’s better to have a moment or two of quiet between your significant points.¹⁰
- If feasible, walk around (but don’t pace except for effect) so that you can “visit with” each student. This is particularly important for courses/lectures (such as navigation) where you may want to oversee the work of students. (Here is another opportunity to use more than one instructor.) Unless there are no alternatives, don’t stand in one place throughout your talk.



⁹ See <http://www.cs.duke.edu/brd/Teaching/Giving-a-talk/giving-a-talk.html>.

¹⁰ See <http://www.meetingtomorrow.com/cms-category/how-to-give-a-great-talk-and-not-embarrass-yourself->.

- If you are asked a question, move towards the audience before you respond. Because some members of the class may not have heard the question, repeat the question before responding. Consider redirecting the question to others in the audience—Can anyone answer Mr. Smith’s question?
- When you begin to gain experience as a teacher, ask someone to videotape you and try grading yourself using a checklist.¹¹ *US Navy carrier-qualified pilots are arguably the finest we have. Yet every carrier landing is graded by qualified observers. Think about having a good instructor in the class with you to observe and offer feedback.*
- Mentoring: exploit opportunities to team teach with weaker or less experienced instructors (see above). This can be a valuable learning experience for the instructors being mentored and also helps to ensure that students get good quality instruction.
- Unless it is necessary to vacate the classroom for other classes or the facility is closing, plan to stay around after your talk to answer questions or otherwise interact with the students. *But make sure that you end the formal presentation on time. Some students have schedules to maintain and it is just as rude to keep them afterwards as it is to start late.*
- Strive for continuous improvement! Take the time to read material on best practices¹² and see if they work for you. And keep learning about your subject(s). Heraclitus of

¹¹Taken from *Extraordinary Teachers—Teachers that Make a Difference*. Quick, C. R., and Quick, D. R., (2007). International Center for Leadership Education.

¹² Here are some web sites of possible interest when searching for best practices:

http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/cii/resources/outcomes/best_practices.asp,

<http://laurelandassociates.com/training-best-practices/>,

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/four-characteristics-of-outstanding-teachers/>, <http://voices.yahoo.com/qualities-outstanding-teacher-226954.html>,

<http://drbruce.hubpages.com/hub/Five-Traits-of-an-Outstanding-Teacher>,

<http://www.inifac.org/articles/ARSEPAR.pdf>,

and

<http://www.exforsys.com/career-center/facilitator/characteristics-of-excellent-facilitator.html>.

And here are a few more related to giving a good presentation

http://headrush.typepad.com/creating_passionate_users/2006/07/a_few_more_pres.html,

<http://www.fastcompany.com/28151/now-we-have-your-complete-attention>,

<http://snarketing2dot0.com/2007/05/10/how-to-give-a-great-presentation-in-nine-words/>,

http://acmg.seas.harvard.edu/education/presentations/carlton_presentations.pdf,

<http://www.wbsonline.com/resources/how-to-give-a-great-presentation/>,

and

<http://www.montroseact.com/DocumentView.aspx?DID=31>.

Ephesus is often quoted as writing: “You can never step into the same river; for new waters are always flowing on to you.” So it is with your classes—no class is ever the same. The students may be younger or older, shift in gender composition, bright or dull, alert or tired. And you may not be the same instructor either. You need to be flexible (the Coast Guard uses the motto Semper Gumby) and adaptable in response to new challenges.

