

YOGA ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA
HATHA YOGA TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM
EFFECTIVE TEACHING SKILLS

Yoga Association of Alberta Goal: *To promote high standards of yoga instruction through teacher training and certification.*

ROLE OF TEACHER

Teacher acts as a mirror to students' experiences, conditioning.

1. To be the overseer / the witness to students' conditions. To observe their physical patterns, emotional challenges, habitual actions, etc.
2. To make the practice about the students in the class, not about the teacher's own needs.
3. To help students to see the reality of their situations. To empower students to notice for themselves – leads to autonomy / freedom.
4. To give students permission to be where they are and to respect their current condition.
5. To begin where students are and take them where they haven't been before by giving them a tool that will help them.
6. To direct students to focus on their actual experience over techniques.
7. To help students cultivate beneficial attitudes and actions.
8. To develop practices that work on the body, breath, thinking mind, intellect, emotional state.
9. To treat students equally and appropriately.
10. To teach by modeling or inspiring rather than telling.

ATTITUDE OF TEACHER

Follow the Yamas and Niyamas.

1. Stay centered.
2. Show your love and enthusiasm for yoga through your practice and actions; through your gestures and expressions; through your voice and words.
3. Be inspirational and motivational.
4. Show and admit to your limitations in any area – physical limitations, scope of your knowledge, etc.
5. Be modest. Be honest.
6. Be non-discriminatory.
7. Give honest feedback in a non-harming way.
8. Be respectful, polite, compassionate and courteous.
9. Be patient with yourself and with your students.
10. Be confident and strong in your words and actions.
11. Honour and respect the sources of your knowledge.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT

Relationship between teacher and student is one of the keys to success.

1. Teacher must act in such a way as to inspire trust.
2. Teacher and student must respect each other. If they don't the relationship may not last.

3. Teacher: "I have experience. I am not just a scholar. I have tested these teachings and I know they have worked for me. You (student) must experiment and evaluate whether they also work for you and become curious and eager to explore them in either case in order to get knowledge and benefits. I (teacher) am willing to support you and assist you in that exploration."
4. Teacher: "I must do my best to support my students in their journey and honour my own teacher."
5. Teacher must respect and maintain teacher / student relationship, e.g., teacher must avoid developing sexual relationships with students.

LESSON PLANNING

What do you want the students to learn, enjoy and experience?

1. Observe students and match the practice to their needs. Observation and reflection are important in determining the purpose of the practice, that is, in determining what is needed.
2. Identify purpose of practice. For example:
 - *Srsti* - Build up the body.
 - *Ciksana* - Perfect the body.
 - *Raksana* - Maintain or sustain student where he / she is at in order to be able to carry out his / her responsibilities.
 - *Cikitsa* - Therapeutic approach for health problems, mental disturbances, etc.
 - *Adhyamika* - Inner search. Inner aspects become more important.
3. Use one tool rather than many. This often leads to greater insight.
4. Keep things simple.
5. Adapt for special needs, situations, and conditions. Design to fit a particular context.
6. Move from gross to subtle.
7. Set up something and then take it deeper, more subtle.
8. Set the intention.

TEACHING A CLASS

Teach from your experience and knowledge. Remember how it felt being a beginner.

Time

1. Arrive early and make sure that the room is ready, e.g., right temperature, tidy, etc.
2. Start class on time.
3. At the end of class, give students time and energy to ask questions.
4. End class on time.
5. Leave room ready for next teacher.

Room Arrangement

Arrangement is affected by size (large, small) and shape (round, rectangle, square) of room.

1. Large room – use a corner or smaller space for optimal communication and spatial reference.
2. Small room – register only the number of students that comfortably fit in the room and that allows for each participant to have his / her personal space.
3. Arrange mats and props in a neat and orderly pattern (*saucha*), e. g., rectangular room – mats parallel to short wall; place props on side of mat. Neatness makes moving around the room efficient and safe and fosters clarity.
4. Reduce distractions like doors, windows, mirrors, clocks, etc.
5. Arrange according to the poses being taught.

Teacher Position

1. Position yourself and the students in such a way that you can see all or as many of the students as possible and that they can see you, e.g., taller students at the back.
2. Face the students when speaking.
3. Stand and walk around the room to connect with students.
4. Move around the room in the same direction rather than randomly in order to make sure that all students are noticed and /or given attention and to maintain a grounded, focused atmosphere.

Student Position

1. Group students in such a way that they feel comfortable, e. g., with friends or with like limitations or physical concerns.
2. Let students have some choice in where they want to be. For example, if a student's height or size blocks your view of other students too much, then either change your position or ask the student if he / she would be willing to change position.

First Class

1. Greet / meet students.
2. Indicate where shoes, coats and valuables can be placed.
3. Give the location of washrooms, yoga equipment and props, fire exits, etc.
4. Direct placement of mats and props.
5. Ask students about their yoga stories, physical limitations or injuries.

Pacing

1. Pace according to the level of the students. For example, give new students more freedom to make mistakes.
2. Pace fast enough to get students' attention, yet slow enough for them to understand and absorb ideas; to work and adjust according to their needs. Fast pace can lead to contracted and inhibited breathing. Slow pace can lead to fatigue.
3. Pace the class such that you have taught a well-rounded class within the time allotted.
4. Pace class to have time for relaxation, breath work, meditation, closure, clean up, etc.

Voice

1. Speak loud enough for all students to hear. Project your voice to the back of the room.
2. Stay relaxed and grounded. Speak on your out breath.
3. Exhibit mature tone – like you are talking to adults.
4. Use an inspiring, enthusiastic, commanding, authoritative, yet kind tone.
5. Adjust your tone and tempo to focus the students' attention on the quality of the practice, e.g., strong and quick for energizing poses; soft and slow for relaxation.
6. Do not speak too quickly while explaining a pose, or the philosophy, and enunciate well.

Instructions

All students – beginners and advanced – should be given proper instruction.

Two types of Instruction:

- Command – press, draw, extend, lengthen, ground, firm – creates power
- Passive – feel, sense, release, allow – creates the state of the pose

1. Speak clearly.
2. Use plain language.
3. Define specific terms when necessary, e.g., anatomy terms, Sanskrit words.

4. Clarify intentions of postures. Mention cautions.
5. Give just the right amount of information. Be economical.
6. Give one thing to focus on.
7. Be direct and precise with your instructions, e.g., “Stand in Tadasana.”
8. Choose words that are associated with the immediate experience of the students.
9. Be direct. Avoid using expressions such as: “If you want to...” or “If you feel like...”
10. Focus on the students’ experiences, rather than prescriptions. Use expressions such as:
 - “Notice what you are doing.” “Notice your own experience.” or “What happens if...?” Avoid saying “You should...”
 - You are working with people, not a condition. Have students do something and then see how they react or respond to it. Say, “If you do this look what might happen.” or “Try this and observe what happens.” Avoid using “Do...” “; “Don’t do...” for a condition.
11. Specific instructions – Make it clear when instructions are general or specific for an individual student by using his / her name and changing your voice.
12. After giving the instruction, pause and repeat.
13. Direction of Movement
 - Acknowledge if you are mirroring the students or not.
 - Refer to front/back leg or left/right leg.
 - Use parts of the room for reference – back, front, doors, windows, etc.
 - Ask questions – Is the front knee turned in or out?
 - Use comparisons – Move this way and then that way and experience the difference.

Observation

1. Give instructions and then observe students carrying out your instructions.
2. Teach from what you observe.
3. Look for what is right then improve.
4. After giving the instructions, pause and observe. If instructions are not carried out **REPEAT, REPHRASE AND TRY AGAIN.**
5. Walk around so you do not miss anyone.
6. Identify students with limitations or special needs.
7. Observe attitude, breath, skin, facial expression, energy, eyes, form, etc.
8. Observe where the students are touching their bodies. This will show you where they are experiencing discomfort or pain.

Demonstrations

1. Useful, but they can slow down a class.
2. Timing of the demonstration – before or after students do a pose.
3. Get props ready before demonstration.
4. Position yourself so that all the students can see you. The students in front should sit / kneel so that the students in the back can see.
5. Wait until everyone is present before starting the demonstration.
6. Make eye contact to ensure students are watching.
7. Name the pose (Sanskrit / English). Talk about the the benefits of the pose.
8. Demonstration can include modifications first and then final pose, if appropriate.
9. Point or gesture to the body part that you are focusing on.
10. Make demonstration clear and concise – short is more effective than long.
11. Repeat demonstration concisely once or twice to make your points clear.
12. Ensure verbal instructions match physical movements.
13. Show how to move into and out of a pose. **MORE INJURIES OCCUR WHEN COMING OUT OF A POSE.**
14. Demonstrate misalignments only after you have observed them, not before.
15. If you cannot demonstrate what you are teaching, choose and ask a student so you can be clear and effective. Thank the student for demonstrating.

Adjustments

1. Let students know you do adjustments.
2. Let them know that they can request to not be adjusted.
3. Adjust those students that need improvement the most.
4. Use verbal instructions prior to physical adjustments.
5. Ensure verbal instructions connect to physical adjustments.
6. Let the student know you are going to adjust him / her before adjusting.
7. Position yourself for the most effective and beneficial adjustment.
8. Stabilize the student with your body, a prop, etc.

Touching

Types of touch:

- Appropriate - investigating, directing, alerting, adjusting, stabilizing, comforting.
 - Inappropriate / unethical - random, unnecessary, sensual, invasive, e.g., touching sexual, sensitive or vulnerable areas.
1. Ask permission.
 2. Convey specific qualities - kindness, sensitivity, safety, confidence, professionalism and authority.
 3. Release touch slowly so that the student does not become unbalanced or shocked.
 4. If you should accidentally touch a inappropriate body part or area, apologize and move on.