

from Both

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In the course of my career as a magazine editor, and because of my passion for quilting and related arts, I have attended a lot of classes. I have made a few observations over the years about what makes an exceptional teacher... and equally important, what qualities are needed to be a good student.

Are You a Good Teacher?

Teaching takes a special talent, especially creative teaching. If you are a machine quilting teacher, you have the unique situation of teaching mostly adults, and having to know how to deal with multiple machine types at the same time. You must know your material, be comfortable speaking in front of others, be prepared for mechanical issues and be aware of time constraints. The situations listed here are possible scenarios in any given classroom. How would you measure up?

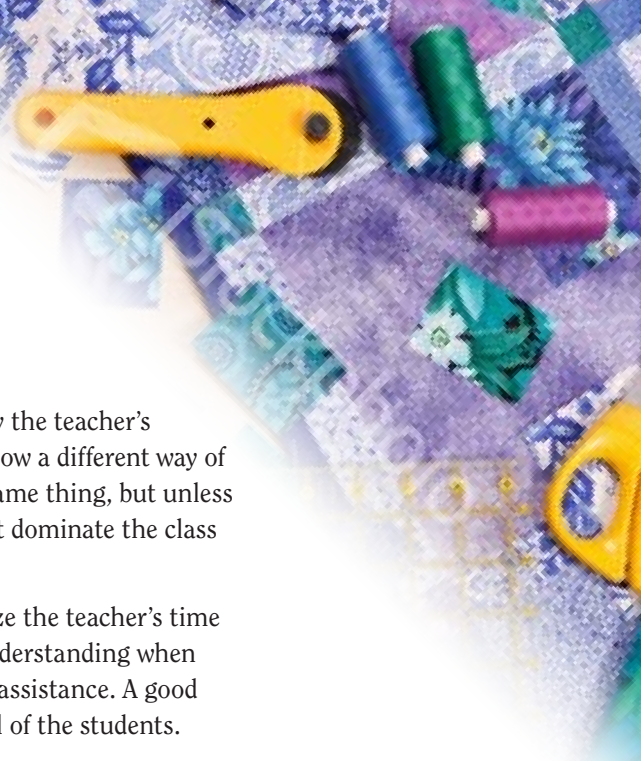
- ❖ The exceptional teacher knows his/her topic. The teacher has either developed the technique which the class addresses, or been sufficiently trained to teach it. The poor teacher reads from the manual, book or pattern. In the worst case, the teacher depends on knowledgeable students to fill in the gaps.
- ❖ The teacher is responsible for letting the students know which books, patterns, supplies or tools are needed long before the day of the class. At the very least, the supply list should be provided to the shop/show venue with enough time for them to get the information to attendees well in advance of the class date. It takes a lot of time away from the scheduled class if students have to rush out and buy the necessary tools on the spot, or have to borrow tools from other students. Do not include items on the supply list which will not be used in the class. The expense and time taken to obtain unnecessary supplies is an unfair burden on your students.

- ❖ A good teacher recognizes that there will be students of all skill levels in the class. Be clear and concise. Take care not to leave anyone behind, but balance that with the importance of not holding up the rest of the class for one student. If one or more students truly cannot understand the instructions, arrange some private time away from the class to help them. Do not merely ignore their needs or tell them to buy your book. After all, they paid you to teach them.
- ❖ Interact with the students. Engage everyone and allow questions, but also know when to move on. Do not let overly aggressive students monopolize the class conversations. Keep the off-topic discussions to a minimum.
- ❖ Be sure to reach out to all students, particularly in hands-on classes. Walk around, offer encouragement and make constructive comments.
- ❖ Incorporate any items you sell (books, DVDs, tools) in an informational way. Show how to use the item, how it will make things easier, but do not push it on your students. They came to learn your technique. If you turn your class into an infomercial, you will lose their interest, and respect, quickly.
- ❖ Ask for feedback. Take the constructive comments to heart and use it to improve your skills.

How Are Your Student Skills?

Being a good student means more than just showing up. Being prepared, understanding what you want to get out of the class and proper behavior all combine to make you a welcome addition, not a thorn in the teacher's side!

Sides



- ❖ Do not wait until the last minute to sign up for the class. You may be unpleasantly surprised to find that the class is full, or that it was cancelled because not enough students signed up. This is particularly important when the teacher is traveling from a distance.
- ❖ Emergencies happen, but if you know that the dates will not work for you due to a conflict, let the organizers know with as much advance notice as possible. Refunds sometimes depend on the length of time left before the class and can be prorated, or even denied.
- ❖ Arrive on time and prepared. Read the class description and understand just what the class is offering. Check out the teacher's website if he/she is unknown to you or if you are unclear what the class is really about.
- ❖ Know your skill level. Do not sign up for an advanced class if you know you are closer to the confident beginner level. You will only frustrate yourself, and hold up the other students if the teacher has to spend time teaching you skills you should have already had in order to participate fully in the class.
- ❖ Be sure to have the necessary supplies in advance. There may not be time at the beginning of the class to purchase them, or the venue may not even offer these items.
- ❖ *Turn off* cell phones, blackberries, pagers and the like. Keep personal conversation to a minimum. Do not compete with the teacher. He or she is there to impart important information not only to you, but to the other students as well.
- ❖ Pay attention and try the teacher's method. You may know a different way of accomplishing the same thing, but unless you are asked, do not dominate the class with 'your' way.
- ❖ Try not to monopolize the teacher's time and attention. Be understanding when other students need assistance. A good teacher will get to all of the students.
- ❖ Do not get discouraged if the technique is not as easy as you thought and you have to struggle a bit. Try to realize that this is your first attempt, and consider it practice.
- ❖ Fill out the teacher evaluation honestly. Give constructive criticism, if necessary, about the materials or the teacher. Complaining that the room was too hot, or cold, is out of the teacher's control.
- ❖ Do not ask the teacher for extra handouts "for my friends that could not be here." The materials in the class are usually written in such a way that they follow along with the instruction. It does not benefit anyone to get a handout without proper instruction.
- ❖ Never, and I mean *never*, copy a teacher's handouts. These are copyright protected. Some teachers will sell copies, but they are intended for *your* use, not for you to undermine the teacher's ability to teach the class to others at a later date. And along those lines, do not take a class and then go back to your guild or group and offer to teach it. This is also a copyright violation, unless you have complete permission from the teacher. If you want to teach, develop your own class and materials.

The next time you walk into a classroom, whether as a teacher or a student, remember these simple rules, respect each other, and most of all, have fun! 