

# CHALK TALK

## *A Recipe for Student Empowerment*



Naomi Norman

### *Ingredients:*

- One large basket of ancient Roman or Greek pottery sherds
- One classroom of interested archaeology students (if you only have uninterested students, use them instead)
- One stopwatch

### *Instructions:*

- Divide the students into three or four groups
- Pour the contents of the basket in front of each group of students, dividing the pottery as evenly as possible among the groups
- Ask each group to sort the sherds using any system that seems logical
- After five minutes, ask each group to describe its classification system to the other groups
- Gather all the sherds into the basket; redistribute and ask the students to re-sort and re-classify
- After five minutes, have each group describe its new classification
- Repeat as often as you wish
- Re-assemble all the students into one group and pour all of the pottery in front of them; begin to re-sort the pottery, asking the students questions about what they see and what it might mean as you re-sort the pottery, bringing order out of chaos

**T**his is a simple exercise that encourages students to touch, examine, and interrogate real material from classical antiquity—material that previously they may have seen only in museums and have been forbidden to touch. At the same time, this exercise engages critical thinking skills and instructs students in fundamental principles of archaeology. And it's fun.

Year after year in my archaeology classes, I see that this exercise helps train students to interpret archaeological material and allows them to simulate the experience of field archaeology. Archaeologists use pottery—which is a critical linchpin in classical archaeology—to date a site through the concepts of seriation and typology. When I just lecture about these concepts, I see the students' eyes glaze over; it's archaeological hocus-pocus to them.

On the one hand, I can tell them that when an archaeologist is very familiar with a particular type of object, she can perceive changes and relationships between decoration, shape, and proportions that she can use to produce a chronological sequence for that object; but they don't believe me. Instead they try to memorize the sequence, and frequently fail. On the other hand, when students themselves look at objects and notice characteristics of the objects and observe changes between one group of objects and

another, they discover for themselves the basic categories of analysis in classical archaeology. They see seriation and typology at work; they discover the categories and describe them to other students. Because they work in groups, they are modeling for one another the processes of archaeological analysis and interpretation.

Similarly, as they are asked to sort a slightly different collection of material, they model for one another the process of reworking and refining a hypothesis in light of new data. When I ask the students to look at the entire collection of pottery and re-sort it under my guidance, they discover how much of their classification and interpretation was correct; as I ask them a series of questions and provide some additional information, they see how to enlarge their hypotheses and how to use pottery to answer larger questions about ancient society. In all of this, I ask the questions and they supply (albeit with my prodding) the answers. The exercise gives the students confidence in their ability to do this kind of work. It no longer seems like archaeological hocus-pocus; rather than seeing only facts to memorize, they see a process, a method that is based on observable characteristics that the students themselves can master. In short, it empowers them to think like archaeologists. Only at that point am I ready to begin lecturing. 🐼





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Teaching Tips from the  
UGA Teaching Academy

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Editor

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## INTRODUCTION

This project to gather tips on effective teaching was initiated in October of 2009 (the tenth anniversary of the UGA Teaching Academy) in honor of the University's 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary, celebrated in the spring of 2010. A colleague of mine on the Executive Committee of the Academy, Lloyd Rieber, has referred to the collection as a compendium of "practical wisdom." Ronald Simpson, an important force behind the advancement of teaching at the University in the modern era, encouraged the project with this observation: "I taught for twenty years a course on 'College Teaching' to Ph.D. students from around the campus and I came to learn that small, helpful teaching tips were usually more valuable than theory and philosophy."

In this spirit, these pages present insights from several of the University's Meigs and Russell Professors, as well as from other members of the Teaching Academy who volunteered to participate—sixty-nine instructors in all from across the leafy glades of the Athens campus. Most every discipline and style of teaching is represented here, along with almost every College, School, and Faculty at the University; the Academy favors no particular discipline or pedagogy. The hoop that binds the staves together is the magic of good teaching. As Professor Conrad Fink correctly notes in his contribution to this collection, no single or simple answer exists for the achievement of successful teaching. Still, each of us can benefit from reading about the experiences of colleagues with records of instructional excellence.

The title of this volume, *Chalk Talk*, is something of an antiquation in this age of PowerPoint, white boards, and video presentations. Old fashioned blackboards and white chalk dust that covers the instructor by the end of the day have gone the way of the dinosaurs in most classrooms. (Only two of the essays here mention chalk.) The title, though, attempts to capture the unchanging essence of teaching: an instructor, a student, and a means for displaying ideas. The instructional tools may now be increasingly electronic, but the basic ingredients endure. For the sentimental, the title may also evoke pleasant thoughts of the old fashioned classroom, perhaps of Mr. Chips and the boys at Brookfield School seated before a crackling fireplace savoring tea and crumpets, as portrayed by James Hilton in *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1933), the endearing tale of the joy that accompanies a life of teaching. The title aside, one will find in this compendium a feast of ideas about teaching. These essays suggest a wide range of approaches to enliven the classroom, everything from the use of costumes, scavenger hunts, and group projects to memorable scientific experiments, role-playing, debates, quiz shows, guest speakers with unique historical recollections—even murder (of sorts).

It has been an enormous pleasure for me to assemble the thoughts of my colleagues on the subject of teaching and I believe that many other faculty members, as well as teachers at all levels of education, will find this a memorable reading experience that will carry over into their own classrooms. I want to thank each of the contributors. They had a short deadline and received no financial remuneration; these essays came from the heart, in support of the teaching mission. I also want to express my appreciation to the staff of the University Printing Department: Manager Max G. Harrell and Customer Service Representative Rick Marr for their unfailing courtesy and sure guidance, as well as Senior Graphics Designer William Reeves, whose outstanding sense of design and professional presentation can be seen on every page of this volume. Though largely unheralded, the Printing Department is truly one of the University's prize operations. Deserving special notice, too, are three members of the Teaching Academy's Executive



Committee who helped with proofreading chores: Professors Claiborne Van C. Glover, Lloyd P. Rieber, and Fran N. Teague. They were joined by two of the University's top Ph.D. candidates in International Affairs: Marie Milward and Allison Shelton. On behalf of the Teaching Academy, I would also like to thank Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Jere Morehead for his support of the project and his career-long devotion to the advancement of teaching at the University of Georgia.

Let me say a word or two about the purposes of the Academy. During a campus visit in the spring of 1999, Dr. Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, invited the University of Georgia to establish a teaching academy as part of the Foundation's initiative to foster a national network of these institutions. The goal of these academies is to provide a structure, along with support and a forum, for the scholarship of teaching and learning. A small group of faculty took Dr. Shulman's invitation to heart and met with Dr. Tom Dyer, then Vice President of Instruction, to discuss the feasibility of this initiative. Dr. Dyer sent a memo of inquiry to all Meigs and Russell teaching award recipients, as well as Lilly and Senior Fellows, along with Regents, Research, and University Professors, to ask about their interest in forming and participating in such an organization. An advisory committee was then formed, and on October 27, 1999, the University officially founded the UGA Teaching Academy with thirteen charter members.

As set down in its mission statement (see Appendix A), the Academy is meant "to promote and celebrate excellence in teaching and to foster learning through inquiry." It has the further goals of encouraging faculty leadership on behalf of teaching and learning, advocating the development of effective educational environments, and fostering learning through inquiry. Responsibility for guiding its work lies with the Executive Board. Dr. Joseph M. Broder, an Academy Charter Member, has served as the inspiring Director of the Board throughout its first decade. He is assisted by a rotating group of ten faculty members on the Academy's Executive Committee, as well as by an able staff assistant, Stefani K. Hiller. Over the years, many distinguished faculty have been selected for the Board, and the Academy has inducted over 225 members—the majority of whom continue to serve as active classroom instructors.

Each year, the Academy's Executive Committee plans and organizes a symposium on teaching, usually held in the mountains of North Georgia in the spring and graciously funded by the University's Provost and Vice President for Instruction. The Academy also sponsors a reception for the annual Founders Day Speaker, organizes workshops for its members, and supports campus lectures on pedagogy presented by visitors and the University's own faculty. Each fall semester, new faculty members who have displayed significant abilities as instructors are inducted into the Academy at a banquet. The objective throughout the year is to hold high the banner of teaching at the University.

In a famous moment in British history, the incomparable Lord Nelson sent a simple but inspiring message to his fleet as it joined arms against the French armada at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. "England expects each man this day to do his duty," he signaled with semaphore flags. The citizens of Georgia have expectations, too. They seek the highest level of instructional excellence from the faculty at the State's flagship University. As the essays in this collection indicate, members of the faculty take this expectation seriously and seek each day to do their duty.

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