



The Power of Best Practice Cards for Faculty Development

22 Principles & 34 Strategies

Adapted from *The Professor's Manual* by Victoria Nesnick, Ed.D.

Best practice cards:

- are long-lasting, handy reference tools, and a proven method to enhance teaching and consequently student learning;
- can be very helpful when created by educators or administrators with expertise and/or a strong interest in researching a specific area of the teaching-learning process, and wish to share that knowledge and experience;
- whether commercially or privately created, have a tremendous professional value to current and aspiring: educators, tutors, teacher assistants, educational administrators, and directors of teaching and learning centers;
- are especially effective when comprised of at least two essential components:
 - a numbered list of guiding/empowering principles (universal truths/truisms) about teaching and learning, and
 - a numbered list of teaching-learning strategies that can be implemented in a course almost immediately;
- although a bit challenging to create, can also be fun and rewarding because they provide opportunities to be creative in a very helpful, meaningful, and memorable way.

How & Why Best Practice Cards Are Helpful

- 1. The Writing Principle:** Writing can help you clarify your thinking and can give you a sense of control over your task.
Strategy #1: Commit your thoughts in writing.
- 2. The Written Plan Principle:** Committing a plan in writing increases the likelihood that it will be achieved.
Strategy #2: Use best practice cards as a written plan for your success in a specific area.
- 3. The Written List Principle:** A written list tends to be empowering. It can bring order to chaos and help you select essential points from an overwhelming sea of concepts and tasks. This is because humans process and remember data more quickly and easily when it is formatted as a written list rather than as a long verbal or written narrative. Even without access to the list, our spatial memory helps us remember the item's location on the list. A written list strengthens learning via visual memory. Recalling data strengthens that knowledge and aids in its future retrieval.
Strategy #3: Format your best practice cards as written lists of principles and strategies.
- 4. The Numbered-List Principle:** A numbered list is an effective way to: organize, sequence, highlight, and prioritize, which make data more manageable. It can be skimmed easily and provides a space to place and locate data. This facilitates understanding and future recall.
Strategy #4: Number principles and strategies in a meaningful, purposeful manner rather than randomly.
- 5. The Finite Principle:** A list contains a finite number of items which can be alluring, reassuring, easier to read, faster to comprehend, and easier to retain than endless volumes of ideas and suggestions.
- 6. The Procrastination Principle:** A list can help prevent you from procrastinating because it can help you focus on tackling one task, or item, at a time.
- 7. The Stress / Anxiety Reliever Principle:** A list that is designed to focus on the core of what needs to be achieved, can help relieve stress. Such a list has often been called "a shortcut to achievement".
- 8. The Tool-Box Principle:** A task is more effectively completed when the needed tools are easily accessible.
Strategy #5: Add best practice cards to your educational toolbox and refer to them often.
- 9. The Handy Reference Principle:** Having a convenient place to file, store, archive, and retrieve lists of valuable data helps you get and stay organized, increases usefulness of that data, and saves you valuable research time.
Strategy #6: Use best practice cards as a convenient system to remind yourself of research-based, highly effective, teaching and learning principles and strategies.
- 10. The Motivation Principle:** Best practice cards serve as motivational tools to improve and strengthen your teaching effectiveness. Succeeding at one item can motivate you to tackle the next.
Strategy #7: On your cards, include teaching strategies for which you want to become proficient.
- 11. The Active Engagement Principle:** Learning is strengthened when we are actively involved (physically, mentally, and emotionally) in our learning process.
Strategy #8: Individually or collaboratively, create your own best practice cards or revise existing cards to meet your specific needs and interests.
- 12. The Focused / Targeted Principle:** Creating a best practice card helps you stay mentally focused and serves as an external memory. Each reading reinforces the content.
Strategy #9: Use a catchy/captivating title and subtitles.
Strategy #10: Focus on realistic, changeable behaviors that you can perform without becoming frustrated or giving up.

How to Create Your Own Highly Effective Best Practice Card

- 13. The Collaborative Principle:** Partnerships and teamwork can create synergism and enhance learning and recall.
Strategy #11: Consider working with a colleague, or small group of colleagues, to create relevant, useful cards.
Strategy #12: Periodically, share ideas with colleagues.
Strategy #13: Collect valuable content by drawing on one another's wealth of knowledge and experiences.
Strategy #14: Expand your knowledge by researching best practices shared in academic/educational literature.
- 14. The Quick-Read / Reader-Friendly Principle:** Concise, short bits of to-the-point, stand-alone items can be easily read and understood in brief intervals.
Strategy #15: Organize data in a logical sequence. Remember that poorly sequenced items can inhibit, prevent, and discourage learning.
Strategy #16: Maintain a consistent structure when formatting your card. It will strengthen learning and recall.
Strategy #17: Focus attention by using headings, subheadings, easy-to-read fonts, bold type, and italics.
Strategy #18: If intending to share your card with others, remember to keep red/green color blindness in mind.
Strategy #19: Strive for simplicity. Eliminate unnecessary, potentially overwhelming or confusing information.
Strategy #20: Omit needless words.
Strategy #21: Avoid repetition.
Strategy #22: Maintain a positive tone. Avoid negative comments.
Strategy #23: Avoid using absolute words such as "always" and "never". Typically, they are inaccurate and behavior is rarely that consistent.
Strategy #24: Conclude with a motivational, positive comment or quotation.
- 15. The Goal Principle:** Research indicates that setting goals is a powerful strategy to improve productivity and organizational effectiveness.
Strategy #25: Articulate an attainable goal, or action plan, for yourself regarding the number of topics for which you want to create a best practice card.
Strategy #26: Include both proximal/short-term and distal/long-term goals.
- 16. The First Step Principle:** Successful first steps help promote and motivate learning and effort.
Strategy #27: Begin with a simple best practice card, so you will experience success and motivate yourself to progress toward more difficult/complex concepts.
- 17. The Self-Efficacy, "I can do it!" Principle:** As your self-efficacy level for a specific task increases, so will your achievement level regarding that specific task.
Strategy #28: Strengthen your teaching self-efficacy level by acknowledging your previous successes and through vicarious experiences. Use this card as a sample of what you can achieve and likely exceed.
- 18. The Introductory / Overview Principle:** Learning, and retention of that learning, is enhanced when we see the "big picture." A best practice card can help create a large portion of the picture.
Strategy #29: Begin your card with an introductory paragraph, an overview of core concepts or major themes.
- 19. The Task Analysis Principle:** Learning a complex task can be simplified and demystified by separating it into its sequential components and addressing each, one at a time.
Strategy #30: Divide your best practice card into its various components and work on each part sequentially.
- 20. The Self-Assessment Principle:** Self-assessment can be a powerful source to enhance and strengthen learning.
Strategy #31: Use best practice cards to: raise your awareness of effective teaching, set your own goals, and as a checklist, or self-evaluation tool, to visualize and strengthen your sense of success.
Strategy #32: Remember: Adding one principle or strategy a day can provide a powerful sense of achievement.
- 21. The Sharing Principle:** Sharing can help to lessen the work and increase the rewards.
Strategy #33: Routinely, share your cards with colleagues.
- 22. The Celebration Principle:** Celebrating an achievement helps reinforce it, as well as your self-efficacy level. Celebrating your achievements can motivate you to try again and perhaps succeed at a higher level.
Strategy #34: Be self-nurturing.

Titles from Dr. Nesnick's Collection of Best Practice Cards

- *Self-Efficacy: The "I can do it!" Belief*
- *Essentials of Course Design: 20 Principles & 36 Strategies*
- *Essentials of Effective Instruction: 40 Principles & 40 Strategies*
- *61 Tendencies of Highly Effective Educators*
- *55 Strategies to Create a Highly Effective Syllabus*
- *25 Common Teaching Mistakes and How to Prevent Them*
- *34 Strategies to Motivate Student Learning*
- *44 Guiding Principles & 44 Strategies to Enhance Learning*
- *49 Strategies to Create Written Tests*
- *80 Strategies for Test Taking*
- *40 Strategies for Professor-to-Student Feedback*
- *380 Ways to Say, "Good Work!"*
- *40 Strategies to End Your Lesson Effectively*
- *36 Tips for Creating Effective PowerPoint Presentations Plus a PPT Scoring Rubric*
- *Creating and Using Scoring Rubrics*
- *Classroom Observation Report and an Abbreviated Form*
- *The Effective Classroom Management Pyramid*
- Plus more