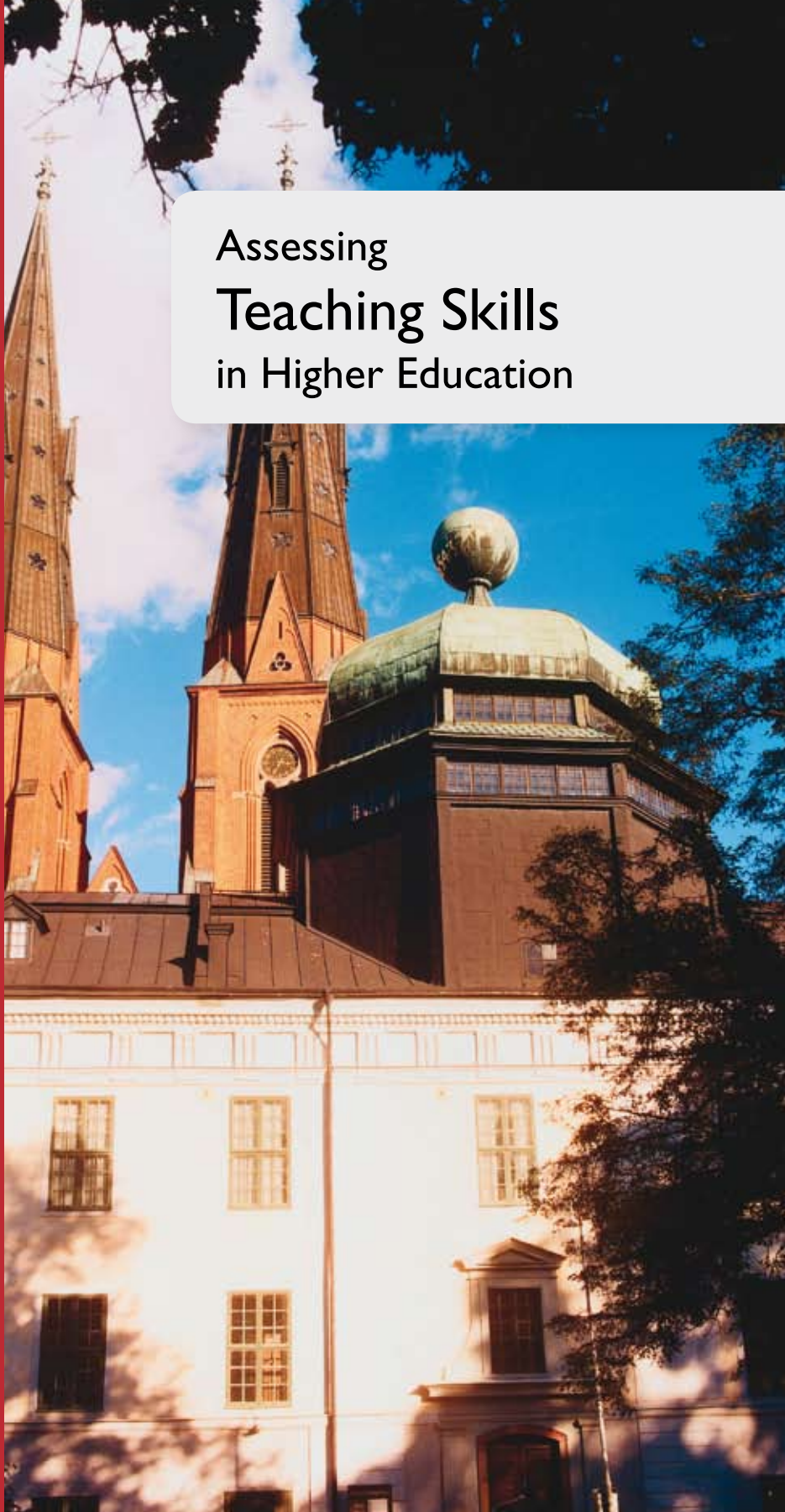




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# Assessing Teaching Skills in Higher Education



# Regulations

How the demand for *demonstrated teaching skills* should be handled when appointing or promoting teachers in higher education is regulated in

- Higher Education Act (HEA)
- Higher Education Ordinance (HEO) and
- Local rules and regulations at individual higher education institutions.

Law and ordinance always apply; they define the framework for what can be prescribed in local regulations. Within this framework the guidelines at different institutions may vary. Therefore, be sure always to check what regulations in addition to law and ordinance apply in individual cases.

The same rules apply to promotion and appointment.

## **A twofold qualification requirement**

Like academic skills demonstrated teaching skills are a qualification requirement for senior lecturer and professor. For qualification as senior lecturer there is an additional qualification requirement of teacher training for teaching in higher education.

The qualification requirements must be met for academic and teaching skills separately. Insufficient skills in one area cannot be compensated by excellent skills in the other.

### Some facts

#### Qualification Requirements

Only a person who has demonstrated academic and teaching skills may be appointed professor.

(3 chapter HEA)

Qualified for appointment as senior lecturer is a person who

- Holds a doctorate ...
- Has taken part in teacher training ...
- Has demonstrated teaching skills.

(4 chapter HEO)

The qualification requirements must be fulfilled for academic and teaching skills separately. Excellent skills in one qualification area cannot compensate for insufficient skills in the other.

(Uppsala university, Guidelines for the appointment of teachers)

### **Who can give expert judgement on teaching skills?**

Academic and teaching skills shall be assessed with the same amount of care. This means that both assessments must be made with equal expertise. It might be appropriate to engage a special referee for the assessment of teaching skills, in addition to the experts engaged for the assessment of academic skills. If so, this should be someone well acquainted with teaching in higher education

#### **Some facts**

#### **Assessment**

As much attention shall be given to the assessment of teaching skills as to the assessment of academic skills.

(4 chapter HEO)

Separate referees for the assessment of teaching skills might be called in. This possibility should always be considered in order to make sure that applicants receive such expert judgement of their teaching skills as they have a right to expect and as is required according to HEA and HEO.

(Uppsala University, Guidelines for the appointment of teachers)

### **Focus on quality**

When assessing teaching skills focus should be on the quality of the teacher's pedagogical work. If the material presented for assessment does not allow judgement of the quality, the teacher shall be given the opportunity to add to the application.

# What Is Meant by Teaching Skills?

The aim of all teaching activity is to facilitate and support student learning. Doing this in the best possible way is to show teaching skill.

## **Teaching qualifications and teaching skills**

Support for student learning can take many different forms. Some support activities can be directly perceived by the students. Other activities are less apparent, but still important since they help create good working conditions for teachers and students and thereby have an influence on student learning.

Teaching (including supervision and examination), the preparation of study guides and learning material, the development of courses and new methods, efficient administration and good pedagogical leadership are examples of different types of pedagogical work. Of importance is also what the teacher has done to develop and maintain his or her pedagogical competence.

The different pedagogical activities a teacher has performed are all part of his or her teaching qualifications. These teaching qualifications are what the teacher presents as a basis for an assessment of teaching skills. Teaching skills are related to the way in which the teacher has performed the activities. The assessment of teaching skills should focus on how the teacher works, not what the teacher has done.

### **Some facts**

#### **Teaching Qualifications and Teaching Skills**

All work activities related to teaching and learning, including the teacher training courses the teacher has taken, together form his or her teaching qualifications.

Teaching skills are related to the way in which the teacher has carried out the activities and what results have been achieved.

It is essential to make a distinction between teaching activities and teaching skills. Comprehensive teaching activities are not by themselves proof of demonstrated teaching skills. When judging teaching skills focus should be on to what extent the teacher has carried out the activities in such a way as to help improve student learning.

### **Applications that display teaching skills**

Qualifications should be presented in such a way as to make possible an assessment of the quality of the performed work. It is up to the applicant to present his or her qualifications in such a way that an objective assessment of the quality can be made. A list of what the teacher has done – a traditional curriculum vitae – is not sufficient basis for an assessment of teaching skills.

#### **Some facts**

#### **Teaching Portfolios**

##### **Teaching portfolios**

offer a model for presenting pedagogical experience in such a way that the teaching skills can be assessed. The basic idea is that the teaching portfolio should demonstrate not only what the teacher has done, but also how the teacher works, why he or she works in that way and what results have followed. See reference list and reading tips for further information on teaching portfolios!

## Teaching skills need to be defined

Every assessment requires both general knowledge about the nature of the phenomenon to be assessed and specific knowledge about what aspects are important for the assessment. In this respect there is no difference between the assessment of academic skills and teaching skills. However, the tradition and consensus that exist in connection with judging academic skills do not exist in relation to teaching skills.

### Some facts

#### Assessment of Qualifications

In principle academic and teaching skills shall be assessed in the same way. In both cases a documentation of the qualifications is required and the assessment shall be based on clearly defined criteria.

SOU 1992:1, Appendix 2

It has been suggested that teaching skills cannot be assessed, at least not in a satisfactory way. That is of course not true. But in order to make valid and reliable assessments the scope and meaning of teaching skills need to be clearly formulated.

### A matter of legal rights

Every person who is assessed has a right to know on what grounds the assessment has been made. This is an additional reason why it is important to clarify what is meant by teaching skills. A clear formulation of the basis for an assessment is also helpful when the judgements of different assessors are compared.

### Clear criteria

What criteria of teaching skills are relevant depends on the way teaching skills are defined.

Different assessors might define teaching skills in different ways. In individual cases certain aspects might be more relevant than others. This will of course influence the choice of criteria.

The important thing is always to specify clearly what criteria have been used when making an assessment.

### **Criteria related to everyday work**

Criteria of teaching skills are typically formulated on a fairly general and abstract level. This naturally follows when the aim is a limited number of criteria that can be widely used. But it entails problems when trying to apply them. Broad and general criteria can normally not be used as a basis for assessment unless they are first specified and connected to current circumstances.

Criteria can be specified in different ways. One possibility is to formulate indicators – examples of procedures or results that show that certain criteria are fulfilled. Another possibility is to formulate questions exemplifying ways in which the meaning of the criteria can be clarified.

#### **The meaning of teaching skills can be described by formulating**

- A definition
- Criteria that follow from that definition
- Examples of what it means to fulfil the different criteria.

## On a Scientific Basis

Higher education should be based on research findings. This holds for teaching and other support for student learning as well as for the subject content of the education.

The scientific approach characteristic of research should be applied also in relation to teaching. This means that decisions on e.g. teaching methods or forms of examination and evaluation should be based on what research has shown will best support student learning.

Demonstrating teaching skills involves among other things familiarising oneself with the research-based knowledge that exists concerning the best way to support student learning.

The assessment of teaching skills should also be based on research findings. The validity of the definition of teaching skills used, as well as of the criteria applied in an assessment, should be supported by research findings.

Making expert assessment of teaching skills means considering both tested experience and research-based knowledge of student learning.

### **There is research concerning ...**

- the characteristics of good teachers
- how to provide the best support for student learning
- pros and cons associated with different teaching methods
- how forms of examination influence how students learn and what they learn

**...and many other educational issues.**

See reference list for reading tips!



# A research-based definition of teaching skills

International research studies emphasise three aspects when defining teaching skills. They focus on

- What teachers do (different kinds of abilities)
- Different kinds of knowledge that teachers need in order to be able to act in the best possible way
- Attitudes and underpinning values that teachers embrace and apply.

What teachers do and the consequences of that is the immediately visible part of teaching skills.

Knowledge and attitudes are underlying factors that shape a teacher's actions.

To uphold teaching skills there is a need for continuous updating of knowledge and development of competence.

Cooperation with others, within and outside higher education, is one way to demonstrate teaching skill and can also help develop it further.

Good pedagogic leadership and efficient administration are also important to create favourable conditions for student learning.

**An assessment of teaching skills should take into account all these aspects of a teacher's pedagogical competence.**

## Criteria

The eleven criteria presented here are aimed at assessment of teaching skills in connection with applications for appointment or promotion at Uppsala University (vice-chancellor decision 2003-06-23). They are based on research in higher education and have been formulated in consultation with teachers from different academic disciplines.

## Attitudes

### **Two aspects of teachers' attitudes are relevant:**

- The way in which the teacher relates to students and designs his or her teaching. To put into practice the kind of attitude that secures the best support for student learning can be regarded as the cornerstone of teaching skills.
- A scientific approach to teaching. This involves applying the same kind of thinking in relation to teaching as is done within research.

### **1. An attitude that furthers student learning**

#### **Evidence of this could be that the teacher**

- applies a well motivated teaching philosophy
- has a clear conception of the roles and responsibilities of student and teacher
- informs students about the reasons for his or her decisions on teaching
- strives for good contact with all students
- creates a good teaching climate
- informs himself/herself about students' previous knowledge and qualifications
- has students as the starting point when planning teaching
- helps students develop good study habits
- listens to students
- stimulates students to be active learners.

### **Important parts of a teaching philosophy are**

- The conception of knowledge  
What do I see as important knowledge in the courses I teach? How do I want the students to perceive knowledge in my subject area? How do I work to achieve this?
- The perception of learning  
What supports or hinders student learning? What impact does that have on my teaching? What do I know about different learning styles and how do I apply that knowledge in my teaching?
- The relationship between teacher and student  
Who is responsible for what? What can students expect from the teacher and vice versa? How do I interact with my students to form a relation that supports student learning?
- The goals of teaching  
What goals do I have? What is important to me? How do I work to achieve that?

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## **2. A scientific approach**

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### **Could be demonstrated by**

- Planning teaching in accordance with what research has shown gives the best support to student learning
- Linking teaching to present research findings within the subject area in question
- Applying a reflective and critical attitude
- Helping students develop a reflective attitude and critical thinking.

# Knowledge

**As a basis for demonstrated teaching skills a teacher needs knowledge within four areas:**

- About the subject area (content knowledge)
- About student learning (pedagogical knowledge)
- About teaching (instructional knowledge)
- About educational goals and organisation (curricular knowledge).

## 3. Broad and appropriate subject knowledge

**This means that the teacher**

- Is competent within the subject area
- Is continuously updating his or her knowledge
- Seeks information about subject related research, e.g. via journals or by attending conferences.

## 4. Knowledge about how students learn

**Evidence of this could be that the teacher**

- Has good general knowledge about learning
- Helps students develop critical thinking
- Is familiar with and shows consideration for different learning styles
- Is informed about didactic knowledge about student learning in the subject area he or she teaches
- Is continuously developing his or her knowledge by attending courses on teaching or pedagogical conferences.

## 5. Knowledge about teaching

### **Evidence might be that the teacher**

- Is familiar with requirements and consequences connected with different teaching methods
- Has good knowledge about the different parts of the teaching process
- Has used different teaching methods
- Is familiar with a variety of examination and assessment methods
- Is continuously developing his or her knowledge by attending courses on teaching or pedagogical conferences.

## 6. Knowledge about educational goals and organisation

### **Implies that the teacher**

- Is aware of the general goals and regulations of higher education
- Conducts his or her teaching within the stipulated framework
- Is well acquainted with future working life demands, e.g. in vocational educations
- Has good curricular knowledge
- Makes sure that the course goals are attained
- Varies teaching methods and content according to available resources and the situation at hand
- Clarifies goals and framework to students

## Practice

Demonstrating teaching skills means putting the acquired knowledge of different kinds into practice. Using a holistic approach and adapting one's teaching to the varying demands of different student groups are important aspects of this.

Demonstrating teaching skills also involves regularity – at all times striving to do one's best. To give a splendid performance once, e.g. when giving a trial lecture, does not call for the kind of skill that is needed to continuously provide the best possible support for student learning.

### 7. A holistic view

#### **Could mean that the teacher**

- Informs himself/herself about other parts of the course or program
- Explains to students how the course at hand relates to the education as a whole
- Tries to attain coordination between different course sections and teachers
- Adapts teaching to the existing framework

### 8. Applied teaching skills

#### **Evidence could be that the teacher**

- Masters different teaching methods
- Varies methods according to student needs
- Structures the material in a way that is beneficial to student learning
- Provides clear information in good time
- Gives prompt feedback
- Provides overviews of course and class contents
- Uses a variety of examination methods
- Develops study guides or writes teaching materials
- Works well together with other teachers and personnel
- Is an appreciated teacher.

Good student grades may also be a result of good teaching!

## Improving one's teaching

Teaching excellence entails a desire for development and continuous updating of knowledge and skills. Learning from experience – good as well as bad – is a distinguishing trait. A reflective attitude towards one's own practice is of fundamental importance.

### 9. Striving for continuous improvement

#### **Could mean that the teacher**

- Directs reflection and critical examination to his or her work
- Puts course evaluations to meaningful use
- Discusses his or her teaching with others
- Develops courses and teaching
- Engages in educational development
- Takes teacher training courses
- Writes about teaching in educational journals
- Informs about teaching experiences at for example conferences.

## Leadership, administration and cooperation

Teaching skills can also be demonstrated by creating good conditions for student learning in other ways than in direct connection with the planning, performing and evaluation of teaching. Leading and organising teaching activities is one example. Cooperation with others within or outside higher education is another.

### 10. Excellent leadership and administration

**Can be shown by accepting leadership and carrying out the adherent duties in such a way that**

- General cooperation and participation is furthered
- There is clear information and efficient communication
- Pedagogical development and discussions about teaching are stimulated
- He or she is an appreciated leader of pedagogical activities.

### 11. Cooperation with others and contacts with the surrounding society

**Could mean that the teacher**

- Stays informed about changes in the school system and its consequences for higher education
- Shares experiences and knowledge with colleagues
- Finds out what future employers expect students to know
- Participates in discussions on the purpose of higher education
- Contributes to popular adult education and popular science activities.



## An alternative formulation

Criteria of teaching skills can also be formulated as statements about what characterises teachers that demonstrate good teaching skills. The statements presented in this section are based on a compilation of research findings made by Paul Ramsden et al. in 1995. Each statement is followed by questions designed to help the assessor find useful applications.

## What are the characteristics of good teachers?

1. Good teachers see as their most important task to help students learn; they design their teaching to support student learning in the best possible way.

- How does the teacher describe his or her teaching philosophy?
- How does the teacher obtain information about students, e.g. their previous knowledge and learning styles?
- What evidence is there that the teacher considers students' needs when planning and conducting teaching?
- How does the teacher work to help all students develop?
- How does the teacher get information about how students perceive the teaching?

**2. Good teachers display enthusiasm for their subject, and a desire to share it with their students.**

- How does the teacher transfer enthusiasm for the subject and an active interest in the studies to the students?
- What evidence is there of enthusiastic teaching?
- How do students rate the teacher's enthusiasm, e.g. in courses that have been repeated many times?

**3. Good teachers draw on their knowledge of their subject, their knowledge of their learners, and their general pedagogical knowledge to transform the concepts of the discipline into terms that are understandable to their students.**

- Does the teacher have broad and appropriate subject knowledge?  
How does the teacher update his or her knowledge?
- Is there evidence that the teacher relates teaching to research in a way understandable to students?
- Are there examples of what the teacher has done to help students understand the meaning of basic concepts within the subject area?
- Is the teacher familiar with existing knowledge about teaching and learning? How does the teacher develop his or her competence in these areas?
- How does the teacher secure information about how the subject content is perceived by the students?

4. Good teachers encourage learning for understanding and are concerned with developing their students' critical-thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and problem-approach behaviours.

- How does the teacher encourage a holistic approach and understanding?
- What does the teacher do to design teaching in such a way as to help students develop critical thinking?
- How does the teacher make problem-solving activities a natural part of the teaching?
- What does the teacher do to find out if the students have achieved understanding and developed critical thinking?

5. Good teachers show respect for their students; they are interested in both their professional and their personal growth, encourage their independence, and sustain high expectations of them.

- What evidence is there that the teacher respects the students?
- How does the teacher work to help students become independent learners?
- What evidence is there that the teacher shows consideration for student views?
- How do students perceive the teacher's attitude and support?

6. Good teachers set clear goals, use valid and appropriate assessment methods, and provide high quality feedback to their students.

- What teaching goals has the teacher set?
- What has the teacher done to clarify his or her goals to the students?
- What evidence is there that the examination methods used are in accordance with the goals?
- When and how does the teacher give feedback to the students?
- How do students perceive the feedback given by the teacher?

7. Good teachers recognise the importance of context, and adapt their teaching accordingly. They know how to modify their teaching strategies according to the particular students, subject matter and learning environment.

- What strategies does the teacher use to adapt subject content and teaching methods to the framework at hand?
- How does the teacher help students realise the importance of goals and framework?
- Are there examples showing that the teacher has modified teaching in a changing situation, to better support student learning?
- How does the teacher prepare to meet diverse student groups?

8. Good teachers show versatility and flexibility. They have broad competence both in the use of various teaching methods and teaching at different levels, and in the mastery of varying subject contents.

- What experience does the teacher have of teaching at different levels and to diverse target groups?
- Is the teacher familiar with a variety of teaching methods and teaching strategies and how they function in different settings?
- What is the teacher's attitude towards teaching outside his or her own speciality?

9. Good teachers are prepared to develop their teaching through cooperation with others, within the academic setting as well as in the surrounding society.

- How does the teacher cooperate with others – colleagues, students and administrative personnel?
- As a course director, what strategy does the teacher use to involve everyone, and to make use of everybody's competence?
- What kind of pedagogical leadership does the teacher demonstrate?
- What has the teacher done to create a dialogue with the surrounding society?

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10. Good teachers are also good learners. For example, they learn through their own reading, by participating in a variety of professional development activities, by listening to their students, by sharing ideas with their colleagues, and by reflecting on classroom interaction and students' achievements.

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- What has the teacher done to develop his or her teaching competence, especially during the last five years?
- Are there examples of how the teacher has applied newly acquired teaching competence?
- How does the teacher make use of cooperation with others to develop his or her competence?
- What evidence is there that the teacher reflects on teaching and student learning?
- In what way does the teacher communicate his or her own experiences to others?

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