

Class levels, class size and timing

As a teacher, there are a few possibilities how your students come to your classes.

You can start a group and have a weekly class with regulars. Everyone comes every week, and you can build up from class to class.

When you teach at a studio, there can be a variety of students, with weekly new students, with a variety of experience, or even every week a completely new group.

As the first group is easier and more forgiving, the second one will be more challenging. How to teach different levels, from beginners to experienced yogi's, and still have a build-up for the regulars that come weekly?

Teach based on themes, directions, emphasis, etc. Make sure the theme of every class is whole, so that you don't grab back on last weeks' class.

For example:

Themes. Can be seasons, meridians, yoga sutras, emotions, inspiration from your daily life such as self-care, energy, moon, thankfulness, etc.

Directions. Can be forward bends, backbends, twists, balances.

Emphasis. Can be drishti, bandas, mudras, vayus, grounding, heartopeners, hips, etc.

Teaching different levels.

It takes a bit of experience, but you will really enjoy teaching different level classes once you understand how to do it – and so will your students!

If you are teaching an experienced class mixed with absolute beginners, you have to start explaining the basics. Make the newbees comfortable and add information that is interesting for experienced yogis too. Explain about boundaries, breath, and the layout of the class (starting meditation, sitting / standing / dynamic / sitting / reclining / inverted poses and shavasana).

You can keep this short, but it's important for them to know the structure of the class and not to feel lost. Maybe you also tell them a bit more about breath and do a nice exercise that is also nice and beneficial for the experienced ones.

Boundaries you can tell them that they are free to look first, especially in a sun salutations sequence, or you build it up very slowly. They can follow the breath instructions, but if that is too much for them, let them focus on injury-free movement: don't go further than 70% of your maximum. They should know that they aren't expected to be able to do everything in their first class, that it's more important to get a taste and feel. Yoga poses always stretch your limits and ask strengths from muscles you regularly don't use so often. Knowing you don't have to be able to do it all in one session, get's the stress off it.

Then, you can begin. As you can have beginners in every class, it's important that your sequences are easy to explain & attend. Once you are in a pose you want them to hold a bit longer, the fun starts!

You start with instructing the basics. You build up from the foundation. E.g. in a standing pose, instruct from the feet up, in a seated pose, you start from the sitting bones / base of the spine. In inversions you start from the parts that touch the floor and work up, extensions last, etc.

When the foundation is firm, you tell them to stay in the pose for 10 breaths (or any other amount). Then, start to instruct the experienced yogis by activating their core, mentioning drishti, remind them about the bandhas, levelling hips and lengthening spines, eventual possibilities for binds, and go deeper/further if possible .

Words are really important here. I would suggest: if you feel there is more space, extend x... or : if you want a bit of challenge, you can Make sure the newbies don't feel that they have to, but they are of course also welcome to try if they feel like it.

Class size

There is a difference in teaching a group over 30, a group up to 15 or individuals in private sessions.

Most likely you will teach moderate group classes: somewhere between 5 and 15. In these classes you can see all participants, give verbal instructions, they will see you when you demonstrate plus you can give hands-on adjustments.

When you teach a group over 30, this becomes a bit more complex. You cannot see all (especially the insecure beginners in the back), you cannot adjust all verbally, and you will not be able to hands-on adjust all of them. What to do? Well – the bigger the group, the more important it is who you have in class. Always (always) ask for injuries and pregnancies. Always ask if there are complete beginners.

Memorize the body parts with the injuries. Skip certain asanas when multiple participants have same kinds of injuries, so that you don't have to think about this too much. The rest of the asana's, always mention that people with (wrist/back/knee) injuries should be careful, and if they feel it's not possible, that you will give an alternative as soon as you have explained the pose.

I would suggest to keep the instructions and the sequence as simple as possible. Instruct one sun salutation, then *look at them* (without demonstrating) during the second sun salutation, so that you can see the level of the class. Give clear instructions, keep watching – do they understand your instructions? Know that when you leave your own mat to walk in between the students, the front row will have to deal with just your vocal instructions, so make them loud and simple. Be back in front if you need to demonstrate. If you *have* to adjust, talk out loud what you want all (also the adjusted one) to do, so that it's not 'serve one leave 50 in the rain'.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is the private or semi-private (up to 3) class.

The biggest challenge in private classes is that it becomes more a talking / coaching session than a yoga class. If possible, make sure (in the intake or directly after the introduction of yourself), that you know what they come for. When I teach a private class, in the conformation I always mention that I take 15 minutes to know each other and to know what they want to take with them, before class starts. In that way they know that it's not included. The second class, I start teaching within 5 minutes after they enter the room, especially when they have told you they want to have an asana class. Some people want to move but at the same time try to avoid movement, and they keep talking.

Be in time!

Make sure you don't pass the agreed time. This is stealing from yourself and from them – you don't know their agenda and they don't know yours. Also, when you take time to have a tea and a chat before the start of the first and the second class, and maybe take time to talk after the class too, it creates expectations: what is included in the agreed time and what is not? You will lose so much time with this that your hourly rate will dramatically decrease. So next time you go practice on a friend, you can test if you can be in and out without losing more than 30 minutes!

Timing

A yoga class has quite a set programme: arrival (injuries), introduction of yourself and the theme of your class, arrival meditation, warmup, sun salutes, standing poses, seated / reclining / inversions, shavasana and meditation after shavasana / end of class. How to make sure you time this correctly?

When you teach in a yoga school with only 5-15 minutes in between classes, time management is very important. When you start planning your class, the following timetable can be handy:

| 60 minutes class | | 90 minutes class | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--|-----------|
| Arrival & injuries | 5 | Arrival & injuries | 5 |
| Intro of yourself & theme of class | 3 | Intro of yourself & theme of class | 5 |
| | | Mantra reciting, pranayama | 7 |
| Starting meditation | 3 | Starting meditation | 5 |
| Warming up | 5 | Warming up | 10 |
| Sun salutations (2-3 reps) | 10 | Sun salutations (3-5 reps w variation) | 15 |
| Standing poses | 5 | Standing poses | 7 |
| Seated poses | 5 | Seated poses | 7 |
| Reclining poses | 5 | Reclining poses | 7 |
| Inversions | 5 | Inversions | 7 |
| Shavasana | 8 | Shavasana | 9 |
| End of class | 3 | End of class & meditation | 3 |
| Props back and students out of room | 3 | Props back and students out of room | 3 |
| Total | 60 | Total | 90 |

This time table tells you that 15 minutes after the start of your class you are ready for sun salutes, and 15 minutes before the end of your class, you must be in shavasana, otherwise you have to rush to the end which is not nice for you and not nice for your students.

Make sure your class plan has the possibility to skip parts if you get stuck in time! If your pace of class is high, you might have some time left after class (which is great for pranayama and meditation!), if your pace of class is slow, leave some asanas out. Never let Shavasana out!

Love, Margriet