

Seat of The Teacher

We initiate the foundation of your personal work & our work together by distilling down the qualities of a teacher you seek to embody:

Qualities of a Teacher

- *Jnani* - knowledgeable person
- *Mauni* - silent person
- *Jivatmavan* - self-aware person
- *Straddhavan* - trustful & trusting
- *Sthitdhi* - firm-thinking person
- *Dharmadhiikari* - Dharma-authority
- *Abhyasakari* - practioner
- *Karunyavam* - compassionate person
- *Satyavan* - truthful person
- *Sampradaya Sevaka* - traditionalist

Qualities of the Teacher -- Class Exercise

In your life experience, who were some of your greatest teachers? A teacher can come in the form of any living being, so think of the ones you've encountered in which you learned important lessons when the learning was facilitated by something about that teacher in particular. Pick one from your list and quickly jot down some answers to the following:

Pick one Teacher. What are/were some of the qualities that put him or her high on your list of great teachers?

What did you learn in that relationship?

What are some of the responsibilities of any teacher?

What are some responsibilities that are more unique to teachers of yoga asana?

What is it about yoga that brought you into this training and that you wish to share with your yoga students?

What are some unique personal qualities/gifts you have to offer?

If there were no barriers (time, money, etc.), what kind of teacher do you aspire to be?

What would you like your strengths as a yoga teacher to be? How would you like others to describe the experience after taking one of your classes?

Vision and Voice

We invite you to find your voice in these pages. Let these exercises & discussions become a portal for your awakening, unfolding, and sharing of your highest potential as a teacher.

“When you say something with your whole being... it can transform the world.” - Thich Nhat Hand

“The Law of Maintenance: What goes unfed weakens, what you feed grows stronger.” - Red Hawk

Yoga offers a powerful practice for connection with our most heartfelt desire, called *Sankalpa*, a Sanskrit word that means “resolution” or “resolve.” The practice of *sankalpa* is the practice of intention setting. It’s what the mythologist Joseph Campbell termed a “call to awakening” because *sankalpa* wakes us up from our conditioned existence and our habitual patterns (or “*samskaras*”).

Sankalpa aligns us with our basic goodness, our true nature. It helps us access our deep inner resources, which many of us often struggle to connect with or even forget that we have within us. These short, sincere intentions or “resolutions of awareness” are a vital part of any authentic spiritual practice. They remind us that we are already whole.

The effectiveness of intentions is explained by the familiar Yoga instruction: with energy flows intention. In other words, wherever you place your attention, your life energy will go. Your actions will bring results, as all actions have consequences. In the Yoga tradition, it is said that we are the heirs of our own actions, which is another way of saying: you reap what you sow.

“The possibility for our happiness and indeed our entire spiritual journey, rests on the clarification that what most completely determines the result of any action is the motivation behind it.” - Joseph Goldstein

Here are a few suggestions for creating a sankalpa:

- *Sankalpa, or intentions, should be stated in the present tense.*
- *Your resolve can take two forms. The first is as a statement that reflects your true nature. "I am healed, whole and complete". The second type is as a specific intention or goal, which will align your moment-to-moment choices with your larger life aspirations.*
- *Set them when you are in clear state of mind.*
- *A sankalpa will not ask you to change who you are.*
- *Keep coming back to your sankalpa – it is ultimately a practice of remembering, of mindfulness.*
- *Once you have created your intention, open yourself to the universe. One must have resolve, but also a good measure of surrender too. As with any practice, for it to be of benefit we have to do it. So go ahead and create your sankalpa for the day/week/year. And then, to use Gandhi's words of advice, "renounce and rejoice".*

(from <http://www.livingsukha.com/yoga-practice-notes-mike/sankalpa/>)

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Topics for Discussion:

- How can intention setting be different than goal setting? Is that distinction important?
  - Intentions come from within: what matters most to you. How can that personal commitment to your inner values impact your worldly actions & how you show up in the world?
  - As you gain insight through yoga and meditation, your ability to act from intentions blossoms. In fact, your intentions themselves might very well change. How can we stay committed to something that is ever evolving?
  - What are some hang ups or roadblocks that prevent us from closing the gap between setting an intention & living an intention?
  - Is it even necessary to outwardly or explicitly express our intentions?
  - How can the practice of intention setting be used effectively & with integrity in the classroom setting? ("now close your eyes and set an intention...")
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# The Four Quadrants of Human Experience

Tips to include the Body Aspect in the class plan

Tips to include Intellect Aspect in the class plan

**Execution**  
Athletes and Dancers

WHAT IS?

Qualities

- Touch
- Feeling
- Eating and Drinking
- Pleasure and Sensations

Body

**Knowledge**  
Scientists and Engineers

HOW DOES?

Qualities

- Curiosity
- Distinction
- Discernment
- Names, Labels, shapes faces

Intellect

**Desire**  
Psychologists

Emotions

Qualities

- Sadness, Anger, Fear
- Full range of emotions
- All the emotions accessed by yoga

Answers Personal Questions of WHY?

**Inspiration**  
Poets and Mystics

Spirit

Qualities

- Intuition
- Introspection
- Self-Compassion
- Instinct
- Inner-Light

Answers Big Questions of WHY?

Tips to include Emotion Aspect in the class plan

Tips to include Spirit Aspect in the class plan

For further reading about the Quadrinity Model:

<https://www.hoffmaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/PPFL-4Email-rev2.pdf>

## TEACHING METHODS – Types of Students

4 Student Archetypes:

1. Athletes & Dancers (Physical Types)
2. Scientists & Engineers (Intellectual Types)
3. Psychologists (Emotional Types)
4. Mystics & Poets (Spiritual Types)

In what ways do you relate to this and see yourself? In what ways does this not apply to you?

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How do you see this in your students?

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How do you see this in the culture of the studio/gym/place where you teach yoga?

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In your interest as a teacher?

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In your approach to teaching?

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**Vision Statement Exercise**

“It is better to strive in one’s own dharma than to succeed in the dharma of another. Nothing is ever lost in following one’s own dharma. But competition in another’s dharma breeds fear and insecurity.” –Krishna, The Bhagavad Gita

“good teaching requires self-knowledge.” – Parker Palmer

Discovering your own mission brings clarity. It helps us align with others whose mission is similar to ours. It helps us know and stay true to our own place in the world and in our communities. Focusing on our own mission helps eliminate fear and anxiety about what others are doing. It allows us to see that we are each working in our own way to create the many parts of the vision of yoga in the modern era. Mission guides individual choices and gives coherence to what we do and why we do it.

In your Journal, write down your answers to the following questions:

- o Why is yoga important to you?
- o How does teaching yoga relate to your practice of yoga?
- o When you think of your best teachers, what 3 words come to mind?
- o When you envision yourself teaching a class, what is the quality you would most like to embody?

Using the answers to these questions as a framework, write your own vision statement of yoga as a whole and your personal mission statement for this program.

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Further Exercises:

- **Your Life Story - without the Story:** Can you tell your life “story” without comment or feedback.

“Certain aspects of ourselves that seems like immutable, profound tendencies are actually just impulses, residues we carry, not actually ‘us.’” ~ Elena Brower

- **Letter of Asking Forgiveness for something you’ve done and feel ashamed of...**

“I forgive, heal and release everything that consciously or unconsciously could delay or block the complete evolution of my being.” - Mario Liani

Voice

... when you engage in work ... that taps your talent and fuels your passion – that rises out of a great need in the world that you feel drawn by conscience to meet – therein lies your voice, your soul’s code. Stephen Covey

Our voice is the primary vehicle for giving our gifts to the world and as As yoga teachers, voice is one of our most important tools for getting our message across and doing our work. How many of us are deliberate in how we use our voice?

Inquiry:

What qualities can you identify about your own voice in regular conversation? In teaching? Are you presenting the same voice or do you project a “teacher voice”.

Accessible, authentic, comfortable, reassuring, off-putting, sing-songy, questioning, rhythmic, low, loud, concise, clear, effective, weak, spacious, crowded, direct, joyful, monotone, annoyed,

angry, bossy, compassionate, loving, unsure, warm, cold, sensitive, present, motivating, discouraging, gracious, authentic, repetitive,

Word Habits & Choices: How you say things is just as important as what you say. Gerunds, Negatives, Repetitive Phrases (um, and, uh, so), Predictory, Extra Words, Personal

What other experiences influence the effectiveness & power of your class?
Setting, place, posture, presence, music

Finding a comfortable pitch (Reference: Pamela S. Phillips FINDING YOUR OPTIMUM SINGING PITCH, Singing For Dummies, 2nd Edition)

Finding your optimum singing pitch starts with finding your optimum speaking pitch. You can move from singing to chanting to speaking and apply your same breathing technique and tone production when speaking or singing. In exploring chanting, you find the pitch that sounds the best in your voice, called the optimum pitch.

Your optimum speaking pitch, or the central speaking pitch that sounds the best in your voice, is usually where you say, "Uh-huh." The pitch on huh works the best for most people. If someone asks you a question and you answer without thinking about what you're doing, you probably make the tone on a pitch near your middle voice if you're a woman and near chest voice if you're a man. This is good.

The tone of the optimum pitch is important, not just the pitch itself. To find your optimum pitch, follow these steps:

Say "Uh-huh." Notice the second pitch that you sound for the huh of "Uh-huh."

Say "Uh-huh" a few times and then move right into speaking by saying your name immediately after the huh.

Notice the pitch when you said your name. Was it one of the pitches in "Uh-huh," or was it lower? If it was lower, try again and say your name on the same pitch as the huh.

Your optimum speaking pitch helps you find prominent vibrations and easy carrying power to your speaking voice. You can then take that to other pitches. If you aren't sure what sounds best, ask a friend to listen or record yourself and listen back. It's okay to explore different pitches; that's the objective of the exercise.

Listen for the pitches that really buzz or really vibrate as you speak. The best speaking pitch isn't the lowest or highest note of your range; it's somewhere near the middle voice range for women and the chest voice range for men

Your Teaching Voice Projection & Elements (from the work of Barbara McAfee)

Earth

Gifts: Gut instinct, authority, and grounding

Source in the Body: Pelvis, buttocks, legs, and feet

I feel the earth move under my feet. An earthy voice is deep and projects authority. Grounding & steady. Earth in the voice is associated with the feel of stillness, security, quietude, being slow moving, being reflective, low-pitched, calming and secure. It can be used to try and calm someone down and be helpful & supportive during times of uncertainty & vulnerability.

Fire

Gifts: Passion, personal power, and vitality

Source in the Body: Belly, solar plexus

Come on baby light my fire. A fire inspired voice communicates passion and inhabits our personal power. Persuasive & encouraging. A Fire voice is motivating & great voice for communicating enthusiastically a new vision or challenging pose or sequence.

Water

Gifts: Caring, compassion, and affirmation

Source in the Body: Throat

Go with the Flow. A water inspired voice is caring and compassionate. It makes people feel safe and is good for apologizing and moments of tenderness/vulnerability. A water voice can be associated with the feeling of kindness and understanding. Water voices can be intoxicating, soothing, healing and uplifting. A person with this voice links words, ideas, feelings and imagery.

Metal

Gifts: Clarity and focus

Source in the Body: Forehead, eye brows

I can see clearly now the rain is gone. A metal voice is associated with clarity & precision. No nonsense or flourish. Often more words. Less space, poetry and imagery. Creates a sense of authority & trust; knowledge as power.

Air

Gifts: Inspiration, possibility, and spiritual connection

All I need is the air that I breath. A voice associated with the air element connects us to spirit. It is good for inspiration and story- telling. Ethereal, spacious, voice of possibility. This is the voice to intentionally use when you want to people to think differently, to come up with new ideas, to be expansive and or step back and look at the big picture.

Exercise: Record yourself teaching. Identify the main element(s) present. Explore patterns and habits in your presentation. Is this voice your “normal” voice? Is there clarity and steadiness? What changes if any would you like to work on.

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### **The Importance of Listening...**

“Listening is an everyday social art, but it’s an art we’ve neglected and must learn anew. Listening is more than being quiet while the other person speaks until you can say what you have to say. I like the language Rachel Naomi Remen uses with young doctors to describe what they should practice: ‘generous listening.’ Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability -- a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity.” ~ Krista Tippett, *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry Into the Mystery and the Art of Living*, at 29.

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Exercise: Record yourself teaching a class. Generously listen to yourself teaching. What do you notice? How do you feel when you listen to yourself - taking into consideration word choice; cadence, rhythm, and pacing; and tone of voice?

- List the phrases & words you repeat more than once:
- List any phrases & words that really work for you:
- Notice phrases & words that aren’t as potent or precises as they can be: experiment with new word choice to refine what it is you mean.

Exercise: Crafting your Class/Offerings: We can share our vision in ways beyond the use of our voice. What are the components of your current classes/offerings that feel most authentic? What are pieces of your vision that have yet to come through? How can you “give voice” to them?

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## The Power of Words... [excerpted from Donna Farhi's Teaching Yoga, at 92-94]

### Sutra II.36

When there is firm grounding in the perception of what is, or of truth, it is seen that an action and reaction, seed and its fruits, or cause and result are related to each other; and the clear vision of intelligence becomes directly aware of this relationship. (Or, one's words are fruitful.)

#### The Power of Words

As important as the touch that we use (or don't use) in our interactions with others are the words we choose and the manner in which they are delivered. The meaning of a word can be powerfully altered by the volume and the tone of voice used in its delivery. Most important, we should keep in mind that words that might otherwise have a neutral meaning can be amplified to stunning proportions in the student's mind by their having been spoken by someone important to her.

But speak we must! It is important that our language reflect the kind of healthy relationship with self we wish to facilitate in the other. When a teacher yells instructions, or uses words that evoke a punitive relationship with the self, he is setting up a violent model for the student's own internal dialogue. Many years ago I attended a class at a Yoga conference with a teacher whose language seemed more suited for a military academy. She coarsely instructed us to "cut" our muscle to the bone, "push" ourselves to the limit, and finally advised us to "shove" ourselves up against the wall in a Handstand (Adho Mukha Vrksasana). This instruction to "shove" myself left me so disconcerted that I quietly rolled up my mat, excused myself with a terrible headache, and for the first time in what must have been thousands of classes, I left. I had spent too many years generating a healthy relationship with myself to want to shove myself anywhere!

More subtle is the way in which language, by its very limitations, can separate from the person from the action, increasing rather than decreasing a sense of dissociation from the body. Notice the subtle differences in these instructions:

'Stretch your muscles to the limit.' Or, 'Invite your muscles to open.'

'Push with the arm to twist the spine further.' Or, 'Keep the arm stable and as you exhale feel for the moment when the spine is ready to rotate.'

'Breathe in for four counts.' Or, 'Allows the breath to enter for four counts.'

Notice that in the first instruction, there is someone doing something to somebody, thereby setting up a separation between mind and body. In the second instruction, the action originates from the inside, and the actor and the action are unified. Also notice that the second instruction in each case asks the student to make an internal inquiry rather than simply obey a command.

Through the careful use of language, we can invite the student to access her own internal reference point and to encourage her independence. The teacher's commitment to facilitate this independence. The teacher's commitment to facilitate this independence is part of the ethos at the heart of Yoga.

Finally there is one word noticeably missing from many Yoga teachers' vocabulary: sorry. When we make a mistake, when we speak impatiently or more harshly than we intended, it can be a powerful moment for the teacher to apologize and for the student to receive that apology. When a teacher apologizes, it is an act of respect for the student. It is also a means of expressing not only our regret but also that we hold ourselves to the same standard of behavior that we expect from our students. Admitting a mistake is a way for a Yoga teacher to express his honesty with where he is in his journey. It is also a way to prevent unnecessary hurt and future resentment. It's a simple word, and while it can take great humility to say it, this magical utterance can be healing for both teacher and student.

## 4 Tips for Ditching “Yoga-Speak” and Finding Your Voice

By Kat Heagberg, Yoga International

<https://yogainternational.com/article/view/4-tips-for-ditching-yoga-speak-and-finding-your-voice>

In yoga culture, we hear a lot about "finding your voice" and "teaching from the heart," but what do those statements mean exactly? I know when I first started teaching, I was far more concerned with not mixing up my rights and lefts than I was with teaching my truth. Mostly, I was just focused on not messing up, but I was also really concerned with sounding yogic enough. I didn't want to be myself. I wanted to be a yoga teacher. I thought I needed to have all the answers—to be a master of physiology and philosophy at the ripe old age of 20. I struggled with the flowery, poetic words that seemed to come easily to the teachers I admired, feeling awkward and unnatural with language like "heart opening" and "shining brightly." I spoke with my yoga voice—a soft, lilting, head-voice that I hoped sounded ethereal enough to drown out my awkwardness.

Secretly, I felt like a yoga fraud. Playing the role of yoga teacher was draining, demoralizing, and ultimately unsustainable.

Thankfully, before the grueling Stepford-Yogi act turned me off down dogs (or at least teaching down dogs) for good, I managed to connect with seasoned teachers and mentors who showed me a few tricks of the trade language-wise, and more so, helped me develop the confidence to teach as me. Often this meant—and sometimes still means—(lovingly) calling me out when I reverted to "yoga-speak." By yoga-speak, I mean the speech patterns, habits, and clichés that we tend to fall into when trying to sound how we think a yoga teacher should sound. The trouble with yoga-speak is that it creates a barrier between teachers and students, often making us come across as perfectly polished, sing-songy yoga-robots (yobots?) instead of real, live, flesh-and-blood humans. And most of all, it prevents us from teaching as ourselves—the unique, interesting, adept, yet (charmingly) flawed teachers that we are.

Here are a few tips for quelling yoga-speak that I've found especially useful:

Avoid (or at least explain) yoga jargon

"Engage your root lock." "Hug the midline." "Take a vinyasa." Don't get me wrong, all of these are excellent cues, but they're meaningless if your students don't have any idea what you're talking about. Case in point: As an Anusara-trained teacher, I once asked a friend to "puff up your kidneys like two little balloons." She immediately burst out laughing and said, "Kat, what the hell does that mean?" I had to laugh, too. All I really meant was "don't arch your lower back so much," but I was so caught up in saying the "right" thing that I forgot that the

Anusara-speak would make zero sense to my friend, who normally practiced a different style of hatha.

I didn't want to be myself. I wanted to be a yoga teacher.

Before you revert to jargon (this includes style-specific idioms, anatomical language, and Sanskrit terms), explain the concept, action, or pose in the common vernacular. For example:

"In Sanskrit, this pose is called adho mukha shvanasana."

"Press your femurs—those are your thigh bones—toward the wall behind you."

"Resist your forearms toward each other. This is called 'hugging to the midline' because you're resisting in toward the center of your body."

This puts everyone on the same page and no one feels left out or confused because they're not hip to the yoga lingo.

Ease up on the "ing"ing

For whatever reason, we yoga teachers love "ing" words. ("Inhaling our arms up, exhaling forward, inhaling halfway lift, exhaling downward facing dog...." You get the idea.) But when we slip into those long, sing-songy, run-on sentences with a seemingly never-ending string of "ing" endings, it's easy for students to mentally check out. Perhaps because when we use passive language like this, it doesn't seem so much like we're talking to students as just, well, talking.

I suspect that many of us use passive language because we want to come across as nurturing, inviting, and non-forceful. These are all good intentions, but intentions that can still be put into practice while speaking confidently and directly. Directness doesn't preclude respect and kindness, rather it simply means speaking to your students: "Inhale your arms up. Exhale fold forward. Inhale, lift halfway. Exhale, downward facing dog." See the difference?

Don't get me wrong, all of these are excellent cues, but they're meaningless if your students don't have any idea what you're talking about.

This doesn't mean you can never again use an "ing" word; but if you tend to use them excessively when you teach, play with incorporating more direct language and see if you notice a shift in the energy of your classroom.

**Offer specific feedback**

"Good job" loses all meaning if you use it haphazardly with no context. Complimenting your students is a great idea. After all, affirmative words can be encouraging and empowering, but only if they're specific.

Tell your students why they're doing a good job: "Beautiful length in your spine, Sue," "Great job keeping your thighs lifted, Steve," etc. Not only does it feel more genuine, but it may actually enhance their alignment. If I'm holding cobra pose, for example, and my teacher commends the broadness of my collarbones and the lift in my sternum, you better believe that I'm going to see if I can find just a little bit more openness and lift.

Same goes for affirmations directed toward your entire class. It's the difference between "Nice work," and "You guys are all really strong and steady in your planks today." While the former can come across as (and often are) filler words to break the silence, the latter is specific, relevant feedback that tells your students that you're present with them, that you're paying attention, and that you notice their efforts and progress.

Keep it real

Here's a tip that has been a HUGE help for me and one that I often share with the new teachers that I mentor and train: Teach as though you were teaching a group of your closest friends or family members. You don't have to perform. You don't have to play a role. You don't have to sound ethereal. Just speak in your regular voice and tell them how to do the pose.

And from there, let your personality shine through! If you're a poetic person, embrace your inner sonnetist. But if you tend to be more straightforward and literal, you don't have to force the flowery language—especially if it feels disingenuous. If you'd rather wax philosophical on the psoas than paraphrase Rumi, you do you. Your individual style isn't going to appeal to every student—no teacher's will—but it will attract the students who want to learn what you have to teach.

You might also consider using metaphors and imagery revolving around the stuff that you love, whether it's gardening, baseball, or Harry Potter. I'm not suggesting you transform your studio into Hogwarts or theme an entire class around Order of the Phoenix—that would be alienating for the students who don't share your interest—but a simple nod to the fact that the nagani in nagani madasana (intoxicated snake pose) is linguistically related to the name of Voldemort's snake (Nagini, which means "a female snake") is sure to put a smile on the faces of fellow Potter-heads. Because really, aren't we all at our most animated when we're talking about the things we're most into? (Don't believe me? Try asking a four-year-old about dinosaurs.)

It's not about being perfect

As teachers, it's important to be mindful of our language choices, for sure, but it's also easy to get SO caught up in saying everything "right" that we forget to be ourselves. Ultimately, it's not

a huge deal if you said "um" 12 times, mixed up your right and left, or forgot to call a pose by its Sanskrit name. If you're teaching from a place of authenticity, it's going to resonate with your students. I know that I found when I shifted my aim from being "perfect" to being authentic, teaching became a lot less stressful, a lot more fun, and way more sustainable. Seriously, constantly trying to measure up is exhausting! After all, it's awfully hard to find your voice if you feel like you have to be somebody you aren't.

## **Read: The Art of Verbal Communication**

**By Jason Crandell | Aug 28, 2007 | Yoga Journal**

<http://www.yogajournal.com/article/teach/the-art-of-verbal-communication/>

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The Art of Dynamic Language

by Danny Arguetty

Excerpted from the guide "Dynamic Language and Heart Opening Themes"

<https://kripalu.org/resources/art-dynamic-language>

When we, as yoga teachers, use varied language, creative words, and clear instructions, there is a more complete quality to the practice at hand. Our language supports students in remaining more present to their own internal experience while feeling safe in the outward structure of a given posture. It is vital to remember that we are all going to have diverse language edges. Some teachers are better at instructing technical language and long for the ability to weave in creative imagery into their classes. Other teachers are proficient with images and inspirational words, but are challenged by clear and direct instructions. Regardless of where you are at, the first step is to build awareness and then slowly begin to take action to cultivate a new skill.

1. **Action Words:** Lucid and direct instructions involve dynamic action words that clearly communicate to the students what to do next. Action verbs like "step," "take," or "extend" embody confidence, create safety, and allow the teacher to create a class tempo that provides space for an experience to unfold. Sometimes when teachers begin to use clear language they fear sounding too bossy, yet there is a way to express with confidence while still staying in the soft space of the heart. A simple formula to utilize while sharpening this tool of clear direct language is verb (move your) + body part (knee) + direction (in line with the ankle below) = clear instruction.
2. **Experiential Words:** Reflective and investigative words like "notice," "feel," or "sense" can follow after a few direct instructions, which invites students into an expanded inquiry while invoking a softness into the physical practice. Furthermore, these words

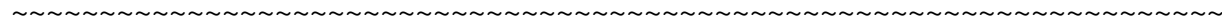
create introspection and help students remember that yoga is an all-inclusive process that engages all layers of our being.

3. **Diversity of Language:** The ability to say the same exact thing in several different ways is a valuable skill while teaching yoga. Instead of only utilizing the instructions of inhale and exhale, we begin to express these actions with phrases like “take a breath,” “draw in oxygen,” “let the breath go,” or “release all the air.” In relaxation, in lieu of saying only “relax, relax, relax,” we spice it up with words like “soften,” “let go,” “descend into the earth,” or “release.” In leading students into movements and postures, instead of always saying the same instruction such as “step your right foot back, front knee bends at 90 degrees,” we begin to add variety as in the examples, “take your right foot back, front knee comes to a right angle,” or “Front knee aligned with the ankle below,” or “front knee in line with the second toe.” The potency of this ability to diversify our words as teachers is twofold. First, it provides deeper clarification for students on a technical level in case they didn’t understand our wording the first time. As students, we all learn and hear differently, so we ensure a higher probability of comprehension through utilizing a range of instructional language. Second, diverse language aids in facilitating a deeper, heartfelt experience as each new word used carries a distinctly powerful vibration.

4. **Creative Images:** Voltaire writes, “Poetry is the music of the soul, and, above all, of great feeling souls.” Poets use creative words, intelligently constructed grammar, and cultivated poise to weave an experience that taps right into our imagination, heart, and emotions. One of the most powerful techniques poets use in their writing is the comparison of what might seem like ordinary life experiences to the majesty of the natural world. The body itself is part of this wonder of nature, and thus can serve as a platform through which to draw connections to this greater essence. The ability to communicate images and specific body actions as they relate to a theme is an essential tool in teaching yoga. In general, it is valuable to compile a collection of similes and metaphors that can be used for teaching certain technical ideas. Images make instruction more stimulating and interesting, and they give visual learners an added tool to take in auditory cues. Once there is a general understanding of the use of simile and metaphor, we can begin to customize our imagery-based instruction to the particulars of each theme. A metaphor is an expression used to refer to something it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity. In yoga, we might say: “Stretch your roots deeply into the earth,” or, “Notice the ocean waves of your breath.” A simile is a figure of speech in which two essentially unlike things are compared, often in a phrase introduced by “like” or “as.” In yoga, we might say: “Feel the breath ebb and flow like gentle ocean waves.” “Plant your left foot into the earth as tree roots anchor into the stability of the ground.” “With each exhale, let the muscles soften like snow melting in the warm sun.” Keep in mind that utilizing metaphor and simile is delicate business, as too many images in one class might overwhelm students or dilute the main focus of the practice.

5. **Power of Voice:** The inherent power of the voice can be accessed through careful modulation of pitch, volume, and thoughtful pacing. Skill in maneuvering these qualities can be highly useful for teachers, as we can utilize them in different ways relative to the kind of experience we seek to craft. Speaking loudly and quickly through a centering would be awkward, as would be whispering while students hold Side Plank with focused intent and vigor. If the voice becomes too monotonous, students might begin to disengage from the class, whereas too much fluctuation can become distracting. As we continue to work with language and sound, we can thoughtfully explore integrating more dynamic, expressive, and colorful language into our teaching. For some themes, less description and “teacher” talk is more effective. For others, full, expressive language takes students deeper into their understanding and embodiment of the practice. Building the skills of language and voice takes time and requires focused attention, profound self-acceptance, and compassionate humor.

6. **Guiding and Teaching:** In the conversation on language it’s valuable to draw a clear distinction between the modalities of guiding and teaching. In both modes of operation the skills mentioned above apply, yet there is an overall difference in the way we weave the class depending on which delivery system we are choosing.
on about the posture, and more of a workshop feel.



Verbal Articulation Skills

Excerpt from Anusara Yoga Teacher Training Manual:

Plain Language

Use plain language that is easily understood. Consider the background of your students in terms of culture, education, and experience to determine the appropriate language to use in your teaching. Define special terms when necessary. Any anatomical terms, hatha yoga jargon, Sanskrit words, or philosophical terms that some students might not understand should be clearly defined or avoided. Specific parts of the body, like tailbone, head of the arm bone, femur or sacrum should be physically pointed out.

Action Commands

Action commands demand action and self-effort in the students. Commands such as press, draw, ground, firm, hug, extend, lengthen, etc. cultivate willpower, concentration, and integration in the students. Action commands also give direction to Muscular Energy or Organic Energy, e.g., “Embrace your thigh muscles to the bones and draw up from the feet into the hips.” Adding the suffix “ing” to an action command word turns it into an indirect command. For example, the active quality of the instruction “press” becomes less directly powerful when changed to “pressing.” Indirect commands are appropriate to use as linking instructions after an active command. Pressing your hands firmly, lift your hips into the air.”

Types of Verbal Cues

Keep in mind that some cues are literal, some are biomechanical, some instructions are metaphoric, some are jargon-based, some are attitudinal and still others are energetic. Some cues tell students what to do while others give more information about how to do it. The clearer you become as a teacher about what cues you are giving the better your students will understand what you want them to perform.

- Literal- “Stretch your arms over your head. Reach toward the ceiling with straight arms.” “Lift your low belly up from your pubic bone toward your navel.” “Step your feet to the distance of your outer hips.”
- Biomechanical- “Elevate your shoulders by shrugging them slightly.” “Contract your thigh muscles until your knee caps lift.” “Isometrically draw your legs together until your adductors tone.” “Maintain the tone in your bicep as you straighten your arm.”
- Metaphoric- “Open your heart” “Let the winds of Grace fill your sails” “Blossom your buttocks” “melt”
- Jargon-based- “Inner spiral your legs” “inner body bright” “Activate mula bandha” “use your bandhas”
- Attitudinal- “Offer your heart forward” “Courageously lift up” “Humbly bow forward” “Stand with conviction.”
- Energetic- “Soften your skin” “lift your kidneys up” “pull energy up from your feet to your hips”

Verbal Articulation Skills – Homework Challenge

Record 10-15 minutes of your teaching (or use a recording from class) and listen for the different types of cues you give. Put a check mark down every time you can identify a different cue.

Type of Cue	Check
literal	
biomechanical	

metaphoric	
jargon-based	
attitudinal	
energetic	

What type of cues do you mostly give?

How was your posture?

Did you notice any habitual movements or vocal tics?

