SKM YOGA

Yoga Teacher Training Programme

YOGA TEACHING METHODS

Pedagogy, Lesson Planning, Communication and the Art of Yoga Instruction

Compiled by

Dr. Shivam Mishra

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Preface

Teaching yoga is among the most sacred responsibilities a practitioner can undertake. When a student rolls out their mat and places their trust in your guidance, they offer you their body, their breath, and their vulnerability. This book has been written to honour that trust — to equip every teacher emerging from the SKM Yoga Teacher Training Programme with not only the technical knowledge of asana, pranayama, and philosophy, but with the deep pedagogical wisdom necessary to teach yoga effectively, safely, ethically, and beautifully.

Yoga teaching is a craft that must be consciously learned, deliberately practised, and continuously refined. The greatest yoga teachers are not those who can perform the most spectacular postures — they are those who can communicate clearly, observe accurately, adapt intelligently, inspire genuinely, and serve their students with unwavering compassion and integrity. These are teachable skills, and this book is dedicated to their systematic development.

This text covers the complete landscape of yoga teaching methodology: the foundations of pedagogy and adult learning theory; the art of lesson planning for classes of all types and levels; verbal and non-verbal communication; demonstration and physical adjustment; managing classroom dynamics; teaching to diverse populations; assessment and feedback; the ethics of yoga instruction; the use of technology; sequencing and class design; and the ongoing development of the yoga teacher as a practitioner and a person.

Each chapter draws from both classical yogic wisdom and contemporary educational science. We believe the ancient and the modern are not in conflict — rather, modern pedagogy and neuroscience increasingly validate what the yoga tradition has always known: that genuine teaching arises from genuine practice, that the relationship between teacher and student is sacred, and that learning is most transformative when it engages body, mind, and spirit simultaneously.

— Dr. Shivam Mishra
Founder, SKM Yoga

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Foundations of Yoga Pedagogy

"The highest form of human intelligence is the ability to observe yourself without judgment." — J. Krishnamurti

1.1 What is Pedagogy?

The word 'pedagogy' derives from the Greek 'paidagogos' (paidos = child, agogos = leader). In modern educational theory, pedagogy refers to the science and art of teaching — the full constellation of methods, approaches, principles, and relationships that constitute the act of instruction. For yoga teachers, pedagogy means understanding not just what to teach but how to teach it, to whom, in what sequence, and with what intention.

Yoga pedagogy is a discipline that sits at the intersection of ancient wisdom traditions and contemporary educational science. It asks: How do people learn movement? How does breath change when consciously directed? What is the relationship between the teacher's own practice and the quality of their teaching? How do we create safe spaces for transformation? These questions are the heartland of yoga pedagogy.

For the yoga teacher, understanding pedagogy means recognising that you are not a performer demonstrating postures — you are a facilitator of learning, a guide into embodied experience, and a creator of conditions in which transformation can occur. This requires a theoretical framework as much as practical skill.

1.2 Historical Perspectives on Yoga Teaching

The Guru-Shishya Parampara

The classical model of yoga education is the Guru-Shishya Parampara — the lineage of teacher to student, transmitted orally and experientially from generation to generation. The Sanskrit word 'Guru' means one who dispels darkness (gu = darkness, ru = light). The Shishya (disciple) was not merely a student receiving information; they were a seeker undergoing transformation under the sustained guidance and direct transmission of a realised teacher.

In the classical system, the student lived in the Guru's ashram (the Gurukula system), serving the teacher and receiving teachings not through lectures but through daily life, observation, personal practice, and direct inquiry. The relationship was one of complete trust — the Shishya submitted their ego and habits to the purifying influence of the Guru's wisdom. Knowledge was transmitted not only verbally but through Darshan (the powerful presence of the teacher) and Diksha (spiritual initiation).

This model had profound pedagogical implications still relevant today. Learning was individualised — the Guru knew each student deeply and prescribed practices specific to their Prakriti (constitution), their Samskara (conditioning), and their stage of evolution. Learning was holistic — it engaged body, breath, mind, and spirit simultaneously. Learning was relational — the quality of the connection between teacher and student was the primary medium of transformation.

The Viniyoga Principle

T. Krishnamacharya, widely regarded as the father of modern yoga, developed the concept of Viniyoga — the appropriate and individualised application of yoga to each person. His teaching principle was: the practice must be adapted to the individual; the individual need not conform to the practice. His son T.K.V. Desikachar carried this teaching into a comprehensive system that forms the theoretical backbone of one-on-one therapeutic yoga and the personalised approach to teaching that all good yoga educators aspire to.

Modern Yoga Teaching: Group Classes and Contemporary Formats

The 20th century saw a radical shift in how yoga is taught. Teachers like Krishnamacharya, B.K.S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois, Indra Devi, and Swami Sivananda adapted yoga for group settings, Western audiences, and commercial contexts. The intimate Guru-Shishya relationship gave way to group classes of 20, 30, 50 or more students, taught in studios, gyms, hospitals, schools, and corporate offices.

This shift brought immense benefits — yoga became accessible to millions — but it also created new challenges. How does a teacher in a group class maintain the individual attention of the classical model? How does one teach authentically to diverse bodies, abilities, and intentions? These are the central tensions of contemporary yoga pedagogy, and this book is devoted to navigating them wisely.

1.3 Core Principles of Yoga Pedagogy

Principle 1: Teaching from Direct Experience

The foundational principle of yoga pedagogy is that the teacher must have a mature, sustained personal practice. You cannot guide others into experiences you have never had yourself. The authenticity, precision, and depth of your teaching are directly proportional to the depth of your own practice. Teaching from direct experience means that when you cue 'soften the back of the throat,' you know what that feels like from the inside. This embodied knowledge gives your teaching a quality that no amount of theoretical study alone can provide.

Principle 2: Meeting the Student Where They Are (Viniyoga)

Yoga must be adapted to the person; the person need not be adapted to the yoga. This requires the teacher to observe each student's body, breath, mind, and life circumstances, and to offer practices

that are genuinely appropriate for that specific individual at this specific moment. In a group class, Viniyoga means offering modifications, variations, and options that allow students of different abilities to participate safely and meaningfully.

Principle 3: Safety Above All (Ahimsa in Teaching)

A yoga class must be, above all, physically and psychologically safe. Physical safety requires the teacher to understand biomechanics, contraindications, and alignment principles well enough to prevent injury. Psychological safety requires an environment of non-judgment, inclusion, and respect where students feel free to move within their authentic range, ask questions, and be honest about their limitations. The first Yama — Ahimsa (non-violence) — applies as much to the teacher's instruction as to the student's practice.

Principle 4: Holding Spacious Awareness

The most effective yoga teachers have the quality of what Zen tradition calls 'beginner's mind' — an open, curious, non-assuming awareness that allows them to truly see what is happening in front of them. This spacious awareness is the opposite of robotic instruction. It means tracking the energy of the room, noticing the struggling student in the back, recognising when the class needs stillness rather than another posture, and being genuinely responsive to what is — rather than mechanically delivering what was planned.

Principle 5: Continuous Learning and Humility

The yoga teacher who believes they have arrived — who has nothing left to learn — has, in that very belief, begun to decline as a teacher. The greatest yoga teachers invariably remain the most earnest students. Pedagogically, humility means acknowledging when you do not know the answer and finding out. It means remaining open to feedback from students, colleagues, and your own body's responses to your teaching. It means regularly attending others' classes as a student, and continuing to study yoga texts, anatomy, psychology, and educational theory throughout your career.

1.4 The Role of the Yoga Teacher

Teacher as Guide

The yoga teacher's primary role is that of a guide — someone who illuminates a path that the student must ultimately walk themselves. Unlike a personal trainer who prescribes exercises to achieve external goals, the yoga teacher guides a journey of internal discovery. Your role is not to make students look like your idea of a perfect yogi; it is to help each student discover their own authentic expression of the practices, and through that discovery, to find greater health, peace, and integration.

Teacher as Witness

One of the most powerful things a yoga teacher offers is the quality of their witnessing. When a student feels genuinely seen — observed with care, intelligence, and non-judgment — something relaxes in them that allows deeper learning to occur. The teacher as witness holds steady, compassionate attention on the student's practice, noticing what is changing, what is habitual, what is ready to open, and what needs protection. This kind of witnessing is a form of love.

Teacher as Model

Whether intended or not, yoga teachers serve as models for their students. Students observe not just your technical instruction but how you inhabit your own body, how you respond to difficulties, how you treat people who are struggling, and how the practice has (or has not) transformed your daily life. The yoga teacher's life is, in a very real sense, part of the curriculum.

Teacher as Facilitator of Transformation

At its deepest level, yoga teaching is about the gradual liberation of the human being from the suffering caused by unconscious habits of body and mind. The yoga teacher is, ideally, a facilitator of this profound transformation. Even the most basic hatha yoga class, taught with genuine care and wisdom, plants seeds of awareness that can eventually flower into deep transformation.

Chapter 2: Understanding the Learner – Learning Theory and Student Psychology

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

— Benjamin Franklin

2.1 Adult Learning Theory: Andragogy

Malcolm Knowles (1970) coined the term 'andragogy' to describe the theory of adult learning. Most yoga students are adults, and understanding how adults learn is foundational to effective yoga teaching. Knowles identified six core principles of adult learning directly applicable to yoga instruction.

Knowles's Six Principles of Andragogy Applied to Yoga

1. **Self-Concept: Adults are self-directed learners who need to take ownership of their learning. In yoga, this means encouraging students to explore and make conscious choices in their practice, rather than demanding rigid compliance with fixed forms.**
2. **Prior Experience: Adults bring a lifetime of experiences — physical, emotional, professional, spiritual — to their learning. These experiences are resources to be leveraged. Honour students' existing knowledge and invite them to relate new yoga practices to their own lived experience.**
3. **Readiness to Learn: Adults are motivated to learn when the content is relevant to their real-life challenges. The yoga teacher who connects practices to students' stated goals (back pain relief, stress reduction, better sleep) harnesses this natural motivation.**
4. **Problem-Centred Orientation: Adults learn best when education is framed around real problems rather than abstract theory. Rather than explaining anatomy for its own sake, apply it to a challenge the student is facing in their practice.**
5. **Internal Motivation: Adults are more motivated by internal rewards (increased self-awareness, reduced pain, greater peace) than external ones. Cultivate intrinsic motivation by helping students connect with how yoga makes them feel, not just how it makes them look.**
6. **Need to Know: Adults want to know WHY they are learning something before they learn HOW. Always explain the purpose and benefit of a practice before introducing it.**

2.2 Learning Styles – The VAK Model

The VAK model identifies three primary learning modalities. While neuroscience suggests that rigid 'learning style' categories are oversimplified, the framework is pedagogically useful as a reminder that students access learning through multiple channels, and that effective teaching uses all of them.

Visual Learners – The Power of Demonstration

Visual learners absorb information most readily through what they can see. In a yoga class, they benefit greatly from clear demonstrations, visual imagery, alignment charts or diagrams, watching the teacher from different angles, and descriptive visual language in verbal cues ('imagine your spine lengthening like a string of pearls toward the ceiling'). Approximately 65% of people have a primary visual processing preference.

Auditory Learners – The Power of Voice

Auditory learners process information primarily through sound. They respond strongly to the tone, rhythm, and precision of verbal cues; to the use of breath sound as a teaching tool; to music and silence; and to the spoken narrative of a class. For auditory learners, how you say something matters as much as what you say. A calm, warm, unhurried voice creates an auditory environment conducive to deep practice.

Kinaesthetic Learners – The Power of Sensation

Kinaesthetic learners learn primarily through physical sensation and doing. They may struggle to understand a posture from description alone; they need to move into it and feel it from the inside. For kinaesthetic learners, appropriate physical assists and adjustments (always with consent), the use of props, and practices that develop interoception are invaluable teaching tools.

Expert yoga teachers use all three modalities in every class — demonstrating (visual), cueing precisely (auditory), and inviting internal sensation (kinaesthetic). This multi-modal approach ensures all students receive instruction in a form accessible to them.

2.3 Bloom's Taxonomy Applied to Yoga Teaching

Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives describes a hierarchy of cognitive learning goals, from simple recall to complex creation. It maps remarkably well onto yoga teaching, helping us understand the progressive depth of learning we aim to facilitate.

Bloom Level	Cognitive Domain	Application in Yoga
1. Remember	Recall	Name parts of a posture, recall breath ratios, identify Sanskrit names.
2. Understand	Comprehension	Understand WHY a posture is practised — its physiological and energetic effects.
3. Apply	Using knowledge	Independently execute postures, apply breathing techniques, use mudras in practice.

4. Analyse	Breaking down	Analyse their own practice — identifying what works, what needs adjustment, and why.
5. Evaluate	Judging	Evaluate alignment, safety, sequencing, and appropriateness of practices for different conditions.
6. Create	Synthesising	Design practice sequences, adapt for populations, teach others, innovate intelligently.

2.4 Embodied Learning and Somatic Education

Contemporary somatic education theory — drawing on the work of Thomas Hanna, Moshe Feldenkrais, Ida Rolf, and Mabel Todd — aligns closely with yoga's understanding of embodied learning. Somatic education holds that the body is not merely a vehicle for the mind but an intelligent system with its own form of knowing. Learning that engages the body's proprioceptive, interoceptive, and vestibular systems produces deeper, more lasting change than purely cognitive learning.

In yoga teaching, this principle manifests as the priority given to experiential learning over theoretical instruction. The student learns the hip-opening effects of Baddha Konasana not by reading about the hip flexors but by practising the posture, breathing into it, and noticing the sensations that arise. The teacher's primary skill in facilitating somatic learning is directing the student's attention inward — inviting precise, non-judgmental internal observation.

- **Proprioception:** The body's sense of its own position in space. Yoga asana practice significantly develops proprioceptive acuity, improving balance, coordination, and body awareness.
- **Interoception:** Perception of internal bodily states — heart rate, breath, digestive activity, emotion. Meditation and mindful movement are among the most powerful ways to develop interoceptive capacity. Growing research links interoceptive awareness with emotional regulation and mental health.
- **Exteroception:** Perception of the external environment through the five senses. Yoga teaching addresses exteroception through Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal) — gradually turning attention away from external stimuli toward internal awareness.

2.5 Neuroscience of Learning: Key Insights for Yoga Teachers

Neuroplasticity

The brain changes physically in response to learning and experience — neuroplasticity. When we repeatedly practise a physical skill (like an asana), we strengthen and myelinate the neural pathways associated with that movement pattern. This is why consistent practice ('Abhyasa') is essential — each repetition literally rewires the brain. Learning is enhanced by repeated varied practice, mindful attention during practice, adequate sleep (which consolidates learning), and moderate challenge at the growth edge.

Emotion and Learning: The Amygdala Effect

The amygdala — the brain's emotional processing centre — plays a central role in learning and memory. Experiences associated with positive emotion are more readily encoded in long-term memory. When students feel psychologically safe, their pre-frontal cortex (centre of higher learning) can engage fully. When they feel threatened or embarrassed, the amygdala hijacks attention and learning shuts down. Creating a warm, welcoming, non-judgmental classroom environment is therefore not merely pleasant — it is a neurological necessity.

Retrieval Practice and Long-Term Retention

Research consistently shows that testing knowledge (retrieval practice) produces stronger long-term retention than re-reading or re-listening. For yoga teachers: invite students to recall information rather than always re-presenting it. Ask 'What was the breath ratio we used for Nadi Shodhana last week?' Design practices that require students to remember and apply previously learned techniques.

2.6 Understanding Student Motivation

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan) distinguishes between intrinsic motivation (doing something for its own inherent satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (doing something for external reward or to avoid punishment). Research consistently shows that intrinsically motivated learners achieve deeper learning, greater persistence, and more positive long-term outcomes.

In yoga, intrinsic motivation is associated with the joy of movement, the satisfaction of breath awareness, the peace of meditation, and the growing sense of self-knowledge. Extrinsic motivation might include practising yoga to lose weight or impress others. The yoga teacher's role is to help students transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation — from 'I practise yoga because I should' to 'I practise yoga because it genuinely nourishes me.'

Understanding Why Students Come to Yoga

Students arrive at yoga classes with widely varying motivations and needs. Effective yoga teachers understand this diversity and design classes that can serve multiple motivations simultaneously. Common student motivations include:

- Physical health goals: pain management, flexibility, weight management, rehabilitation
- Stress reduction and mental health: anxiety, depression, burnout, insomnia
- Spiritual seeking: meaning, connection, transcendence, community
- Social connection: belonging, friendship, shared practice
- Performance enhancement: athletes, dancers, performers seeking supplementary training
- Specific life transitions: pregnancy, menopause, ageing, grief, recovery

Understanding your students' motivations enables you to frame practices in ways that resonate with their specific goals, increasing engagement and long-term retention in your classes.

Chapter 3: The Art of Lesson Planning

"Failing to plan is planning to fail." — Benjamin Franklin

3.1 Why Lesson Planning Matters

Some yoga teachers resist formal lesson planning, fearing it will make their teaching mechanical, rigid, or disconnected from the living reality of the class. This misunderstands the purpose of planning. A well-crafted lesson plan is not a script to be robotically followed — it is a map. It provides clear orientation so that when you arrive in the room and begin to respond to what is actually present, you do so from a grounded foundation rather than from improvised uncertainty.

Research on expert teaching in any domain consistently shows that experts plan more carefully than novices — but they also depart from their plans more fluidly. The paradox resolves when we understand that deep planning creates deep internalisation, which frees the teacher to be genuinely present and responsive in the moment. Plan thoroughly, then hold the plan lightly.

3.2 Components of a Complete Yoga Lesson Plan

Component	Description and Purpose
Class Details	Date, time, duration, venue, class level (beginner/intermediate/advanced), expected number, special populations (pregnant, elderly, injured).
Theme / Intention	The central thread — physical (hip opening), philosophical (Ahimsa), energetic (grounding), or seasonal — that gives the class coherence and meaning.
Learning Objectives	What specific knowledge, skills, or experiences will students gain? Written in observable, measurable terms using Bloom's action verbs.
Materials and Props	Mats, blocks, bolsters, straps, blankets, eye pillows, music playlist, handouts. Prepare ALL materials before students arrive.
Opening / Welcome (5-10 min)	Centering practice, intention setting, brief check-in. Creates the transition from ordinary daily life to the yoga space.
Warm-Up (10-15 min)	Gentle movements, mobilisation, preparatory practices that gradually raise body temperature, lubricate joints, prepare the nervous system.
Main Practice (25-40 min)	The core asana sequence, pranayama practices, or thematic exploration that constitutes the primary learning experience.
Cool Down (10-15 min)	Counter-poses, forward folds, twists, and restorative postures that safely release the effort of the main practice.
Savasana / Integration (5-15 min)	The essential integration period. NEVER skip or shorten Savasana — it is when neurological and physiological consolidation occurs.
Closing (3-5 min)	Brief reflection, mantra, intention revisiting, gratitude. Creates conscious, meaningful closure.

Modifications and Alternatives	For each major practice: modifications for limited mobility, options for injuries, advanced variations for experienced students.
Contraindications	What conditions (pregnancy, hypertension, glaucoma, disc herniation) require modified or avoided practices?
Assessment Notes	What will you observe to gauge whether learning objectives were met?
Post-Class Reflection	Completed after class: What worked? What to change? What did you notice about individual students?

3.3 Writing Effective Learning Objectives

Learning objectives transform the teacher's orientation from 'what will I do in this class?' to 'what will my students know, feel, or be able to do by the end?' Effective objectives follow the SMART framework:

- **Specific:** Clearly identify what the student will learn. 'Students will understand pranayama' is too vague. 'Students will be able to practise Nadi Shodhana with a 1:2 inhalation:exhalation ratio' is specific.
- **Measurable:** The teacher should be able to observe whether the objective was achieved. Use observable action verbs: demonstrate, practise, identify, describe, compare, evaluate, create, modify, apply.
- **Achievable:** Objectives must be realistically attainable within the class duration and for the population being taught.
- **Relevant:** Objectives must be meaningful and connected to why students come to yoga — their goals, needs, and challenges.
- **Time-Bound:** Objectives are scoped to the specific class. 'By the end of this 90-minute session, students will be able to...'

3.4 Class Themes and Intentions

A well-chosen theme elevates a yoga class from a collection of postures into a meaningful, unified experience. The opening intention, asana sequence, verbal cues, music, and closing reflection all serve the same central purpose.

Types of Class Themes

- **Physical/Anatomical Themes:** Hip openers, backbends, spinal mobility, shoulder release, core strength, balance, inversion practice. Organise the sequence around a specific body area or physical capacity.
- **Energetic/Chakra Themes:** Grounding (Muladhara), creativity (Swadhisthana), will-power (Manipura), heart-opening (Anahata), expression (Vishuddha), clarity (Ajna), expansion (Sahasrara).

- **Philosophical/Ethical Themes:** Ahimsa — honouring body limits; Santosha — finding acceptance; Tapas — the power of consistent effort; Svadhyaya — the practice of self-observation.
- **Seasonal Themes:** Spring renewal, summer abundance, autumn release, winter stillness. Aligning yoga practice with natural rhythms honours the body's relationship to the wider world.
- **Emotional/Psychological Themes:** Releasing fear, cultivating courage, opening to grief, finding joy, developing equanimity. These require particular sensitivity and psychological awareness.

3.5 Sample Lesson Plans

Template A: Beginner Hatha Class – 60 Minutes

Time	Section	Content and Teacher Notes
0-5 min	Welcome & Centering	Students arrive in Sukhasana or Savasana. Guide 3 deep breaths. Set intention: 'Today we invite ease into the body and quiet into the mind.' Brief descending body scan. Explain the class structure.
5-15 min	Warm-Up Sequence	Cat-Cow (Marjaryasana-Bitilasana) x5 rounds breath-linked. Child's Pose (Balasana) — 5 breaths. Thread the Needle both sides. Table-top to Downward Dog — first introduction. Hold Adho Mukha Svanasana 5 breaths, focus on foot-hand connection. Modification: bent knees throughout.
15-20 min	Standing Preparation	Mountain Pose (Tadasana) — detailed alignment: rooting of feet, engagement of legs, neutral pelvis, lengthened spine, relaxed shoulders, crown lifting. Standing Forward Fold (Uttanasana) with bent knees. Half Lift (Ardha Uttanasana). Importance of breath throughout.
20-40 min	Main Sequence	Modified Sun Salutation A x3 (step, not jump). Warrior I (Virabhadrasana I) right side — alignment focus. Low Lunge (Anjaneyasana) right side. Warrior II (Virabhadrasana II) right. Extended Side Angle (with block). Repeat all on left. Triangle Pose (Trikonasana) both sides. Wide-Leg Forward Fold (Prasarita Padottanasana).
40-48 min	Hip Opening	Reclined Figure Four (Supta Kapotasana) both sides — 2 min each. Cue students to flex the top foot for knee protection. Option: seated version in chair for students with tight hips.
48-53 min	Supine Wind-Down	Knees to chest (Apanasana) — 8 breaths. Supine spinal twist both sides — 90 seconds each. Supported Bridge Pose (option with block). Reclined Cobbler's Pose (Supta Baddha Konasana).
53-60 min	Savasana & Closing	Full Savasana setup — offer bolster under knees, blanket for warmth. Guided relaxation: 3 minutes. Silence: 3 minutes. Gentle return: fingers, toes, side roll. Seated closing: recall intention, 3 rounds of Om, Namaste. Home practice suggestion: 5-minute Savasana daily.

Template B: Intermediate Vinyasa Class – 90 Minutes

Time	Section	Content
0-8 min	Opening Pranayama	Seated Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing) — 5 rounds. Introduce the class theme: 'Finding strength through surrender.' Set personal intention. Om x3 and Invocation.
8-20 min	Sun Salutations A & B	Sun Salutation A x3 — focus on Chaturanga mechanics, transitions. Sun Salutation B x3 — introduce Utkatasana and Warrior I within the flow. Downward Dog as a resting posture with multiple breath holds.
20-30 min	Standing Sequence	Warrior I to Warrior II to Reverse Warrior to Extended Side Angle — right side flow. Repeat left side. Triangle Pose (Trikonasana) with block option. Revolved Triangle (Parivrtta Trikonasana) — preparatory hip rotation exercises first.
30-45 min	Balance and Core	Standing Hand to Big Toe Pose (Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana) — three stages with strap option. Half Moon Pose (Ardha Chandrasana) from Triangle. Warrior III with wall support option. Core preparation: Plank holds, Navasana variations.
45-55 min	Backbend Sequence	Cobra (Bhujangasana) — anatomical focus on thoracic extension. Locust (Salabhasana) — full body engagement. Bow (Dhanurasana) — option. Bridge Pose (Setu Bandhasana) — 3 rounds, last round option to hold. Wheel (Urdhva Dhanurasana) — for prepared students only. Counter: Child's Pose x 8 breaths.
55-65 min	Inversions & Twists	Shoulder Stand (Sarvangasana) or Legs Up the Wall (Viparita Karani). Supine spinal twist both sides. Happy Baby (Ananda Balasana). Seated Forward Fold (Paschimottanasana).
65-80 min	Savasana & Yoga Nidra	Full Savasana with guided Yoga Nidra body scan. Rotate awareness through the body systematically. 7 minutes of silence. Gentle return.
80-90 min	Closing Meditation	Seated — observe the field of awareness after practice. Brief journaling prompt: 'What did you notice?' Three Om. Gratitude circle (optional). Namaste.

Template C: Restorative / Therapeutic Class – 75 Minutes

Time	Section	Content
0-8 min	Arrival & Grounding	Students set up mats with all props (bolsters, blankets, blocks). Begin with 10 minutes of free breath observation in Savasana. No instruction — allow the nervous system to arrive.
8-20 min	Supported Child's Pose	Bolster under the torso, blanket under knees. Hold 10-12 minutes. Slow verbal guidance: invite the belly to release onto the bolster. Cue breath into the back ribs.
20-35 min	Supported Reclined Cobbler's Pose	Bolster under spine from sacrum to head. Blocks under thighs. Blanket for weight. 12-15 minute hold. Pure breath observation — no active work. Offer eye pillow.
35-47 min	Supported Forward	Seated with bolster across thighs. Forward fold over bolster.

	Fold	Head turns side to side midway. Strap around foot for tight hamstrings. 10-minute hold.
47-57 min	Legs Up the Wall	Viparita Karani with optional folded blanket under sacrum. 10-minute hold. Cue progressive muscular relaxation in the legs.
57-70 min	Full Savasana with Yoga Nidra	Complete prop setup — eye pillow, blanket, bolster under knees. 13-minute guided Yoga Nidra: Sankalpa (resolve), body rotation, pairs of opposites, visualisation, Sankalpa return.
70-75 min	Closing	Very slow return to sitting. Two minutes of silence. Whispered Om. Gratitude. Reminder to move slowly for the rest of the day.

3.6 Planning for Different Contexts

Private Sessions

One-on-one teaching allows for the most individualised application of Viniyoga principles. In private sessions, the lesson plan is developed collaboratively with the student based on an intake assessment covering health history, goals, limitations, lifestyle, and stage of yoga experience. Private sessions require the teacher to be fluent in a wide range of practices and modifications, and to have strong assessment and communication skills.

Therapeutic Yoga Classes

Classes designed for specific health conditions — back pain, anxiety, diabetes, cancer recovery, pregnancy — require specialised training and careful planning. The lesson plan must account for medical contraindications, modifications, and the psychological dimensions of health challenges. Teachers of therapeutic yoga should always work within their scope of training and maintain appropriate professional boundaries, referring to healthcare professionals when necessary.

Prenatal Yoga Classes

Prenatal yoga requires specialised training. Key planning considerations include: avoiding supine postures after the first trimester, avoiding deep twists and compressions of the abdomen, modifying balance postures for the shifting centre of gravity, emphasising pelvic floor awareness, and incorporating breathing practices specifically beneficial for labour and delivery. Emotional sensitivity to the psychological landscape of pregnancy is equally important.

Online and Virtual Classes

Teaching online requires additional planning considerations. How will you observe students' alignment when the camera shows only one angle? How will you create community and connection through a screen? Online classes require clearer verbal cueing (since demonstrations may be less

visible), more frequent check-ins, and particular attention to the quality of voice, presence, and energy. Lighting, sound quality, and background all contribute to the learning environment.

Outdoor and Non-Studio Settings

Teaching in parks, corporate offices, schools, hospitals, or community centres requires adaptability. Plan for environmental variables (wind, sun, noise) that may affect the class. In corporate settings, classes may need to accommodate students in business attire and without changing facilities. In hospitals, classes may need to be conducted chair-based or adapted for patients with IV lines, limited mobility, or significant fatigue.

Chapter 4: Sequencing and Class Design

"A well-sequenced yoga class is like a beautiful piece of music — it has a beginning, a middle, and an end; tension and release; peaks and valleys; and an overall arc that carries the listener to a place of resolution." — Unknown

4.1 The Principles of Yoga Sequencing

Sequencing is the art of arranging yoga practices into a meaningful, safe, and progressive order that serves the physical, pranic, mental, and spiritual needs of the student. Great sequencing is not arbitrary — it follows principles rooted in anatomy, physiology, energy management, and pedagogical progression. Understanding these principles transforms you from a teacher who follows a memorised sequence into a teacher who can design intelligent sequences for any context.

Principle 1: Build Progressively (Preparation and Counter-Pose)

Every challenging posture has preparatory practices that make it safer and more accessible. The hip-opening sequence leading to Hanumanasana (splits) might include Lizard Pose, Low Lunge with a block, Half Splits, and Pigeon before attempting the full expression. Similarly, every posture that creates a specific action in the body requires a counter-pose that reverses or neutralises that action. Deep backbends (Wheel) are followed by gentle forward folds (Child's Pose). Strong forward folds are followed by gentle backbends (Bridge). This principle of preparation and counter-pose is the backbone of intelligent sequencing.

Principle 2: Move from Simple to Complex

Classes should move from simpler, more accessible practices toward more complex, demanding ones — then back toward simplicity in the cool-down. This arc mirrors the natural Ayurvedic understanding of Agni (digestive fire): you warm and build the fire gradually, work at its height, then allow it to settle. Beginning with complex, demanding practices before the body is warm is both physically dangerous and pedagogically poor — it gives students no chance to develop awareness and understanding before being confronted with complexity.

Principle 3: Warm the Body Before Deep Work

The musculoskeletal system — muscles, tendons, ligaments, and fascia — is significantly more pliable and less injury-prone when warm. Warm tissue can withstand greater stretch forces and recovers more quickly from strain. The warm-up should gradually raise core temperature, lubricate joints through gentle articulation, and activate the neuromuscular pathways relevant to the main

practice. Cold stretching — pulling cold tissue into extreme ranges — is a primary cause of yoga-related injury.

Principle 4: The Peak Pose Principle

Many yoga class sequences are organised around a 'peak pose' — the most challenging or demanding posture of the class, toward which the entire sequence builds. The warm-up and main sequence prepare the body physically and psychologically for the peak pose. After the peak, the sequence 'descends' through counter-poses, cooling practices, and relaxation. This arc creates a satisfying dramatic structure that students often appreciate deeply.

Principle 5: Balance Effort and Rest (Sthira and Sukha)

Patanjali's definition of asana — 'Sthira Sukham Asanam' (Yoga Sutra 2.46) — means the posture should be steady and comfortable. This principle extends to the entire class design: balance periods of effort with periods of rest; balance strong, muscular postures with soft, restorative ones; balance heat-building practices with cooling ones. A class that is all effort produces exhaustion; a class that is all rest produces inertia. The balance of Sthira and Sukha is the hallmark of excellent sequencing.

4.2 Anatomical Principles of Sequencing

Spinal Movements

The spine can move in six fundamental directions: flexion (forward bending), extension (backward bending), lateral flexion (side bending) left and right, and rotation (twisting) left and right. A well-rounded class typically includes all six types of spinal movement, ensuring that no direction is chronically overemphasised. A common sequencing approach is to begin with gentle flexion/extension warm-ups (Cat-Cow), then neutral spine, then gradually introduce more demanding movements.

Sequencing for the Hip Joint

The hip joint has the greatest range of motion of any joint in the body — it can flex, extend, abduct, adduct, internally rotate, and externally rotate. Hip-focused sequences should address all these directions progressively. The hip flexors (psoas, iliacus, rectus femoris) are among the most chronically tight muscles in modern sedentary populations; the external rotators (piriformis, gemelli) are often tight in people who sit with crossed legs. Intelligent hip sequencing opens both groups progressively.

Sequencing for the Shoulder

The shoulder complex — comprising the glenohumeral joint, acromioclavicular joint, sternoclavicular joint, and scapulothoracic relationship — is both the most mobile and most vulnerable joint complex

in the body. Shoulder sequencing should begin with scapular mobility (shoulder rolls, thoracic extension), move to rotator cuff activation and stabilisation, and only then proceed to weight-bearing (Plank, Chaturanga, arm balances). Skipping shoulder preparation is a primary cause of rotator cuff injuries in yoga.

4.3 Energetic Sequencing: Working with the Chakras and Pranas

Beyond the anatomical dimension, yoga sequencing works with the subtle energy body — the Chakras and the Pancha-Prana. Many experienced teachers design sequences that progressively move energy from the base (Muladhara) toward the crown (Sahasrara), beginning with grounding practices and moving toward heart-opening, expressive, and finally meditative practices. This energetic arc mirrors the classic journey of Kundalini Yoga.

Other energetic approaches include: Yin-Yang sequencing (beginning with active Yang practices to generate heat, then moving into long-held Yin postures to work on the deeper connective tissues and meridians); Moon-Sun sequencing (solar/Pingala stimulating practices followed by lunar/Ida cooling practices for balance); and seasonal sequencing (Vata-balancing practices in autumn/winter, Pitta-cooling in summer, Kapha-stimulating in spring).

4.4 The Art of Transitions

How you move between postures is as important as the postures themselves. Jarring, hurried, or unconscious transitions interrupt the flow of Prana and disrupt the meditative quality of the class. Conscious transitions — guided by clear verbal instruction and coordinated with the breath — are themselves a form of practice. In Vinyasa traditions, every transition is an intentional movement; in Iyengar traditions, transitions are taken slowly and with precision; in Yin traditions, transitions are given as much time as the postures themselves.

Teach transitions explicitly, especially to beginners. The movement from Warrior I to Warrior II, for example, involves a specific hip rotation and shoulder adjustment that students need to learn consciously. Do not assume students know how to get into, through, and out of postures — teach the whole movement, not just the endpoint.

4.5 Time Management in Class

Time management is a crucial but often neglected aspect of class design. Many yoga teachers — especially novices — chronically under-time their main sequence and rush through or eliminate Savasana as a result. This is a serious pedagogical failure: Savasana is not a luxury; it is physiologically and neurologically essential to the class.

As a general guideline: allocate a generous proportion of class time (at least 10% and ideally 15-20%) to Savasana and closing. Use a watch or timer discreetly. Practise teaching your sequences

in real time (not just mentally rehearsing) before teaching them to students. Know which elements of your plan are essential and which can be shortened if time runs short — and never let those essential elements be Savasana.

Chapter 5: Verbal Communication in Yoga Teaching

"The right word spoken at the right moment is worth a thousand words said at the wrong one." — Ancient Teaching Wisdom

5.1 The Voice as a Teaching Instrument

In yoga teaching, your voice is your primary instrument. More than any technique you demonstrate or any philosophical insight you share, the quality of your voice shapes the psychological and physical experience of your students. The yoga teacher's voice has the power to calm or excite the nervous system; to invite deeper presence or create distracted anxiety; to instil confidence or undermine trust. Cultivating a refined, expressive, and conscious voice is one of the most important aspects of teacher training.

Qualities of an Effective Yoga Teaching Voice

- **Pace:** The pace of your speaking should match the energy you are creating. In a dynamic Vinyasa class, instructions may come more quickly and energetically. In a restorative class, slow, unhurried speech mirrors and encourages the physiological slowing-down you are guiding. A common beginner teacher mistake is speaking too fast — usually because of nervousness. Practise consciously slowing your speech.
- **Volume:** Your voice should be clearly audible without being harsh or jarring. In Savasana and meditation, lower the volume progressively. In a large class, ensure the students at the back can hear without those at the front being overwhelmed. Learn to project from the diaphragm rather than straining the throat.
- **Tone:** Warmth, confidence, and care should be audible in your tone. A cold, clinical voice creates emotional distance. An excessively sweet or artificially cheerful voice feels inauthentic and can be jarring during deep practice. Cultivate a tone that is genuinely warm, grounded, and alive.
- **Inflection:** Vary your pitch and inflection to maintain interest and convey emphasis. Monotone delivery — common in nervous or habitual teachers — produces drowsiness and disengagement. Rise in inflection to invite; lower it to ground. Use silence and pause for emphasis.
- **Breath:** Students hear your breath. Teaching from a place of easy, natural breathing communicates ease and safety. If you are breathless during demonstration, your students will unconsciously hold their breath too. Model the breathing you wish to see.

5.2 Types of Verbal Cues

There are several distinct types of verbal cues, each serving a different teaching purpose. Expert yoga teachers use all types fluidly and know when each is most appropriate.

1. Anatomical/Alignment Cues

Anatomical cues direct students' attention to specific body parts and their precise positioning. They are the most commonly used type of cue in yoga teaching and are essential for safe alignment. Examples: 'Stack your knee directly over your ankle.' 'Firm your outer right hip back.' 'Draw the lower belly slightly in and up.' 'Soften the back of your skull away from the neck.'

Best practices for anatomical cues: Use the simplest, most precise language possible. Avoid technical jargon that beginners won't understand (say 'tailbone' not 'coccyx'; say 'sits bones' not 'ischial tuberosities' unless in an anatomy-specific training). Give one or two cues at a time — not five simultaneously. Progress from foundation to apex (feet to crown in standing poses; pelvis to crown in seated poses).

2. Action Cues

Action cues describe what to do — they direct movement rather than just position. They are particularly important in Vinyasa-style teaching where movement is continuous. Examples: 'Inhale, sweep the arms overhead.' 'Exhale, fold forward.' 'On your next exhale, rotate from the lower belly.' 'As you breathe in, feel the chest expand in all directions.'

Action cues should always be coordinated with the breath. In classical yoga, every movement has a corresponding breath. 'Inhale into extension, exhale into forward fold' — this coordination is not merely aesthetic; it reflects the deep relationship between the Pranas (Prana Vayu for inhalation/expansion; Apana Vayu for exhalation/releasing).

3. Imagery Cues and Metaphors

Imagery cues use metaphors, similes, and visualisations to evoke a quality of experience rather than a precise mechanical position. They are among the most powerful tools in the yoga teacher's repertoire because they engage the kinaesthetic imagination and produce subtle, whole-body responses that anatomical cues alone cannot achieve.

Examples of effective imagery cues: 'Imagine roots growing from the soles of your feet deep into the earth.' 'Feel as though the crown of your head is being gently lifted toward the sky by a thread of golden light.' 'Allow your breath to be like the tide — unhurried, rhythmic, inevitable.' 'In Trikonasana, imagine you are pressed between two panes of glass — expanding into all available space within the plane.'

The key to effective imagery cueing is to use concrete, universally accessible images. Avoid overly esoteric or culturally specific references that may exclude students. Avoid anatomically inaccurate

images that might create tension (e.g. 'push through' typically creates gripping; 'melt' typically creates release).

4. Breath Cues

Breath cues are a category of action cues that specifically direct the breath, making them one of the most physiologically powerful tools a yoga teacher has. Breath instruction can change heart rate, blood pressure, autonomic tone, and mental state within seconds. Examples: 'Let your exhalation be longer than your inhalation.' 'Breathe into the back of the ribcage.' 'Allow the belly to soften with the inhalation, not pull in.' 'Notice the pause at the top of the inhalation.'

5. Inquiry Cues

Inquiry cues invite students into active self-observation rather than passive compliance. They are among the most sophisticated and effective types of cueing, particularly for developing interoceptive awareness. Examples: 'What do you notice in the left hip that's different from the right?' 'Can you breathe into the area of greatest resistance without trying to change it?' 'What is the quality of your attention right now?' 'Notice whether this posture is asking more of your body or your mind.'

Inquiry cues cultivate the quality of Svadhyaya (self-study) — one of the five Niyamas. They teach students to be their own teachers, which is the ultimate aim of yoga pedagogy.

6. Affirmation and Encouragement Cues

These cues acknowledge effort, validate experience, and create emotional safety. Examples: 'There's no right way to do this — only your way.' 'Honour wherever you find yourself today.' 'Effort without attachment — give yourself fully to the practice and release concern about the outcome.' 'This is the practice: returning, again and again, with kindness.'

5.3 The Language of Instruction: Do's and Don'ts

Language That Empowers

- Use 'invite' rather than 'should': 'I invite you to...' gives students agency.
- Use 'option' to offer variations: 'One option here is to...'
- Use the present tense: 'Feel the length in your spine' rather than 'You should be feeling...'
- Use 'notice' rather than 'feel' for sensations — some students with trauma histories or body dysphoria respond better to 'notice' than 'feel'.
- Use 'breath' as a verb: 'Breathe into the left hip' rather than 'send your breath there' — the latter is anatomically confusing.

Language to Avoid

- Avoid commands that create fear: 'Don't collapse your knee!' Instead: 'Stack your knee over your ankle.'
- Avoid comparative language: 'Like this, not like that.' Body shaming is subtle and common.
- Avoid anatomically inaccurate imagery: 'Suck your navel to your spine' can create harmful over-bracing.
- Avoid excessive spiritual jargon in secular settings — not all students share your philosophical framework.
- Avoid talking continuously. Silence is a powerful teaching tool. Learn to be comfortable with it.
- Avoid complex, multi-part instructions: Give one clear direction, allow the body to integrate, then add the next.

5.4 Counting, Timing, and the Use of Breath in Instruction

Yoga class timing is typically organised around the breath rather than clock time. Rather than 'hold this pose for 30 seconds,' the yoga teacher says 'take five breaths here.' This keeps instruction in harmony with the individual student's unique respiratory rhythm and creates a more organic, embodied sense of time.

When counting breaths, do so audibly but unobtrusively: 'Three more breaths... two... last breath here... on your next exhale, release.' This preparation for transition is a mark of skilled teaching — students should never feel jolted out of a posture by a sudden instruction to move.

5.5 Sanskrit in the Modern Yoga Class

The use of Sanskrit — yoga's classical language — in modern classes is a topic of ongoing discussion. Sanskrit connects students to yoga's living tradition and gives them access to a global community of practitioners. It also carries philosophical and energetic resonances that translations often fail to capture. Saying 'Tadasana' rather than just 'Mountain Pose' places the practice within its cultural context.

However, Sanskrit should be introduced gradually and explained when first used. The yoga teacher's responsibility is both to honour the tradition and to make it accessible. The approach at SKM Yoga is to use both Sanskrit and the English translation consistently, so students gradually develop familiarity with the classical terminology while always understanding what is being referred to.

Chapter 6: Non-Verbal Communication, Demonstration and Physical Adjustment

"The body never lies." — Martha Graham

6.1 Non-Verbal Communication in Yoga Teaching

Research in communication science consistently finds that the majority of human communication is non-verbal — conveyed through body language, facial expression, gesture, eye contact, proxemics (use of space), and energy. For the yoga teacher, non-verbal communication is especially significant because students observe their teacher continuously and absorb messages that are never articulated in words.

Body Language

Your posture, movement quality, and physical presence in the room communicate volumes. A teacher who stands with crossed arms, avoids eye contact, or moves with tension and hurry creates a psychological environment that is the opposite of what yoga aims to cultivate. A teacher whose body is grounded, open, and at ease communicates safety, confidence, and ease — and students unconsciously mirror this.

Practical guidance: Plant your feet when giving instructions; swaying communicates insecurity. Move purposefully through the room; aimless wandering is distracting. Use open, expansive gestures to invite; use firm, contained gestures to ground. Mirror the energy you wish to create in the room — if you want students to be calm, be calm. If you want energy, be energised.

Eye Contact and Gaze

Eye contact is a powerful relational tool in yoga teaching. Genuine, warm eye contact communicates that you see and value the individual student. Avoiding eye contact communicates discomfort, disengagement, or fear. However, the quality of eye contact matters enormously: sustained staring is invasive; occasionally catching a student's eye and offering a brief nod of acknowledgment is connecting and affirming.

In a group class, develop the habit of making conscious eye contact with each student during the class. Students who feel seen are more engaged, more trusting, and more willing to take risks in their practice. Students who feel unseen may feel they are practising alone in a crowd — which is a very different (and less effective) experience.

Use of Space (Proxemics)

How you move through the classroom communicates meaning. Standing always at the front of the room can create a hierarchical teacher-student dynamic that may not serve your pedagogical intentions. Moving through the room — visiting each section of the class, occasionally teaching from the back or the side — communicates attention, inclusion, and care. However, moving too constantly is distracting. Find a rhythm of stillness and movement that serves the class.

6.2 The Art of Demonstration

Demonstration — showing the practice rather than just describing it — is a primary tool of yoga instruction that engages visual learners, clarifies alignment, and provides inspiration. However, demonstration must be used intelligently. There are important decisions every yoga teacher makes about when to demonstrate, how much to demonstrate, and how to manage the class while demonstrating.

Full Demonstration vs. Partial Demonstration

A full demonstration of a posture involves showing the complete sequence of movements from preparation to the full expression to the exit. This is valuable for introducing new postures to beginners or when teaching a particularly complex sequence. However, full demonstrations remove you from the room's awareness — while your head is down in Uttanasana, you cannot see what your students are doing. For this reason, experienced teachers often use partial demonstrations — showing the key action or alignment point without fully entering the posture — so they can continue observing the room.

Demonstrating Modifications and Variations

One of the most important and often neglected aspects of demonstration is showing modifications and variations alongside the full expression. When a teacher only demonstrates the most advanced version of a posture, students who cannot achieve that version may feel inadequate, push past their limits, or disengage. When the teacher demonstrates the block-supported version of Triangle Pose alongside the full expression, they communicate that both are equally valid — which they are.

Using Student Demonstrations

Asking a student to demonstrate for the class can be a powerful pedagogical tool — it validates the student, gives the class a more relatable model, and frees the teacher to provide detailed verbal commentary. However, this must be handled with great sensitivity. Never single out a student without their prior consent. Be careful not to embarrass students who are not comfortable being watched. When using student demonstrations, provide clear, positive guidance and never use a student's body as a negative example.

6.3 Hands-On Physical Adjustment: Principles and Practice

Physical adjustment — guiding a student's body with your hands — is one of yoga teaching's most powerful and most fraught tools. When done well, it provides information that verbal instruction alone cannot convey: the precise direction of a joint movement, the quality of a muscular release, the three-dimensional experience of correct alignment. When done poorly, it can cause physical injury, psychological distress, and serious harm to the teacher-student relationship.

The Ethics of Touch: Consent is Non-Negotiable

The most critical principle of hands-on adjustment is consent. In the contemporary teaching environment — and in alignment with the ethical standards of major yoga teacher training organisations globally — all physical contact between teacher and student requires explicit, informed consent. This means: before touching a student, ask clearly and wait for a clear affirmative response. Never assume consent; never argue with a student who declines adjustment; never interpret hesitation as consent.

Many studios use a 'consent card' system — students place a coloured card (green = open to adjustment, red = no adjustments today) at the top of their mat. This elegant system normalises the consent conversation and empowers students to communicate their boundaries without having to speak up in the middle of a class. SKM Yoga strongly recommends this system for all classes.

Types of Physical Adjustment

- **Directive Adjustments:** The teacher's hands actively guide the student's body in a specific direction or into a more precise alignment. Example: placing both hands on the student's hips in Warrior II and gently rotating the back hip down and forward. Directive adjustments require the most anatomical knowledge and the most sensitive application.
- **Supportive/Assistive Adjustments:** The teacher's hands support the weight of a body part, making the posture more sustainable and allowing deeper release. Example: holding the weight of the student's head in Savasana to allow the neck muscles to release. These are often the safest and most universally well-received adjustments.
- **Energetic/Traction Adjustments:** Light-touch adjustments that create lengthening, space, or traction in a joint or muscle group. Example: placing fingertips on the student's shoulder blades in a forward fold and gently drawing the blades apart and down the back. These require the lightest physical contact and the most developed sense of subtle body communication.

Anatomical Safety in Adjustments

Never adjust: the cervical spine of a student you have not worked with extensively; hyper-mobile joints; areas of reported injury or acute pain; pregnant students in their third trimester without specific prenatal training. Always adjust from a stable, supported stance — do not compromise your own body in an adjustment. Apply pressure gradually, with awareness, and be ready to immediately withdraw if the student shows signs of discomfort.

Verbal Adjustment as an Alternative

For teachers who are uncertain about hands-on adjustment — whether due to limited training, unclear consent, or the student's specific situation — verbal adjustment is often just as effective. Precise verbal cueing, combined with clear demonstration and occasional light touch (on non-vulnerable areas like the outer thigh or upper arm), can achieve remarkable alignment improvement without the risks associated with deep hands-on work.

Chapter 7: Teaching Methodologies and Instructional Strategies

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." — William Arthur Ward

7.1 Major Teaching Methodologies in Yoga

Just as there are many styles of yoga, there are many teaching methodologies — systematic approaches to organising and delivering instruction. Effective yoga teachers are familiar with multiple methodologies and can move fluidly between them depending on the class level, the teaching context, and the specific learning objectives.

Direct Instruction Method

In direct instruction, the teacher provides clear, step-by-step guidance and students follow. This is the most common method in beginner yoga classes and is appropriate whenever students are learning new material, when safety concerns require precise alignment instruction, or when working with clinical populations who need specific therapeutic protocols. Direct instruction is teacher-centred — the teacher is the primary source of knowledge and the students receive it.

Effective direct instruction in yoga involves: clear, sequenced explanation; demonstration; guided practice; immediate feedback; and correction. The risk of direct instruction is that it can create passive, dependent students who never develop the capacity for independent self-observation and practice. This is why experienced teachers progressively introduce student-centred methodologies as the class advances.

Inquiry-Based (Exploratory) Method

In inquiry-based teaching, the teacher poses questions and creates conditions for students to discover answers through their own direct experience. Rather than saying 'In Trikonasana, your top shoulder should stack over the bottom shoulder,' the inquiry-based teacher says 'Take a moment in Triangle Pose. What do you notice about the relationship between your two shoulders? What happens when you rotate the top shoulder back slightly?' This approach cultivates self-awareness, critical thinking, and independent practice far more effectively than direct instruction alone.

The Socratic Method — teaching through questions — is a form of inquiry-based teaching with ancient roots. In yoga, it manifests as the teacher asking probing questions that invite students to

look more carefully at their experience: 'Can you distinguish between the sensation of effort and the sensation of straining? What is the difference between the two, in your body?'

Experiential Learning Method

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) describes how adults learn from concrete experience: first they have a direct experience (Concrete Experience); then they reflect on it (Reflective Observation); then they make meaning of it through conceptual frameworks (Abstract Conceptualisation); then they plan to apply their insights in new situations (Active Experimentation). This cycle maps perfectly onto the yoga learning process.

In yoga teaching, the experiential learning cycle looks like: Student practises Trikonasana (Experience) → Teacher invites reflection on the sensations noticed (Reflection) → Teacher explains the anatomical and energetic significance of what they experienced (Conceptualisation) → Student experiments with applying this understanding in a related pose like Ardha Chandrasana (Application). This cycle produces deeper, more integrated, more transferable learning than any one phase alone.

Collaborative Learning Method

Collaborative learning leverages the social dimension of the classroom for pedagogical purposes. Students learn from and with each other, not just from the teacher. In yoga settings, collaborative learning can take the form of: partner practices (where students assist each other in postures and provide feedback); group discussion of a theme or text; peer observation exercises (one student practises while another observes and shares what they notice); and shared reflection circles at the close of a class.

Research consistently demonstrates that teaching someone else is one of the most effective ways to consolidate one's own learning — the 'protege effect'. In yoga teacher training, asking trainees to teach each other is therefore both a practical training tool and a profound learning strategy.

Demonstration-Observation-Practice-Correction (DOPC) Cycle

The DOPC cycle is a classic instructional loop widely used in movement education:

7. **Demonstration: Teacher (or video, or experienced student) demonstrates the practice.**
8. **Observation: Students observe with specific attention directed to key alignment or movement points.**
9. **Practice: Students practise the pose or technique themselves.**
10. **Correction: Teacher observes students' practice and provides targeted feedback — verbal, non-verbal, or hands-on.**

This cycle can be repeated multiple times within a single class, progressively deepening students' understanding and refining their practice. The correction phase is particularly important — without feedback, students may reinforce incorrect habits. However, correction should always be offered positively, specifically, and in the spirit of encouragement rather than criticism.

7.2 Differentiated Instruction in the Yoga Classroom

Differentiated instruction — the practice of adapting teaching methods, content, and assessment to meet the diverse needs of learners — is one of the most sophisticated and demanding skills in a yoga teacher's repertoire. In a typical group yoga class, you may have beginners and advanced practitioners, young and elderly students, athletes and those with chronic pain, students in emotional crisis and students simply looking for gentle exercise. The challenge of differentiated instruction is to serve all of them well — simultaneously.

Tiered Instruction: Offering Multiple Levels

The most practical approach to differentiation in yoga is tiered instruction — consistently offering three levels of a practice. For every posture or technique, the teacher offers:

- A supported/modified version for students with limitations or beginners (e.g., Supported Bridge Pose with a block under the sacrum)
- A standard version for the general class population (e.g., Bridge Pose with active legs)
- An advanced variation for experienced students seeking challenge (e.g., One-Legged Bridge or Wheel Pose)

This approach communicates inclusion and respect for diverse abilities, prevents injury by removing the implicit pressure to achieve the most challenging version, and keeps the class accessible without boring experienced students.

Choice-Based Instruction

Choice-based instruction gives students explicit agency over their practice within a structured framework. Rather than prescribing a single posture, the teacher offers a range: 'You might stay in Supported Child's Pose, move to a Low Lunge, or take Pigeon Pose — whatever feels most appropriate for your body today.' This approach honours adult autonomy, develops students' capacity to assess their own needs, and is particularly effective in mixed-ability classes.

7.3 Sequencing Instructional Strategies by Class Level

Strategy	Beginner Class	Intermediate Class	Advanced Class
Cueing Type	Detailed anatomical + action cues. One instruction at a time.	Blend of anatomical and imagery. Occasional inquiry.	Primarily inquiry and imagery. Trust student's self-knowledge.

Demonstration	Frequent full demonstrations. Slow and thorough.	Partial demonstrations. Model key alignment points.	Minimal demonstration. Students practise independently.
Adjustment	Frequent, supportive, directive.	Targeted, specific, energetic.	Rare, subtle, invited.
Silence	Minimal silence. Constant guidance.	Regular pauses for self-observation.	Extended silences. Trust the student's inner teacher.
Discussion	Brief, practical, focused on safety and basics.	Theme exploration, philosophical inquiry.	Deep philosophical discussion, Svadhyaya prompts.
Student Agency	Low — teacher guides every step.	Medium — students make some choices.	High — students design their own practice with teacher support.

Chapter 8: Discussion, Questioning and Facilitation Techniques

"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery." — Mark Van Doren

8.1 The Role of Discussion in Yoga Teaching

Not all yoga teaching happens in silence, in movement. Discussion — the verbal exploration of experience, philosophy, and questions — plays a vital role in yoga education, particularly at the teacher training level and in study-oriented classes. Discussion creates community, deepens understanding, reveals assumptions, invites multiple perspectives, and develops the capacity for critical thinking and reflective practice.

The Sanskrit tradition of Satsanga (gathering of truth-seekers) and Swadhyaya (self-study) are the classical roots of discussion-based yoga pedagogy. Socratic dialogue, as practised in ancient Greece, has its parallel in the teacher-student dialogues of the Upanishads — most famously, the Chandogya Upanishad's dialogue between Uddalaka and Shvetaketu, and the Bhagavad Gita's extended dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna.

8.2 Effective Questioning Techniques

The quality of a yoga teacher's questions often determines the depth of a class's learning. Poor questions produce shallow or closed responses; great questions open up genuine inquiry, invite multiple perspectives, and guide students toward their own insights.

Types of Questions

Closed Questions

Closed questions have a specific, limited range of correct answers. 'Which foot leads in Warrior I?' is a closed question. These are useful for checking basic comprehension and establishing shared knowledge. However, overuse of closed questions creates a didactic, knowledge-transmission dynamic that is inappropriate for yoga's deeper educational aims.

Open Questions

Open questions invite a range of thoughtful, personal responses and begin with 'how,' 'what,' 'why,' 'in what way,' or 'tell me about.' Examples: 'What do you notice in your body after a sustained Pranayama practice?' 'How does the experience of Tadasana today differ from when you first learned it?' 'What does the concept of Ahimsa mean to you, in your daily life?'

Probing Questions

Probing questions follow a student's response and invite deeper or more specific exploration. 'Can you say more about that?' 'What do you mean when you say the pose felt incorrect?' 'How does that understanding change the way you approach your practice?' Probing questions communicate genuine curiosity and respect for the student's perspective.

Reflective Questions

Reflective questions invite students to look back on their experience, notice patterns, and draw their own insights. 'Looking back at the last ten minutes of practice, what were the moments of greatest ease and greatest resistance?' 'What has changed in your relationship with this posture over the past month?' Reflective questions develop the quality of Svadhyaya — the yoga of self-study.

Hypothetical/Conceptual Questions

These questions invite students to think beyond their direct experience into the broader philosophical and ethical dimensions of yoga. 'If Ahimsa means non-violence, how does that principle apply to the way you speak to yourself about your practice?' 'How might the concept of Santosha (contentment) apply to a student who is frustrated with their lack of flexibility?' These questions are particularly valuable in teacher training contexts.

The Wait Time Principle

Research consistently shows that the average teacher waits less than one second after asking a question before either answering it themselves or moving on. Yet quality thinking takes time. Practise waiting at least 5-10 seconds after asking an open question before inviting responses. This 'wait time' dramatically improves the quality and depth of students' answers, and communicates that you genuinely want their thoughtful response, not just a rapid reaction.

8.3 Facilitating Group Discussion

Group discussion in yoga classes can take many forms: a brief circle sharing after class, a thematic discussion at the beginning of class, structured partner dialogue, or extended philosophical inquiry in a workshop setting. The teacher's role in group discussion is that of facilitator — not the provider of answers but the creator of conditions in which the group's own wisdom emerges.

Principles of Facilitation

- **Create Safety First:** Discussion requires psychological safety. Begin with simple, low-risk questions before inviting vulnerable sharing. Establish ground rules: confidentiality, non-judgment, respectful listening, speaking from personal experience ('I' statements).
- **Use Inclusive Language:** Ensure all voices are heard, not just the most confident ones. Actively invite quieter members: 'We haven't heard from everyone yet — would anyone else like to share?' Use small groups or pair-shares before whole-group discussion to reduce the anxiety of speaking in front of a large group.

- **Honour All Contributions:** Validate every contribution without judgment or excessive effusion. A simple 'Thank you' or 'That's interesting' is enough. Avoid correcting students' experience — their experience is their experience, and it is valid.
- **Stay Neutral on Opinion Questions:** When facilitating discussions on topics where there are multiple valid perspectives (diet, spiritual belief, relationship to tradition), the facilitator holds space for diversity of opinion without advocating for their own position. This is especially important for yoga teachers, who carry significant authority and can unduly influence students' views.
- **Summarise and Bridge:** Periodically summarise what the group has explored and create bridges to the next question or theme. 'So we've been exploring how Santosha relates to our experience on the mat — how might this translate to how we relate to the challenges of daily life?'

Discussion Formats

- **Think-Pair-Share:** Pose a question; give students 1-2 minutes to think individually; have them discuss in pairs for 2-3 minutes; invite pairs to share with the whole group. This format ensures every student engages with the question and reduces the anxiety of public speaking.
- **Circle Sharing:** Students sit in a circle. Each person speaks in turn, without interruption. The format creates equality (no one person dominates), ritual (the circle is a sacred form in many traditions), and the experience of being witnessed.
- **Fishbowl:** A small group of 3-5 students sits in the centre of the room and discusses a topic while the rest of the class observes. After a set time, participants rotate in and out. This format allows deep discussion while involving the whole group as engaged witnesses.
- **Jigsaw:** Each small group studies a different aspect of a topic and then reconvenes in mixed groups to teach each other. For example, in a teacher training, different groups might each study one of the Brahmaviharas, then share their insights with a mixed group.

8.4 Managing Challenging Discussion Dynamics

The Dominant Voice

In most groups, one or two people tend to dominate discussion. This silences other voices and can reduce the group to a dialogue between the teacher and a few vocal students. Strategies: directly invite quieter members to speak; use structural formats (Think-Pair-Share, round-robin) that give equal time to all; privately and gently acknowledge a dominant participant's contribution and ask them to give space to others.

The Resistant Student

Occasionally, students resist the topic, challenge the teacher's authority, or dismiss the relevance of philosophical discussion. This can be handled with empathy and curiosity: 'That's a different

perspective — can you say more about what leads you there?' Resistance often points to something important. Rather than shutting it down, explore it with genuine openness. Sometimes the resistant student becomes the most powerful contributor to the group's learning.

The Personal Disclosure

Students sometimes share deeply personal material — grief, trauma, relationship difficulties — in the context of philosophical discussion. The yoga teacher must navigate this with care: honour the sharing with genuine compassion; create a boundary around the class context if the sharing is becoming therapeutically intensive ('It sounds like you're going through something really significant — would you like to talk more after class?'); and maintain awareness of the line between yoga teaching and therapy.

8.5 Reflection Practices in Yoga Teaching

Reflection — the practice of looking back at experience with conscious attention — is one of the most powerful learning tools available to yoga teachers and students. Research in reflective practice (drawing particularly on the work of Donald Schon) identifies two essential forms: Reflection-in-action (real-time reflection while teaching) and Reflection-on-action (post-class review and analysis).

Structured Reflection for Students

The yoga teacher can build structured reflection into the class through: journaling prompts given at the end of class ('Write for 5 minutes about what you noticed today — in your body, breath, and mind'); mandated silence after Savasana before the closing (allowing the nervous system to register and integrate the class's effects); return-to-intention moments (revisiting the class theme or personal intention at the close of practice).

Structured Reflection for Teachers

Every yoga teacher should maintain a teaching journal — a regular record of their observations, challenges, insights, and intentions as a teacher. After each class, note: What worked well and why? What would you change? What did you notice about specific students? What questions arose? Where did you feel confident and where uncertain? This disciplined reflective practice is the primary driver of teaching improvement, far more than any workshop or training alone.

Chapter 9: Managing the Yoga Classroom

"Order is not pressure which is imposed on society from without, but an equilibrium which is set up from within." — Jose Ortega y Gasset

9.1 Creating the Learning Environment

The physical, social, and psychological environment of the yoga classroom is not a backdrop for teaching — it is a primary teaching tool. Research in educational psychology confirms that the learning environment powerfully influences students' emotional state, attentiveness, motivation, and willingness to take risks. Creating a beautiful, ordered, clean, and welcoming yoga space is an act of teaching before a single word of instruction is spoken.

Physical Environment

- **Cleanliness and Order:** A clean, tidy studio communicates respect for the practice and for the students. Ensure mats are aligned, props are accessible and organised, and the space is swept before students arrive. The physical order of the room mirrors the Niyama of Shaucha (purity).
- **Temperature and Lighting:** The room temperature should be comfortable for movement without being excessive. Lighting should be adjustable — brighter for active sequences, dimmer for restorative and meditation practices. Natural light, when available, supports circadian regulation and creates a connection with the natural world.
- **Sound Environment:** Consider the acoustic quality of your teaching space. Yoga class instruction requires clear audibility without straining. Background noise (traffic, air conditioning, adjacent classes) should be minimised where possible. The use of music — if used — should be intentional and appropriate to the class style and theme.
- **Aromatherapy and Sensory Details:** Many yoga teachers use essential oils (lavender, eucalyptus, sandalwood) to create a specific sensory environment. If used, always ensure students are not allergic and that the scent is subtle rather than overwhelming. The sensory environment communicates care and intentionality.

Social and Psychological Environment

The social climate of a yoga class is largely determined by the teacher's attitude and behaviour. A warm, inclusive, non-judgmental teacher creates a warm, inclusive, non-judgmental class. The following practices are fundamental to creating a healthy social environment:

- Greet each student by name as they arrive — this simple act of recognition is profoundly impactful.

- Learn students' names as quickly as possible — name cards, name circles, or name tags in early classes help.
- Establish clear community agreements at the beginning of a series: confidentiality, non-judgment, respect for diverse abilities and experiences.
- Model the behaviour you wish to see: curiosity without judgment, effort without ego, care without attachment to outcome.
- Address any instances of exclusion, cliquishness, or subtle disrespect promptly and with firmness combined with kindness.

9.2 Classroom Management: Practical Skills

Starting Class

Beginning class on time demonstrates respect for students who arrived promptly. If you wait for latecomers, you penalise punctuality. However, the opening ritual — centering, setting intention, brief welcome — should be designed to absorb latecomers gracefully without disrupting students who are already in practice. A brief pause in the centering to offer a nod of welcome to a latecomer is usually sufficient.

Managing Late Arrivals

Agree on a policy for late arrivals and communicate it clearly at the beginning of your series. The most common approach: latecomers are welcome up to 10-15 minutes after the class begins; they set up quietly without drawing attention; they join the class where it currently is, without the teacher recapping. Arriving late to Pranayama or Savasana-based classes is more disruptive than arriving late to an asana class and may require a different policy.

Managing Mobile Phones

Request at the beginning of each class that phones be silenced and placed face-down (or outside the room). Frame this not as a rule but as an invitation to practice: 'For the next hour, I invite you to be fully present — this is your time, and it deserves your full attention.' Most students appreciate this invitation. For those with genuine reasons (medical emergency alerts, on-call responsibilities), acknowledge and accommodate respectfully.

Managing Chatty Students

Social chatter in a yoga class — particularly during centering and meditation — disrupts the collective field of practice. Address it with warmth and gentleness: gradually lower your voice to create a cue that quietness is invited; use a transition ritual (three sounds of a Tibetan singing bowl, three Om) to signal the shift from social to sacred space; if necessary, gently and privately ask students who are disruptive to keep conversation to before and after class.

Managing Students in Distress

Yoga practice can bring up powerful emotions — grief, fear, anger, joy, sadness — as the body releases held tension and suppressed experience. This is a normal and often positive aspect of practice. However, the yoga teacher must be prepared to respond with care and skill when a student becomes noticeably distressed during class.

The appropriate response: slow down or pause instruction; gently draw the student's attention to their breath; offer grounding practices (feet on the floor, hands on knees, eye contact if appropriate); give permission to simply rest without pressure to continue; after class, check in privately and, if appropriate, suggest professional support resources.

9.3 Teaching to Beginners: Special Considerations

Beginners occupy a unique pedagogical position. They are simultaneously the most motivated (the initial enthusiasm is powerful) and the most vulnerable (they have no framework for self-assessment, no established practice habits, and no anatomical baseline). Teaching beginners well requires a specific set of skills:

- Assume nothing: explain every instruction, every Sanskrit term, every prop use as if the student has never encountered it.
- Prioritise safety over depth: in the early sessions, it is more important that students feel safe and competent than that they achieve depth in challenging postures.
- Celebrate small victories: the ability to notice the breath in Tadasana is a genuine achievement for a beginner and deserves acknowledgment.
- Create foundations: the alignment habits and body awareness formed in the first few months of practice tend to persist. Invest heavily in these foundations.
- Normalise imperfection: communicate explicitly and repeatedly that yoga is not about achieving a particular physical form; it is about the quality of attention brought to whatever form arises.

9.4 Health and Safety Management in the Yoga Classroom

Pre-Class Health Screening

Before beginning any new yoga series, all students should complete a health screening form disclosing relevant medical conditions, injuries, medications, and specific concerns. This information enables the teacher to plan appropriate modifications and to identify situations requiring medical clearance or specialist referral. The health screening form is not merely a legal precaution; it is a fundamental tool for individualised, safe teaching.

Emergency Procedures

Every yoga teacher must know: the location of the nearest first aid kit; the emergency phone number (112 in India); basic first aid procedures; and how to respond to common yoga class emergencies (fainting, asthma attack, cardiac event, seizure, panic attack, or emotional crisis). First aid certification is strongly recommended for all yoga teachers and is required by many insurance providers.

Injury Prevention

Prevention is always preferable to response. Key injury prevention practices: thorough warm-up before deep stretching or weight-bearing; consistent emphasis on the student's own sensation as the guide (not the teacher's visual preference); never encouraging students to push past genuine pain; proactive identification of students with contraindicated conditions; maintaining professional knowledge of anatomy and biomechanics through ongoing education.

Chapter 10: Teaching Diverse Populations and Adaptive Yoga

"Yoga is for every body." — SKM Yoga

10.1 The Principle of Inclusion in Yoga Teaching

One of the most significant developments in contemporary yoga pedagogy is the growing recognition that yoga must be genuinely accessible to all people — regardless of age, body size, mobility, physical or cognitive ability, cultural background, gender identity, or health status. This is not merely a social justice issue; it is a deeply yogic one. Yoga's philosophical foundation — the recognition of the same consciousness in all beings (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — 'the world is one family') — demands that yoga studios and teachers be genuinely welcoming to all.

Adaptive yoga — the intelligent, compassionate adaptation of yoga practices to meet diverse needs — is therefore not a specialised branch of yoga; it is the fullest expression of yoga's essential principles. This chapter provides an overview of key principles and practical considerations for teaching the most common diverse populations.

10.2 Teaching Children and Teens

Children (Ages 4-12)

Children learn primarily through play, story, movement, and imagination. Yoga for children should be joyful, creative, and game-like. Posture names can be taught through animal stories (Lion, Cobra, Tree, Eagle), nature visualisations, and cooperative games. Attention spans are short — a children's yoga class should include frequent changes of activity and generous time for free movement and creative expression.

Key pedagogical principles for children's yoga: keep instructions playful and positive; use humour and imagination generously; allow children to find their own expression of postures rather than insisting on adult precision; include breathing games (blowing bubbles, making breath sounds, belly breathing with a stuffed animal on the abdomen); make Savasana into a 'magic carpet ride' or 'sleeping like a sloth' story.

Teens (Ages 13-18)

Teenagers are navigating enormous physical, emotional, and social changes. Yoga offers extraordinary gifts at this life stage: body awareness without comparison, stress reduction tools, emotional regulation skills, and a sense of inner stability amid external chaos. However, teens can

be acutely self-conscious and may be highly sensitive to being watched, corrected, or singled out. The yoga teacher of teens must earn trust before offering depth.

Effective pedagogy for teens: create a genuinely non-judgmental, non-competitive environment; give teens autonomy and choice wherever possible (this is developmentally appropriate); use relatable language and avoid being patronising; connect yoga practices to issues teens genuinely care about (stress, sleep, sports performance, mental health, concentration); avoid physical assists until strong trust is established.

10.3 Teaching Seniors

An ageing global population is bringing increasing numbers of older adults to yoga — and yoga has extraordinary gifts for this population: improved balance (reducing falls), maintained flexibility and joint health, preserved cognitive function, social connection, and existential wellbeing in the face of life's final chapter. Teaching seniors requires both specific anatomical knowledge and profound compassion.

Physical Considerations for Senior Students

- Bone density decreases with age — avoid extreme loading on vertebrae and limbs; forward folds with rounded spine carry disc risk.
- Joint health: osteoarthritis is common; avoid compression and extreme ranges in affected joints; always offer chair-based alternatives.
- Balance: vestibular function declines with age; always have a wall, chair, or blocks available for balance postures.
- Cardiovascular: seniors may be on multiple medications (blood thinners, beta-blockers, diuretics) that affect their safe exercise response; never push for maximal exertion.
- Neurological: slower proprioceptive feedback means transitions need to be slower, more supported, and more clearly cued.

Pedagogical Approaches for Seniors

Move more slowly. Allow more time for students to enter, adjust, and exit postures. Provide more frequent verbal reassurance. Use chairs and walls consistently, not as a fallback for those who 'can't do' the pose but as intelligent tools for everyone. Honour the wisdom and life experience that senior students bring to the practice — the relationship with elderly yoga students should be one of mutual respect.

10.4 Teaching Prenatal Yoga

Prenatal yoga is one of the most rewarding and most responsibility-laden specialisations in yoga teaching. Pregnant students come with heightened physical sensitivity, hormonal fluctuations,

emotional complexity, and specific risks that demand specialised knowledge and care. SKM Yoga strongly recommends dedicated prenatal yoga training for any teacher wishing to teach this population.

Key Trimester-Specific Considerations

- **First Trimester (0-12 weeks):** Often the most vulnerable period — high rate of miscarriage; significant fatigue and nausea. Avoid strong backbends, deep twists, intense heat, and inversions. Prioritise gentleness and rest. Many women are not yet public about their pregnancy.
- **Second Trimester (13-26 weeks):** Often the most comfortable period. The womb is growing — begin to avoid deep supine postures and those that compress the abdomen. Continue to avoid deep twists. Pelvic floor awareness, lateral stretching, and hip opening are beneficial.
- **Third Trimester (27-40 weeks):** Avoid supine postures entirely. Focus on lateral reclined positions, supported standing, modified seated practices, and birth-preparation practices (pelvic floor, birthing breath techniques). Labour preparation: slow, supported, breath-centred.

10.5 Teaching Students with Injuries and Chronic Conditions

Lower Back Pain

Lower back pain is the most common reason adults seek yoga. The majority of lower back pain is mechanical — related to muscle tension, poor postural habits, weak core, and restricted hip and hamstring mobility. Yoga is highly effective for mechanical back pain when taught intelligently. Key principles: strengthen the deep core (Transversus Abdominis) without bracing; release the hip flexors and hamstrings; teach neutral spine posture; avoid aggressive forward folds with rounded lumbar spine; always screen for red flags that require medical referral (severe unilateral pain, numbness, bowel/bladder changes).

Anxiety and Depression

Yoga is one of the most evidence-based non-pharmacological interventions for anxiety and depression. The vagal toning effects of slow Pranayama (particularly extended exhalation), the parasympathetic activation of restorative yoga, the nervous system regulation offered by Yoga Nidra, and the community support of a yoga class all contribute to measurable improvements in anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Teaching students with anxiety: create predictability and safety; avoid practices that feel uncontrollable (strong breath retentions, inversions if they are feared, extremely loud music); offer grounding practices; normalise whatever arises without over-interpreting or pathologising. Teaching students with depression: prioritise activating practices early in the class; be especially attentive to

energy levels; create social connection; use warmth, humour, and genuine appreciation of the student's presence.

Cancer and Oncology

An increasing body of research supports the benefits of yoga for cancer patients and survivors, including reduced fatigue, improved sleep quality, reduced anxiety and depression, and improved immune function. Teaching oncology students requires specific training and awareness: avoid deep twists and compression postures for patients with abdominal tumours; avoid inversions for patients with brain metastases; be sensitive to body image changes (hair loss, scarring, weight changes from treatment); consult with the student's oncology team regarding activity restrictions.

Chapter 11: Assessment, Observation and Feedback

"Without reflection, we go blindly on our way." — Margaret J. Wheatley

11.1 The Purpose of Assessment in Yoga Teaching

Assessment in yoga teaching serves multiple interconnected purposes: it helps the teacher understand what students know and can do; it identifies areas needing attention; it informs future lesson planning; it provides students with feedback that supports growth; and it measures the effectiveness of the teacher's instruction. Unlike academic assessment, yoga assessment is primarily formative (ongoing, for the purpose of improving learning) rather than summative (terminal, for the purpose of grading).

11.2 Observation Skills: Seeing the Student

Observation is the foundational assessment skill in yoga teaching. The ability to see clearly — to observe a student's posture, movement quality, breath, and psychological state with accuracy, precision, and non-judgment — is developed through sustained practice and deliberate training. It cannot be developed by reading; it can only be developed by looking.

What to Observe

- **Postural Alignment:** The spatial relationship between body segments. Is the knee stacked over the ankle? Is the spine neutral or curved? Are the shoulders symmetrical? Systematic observation moves from the base (foundation) upward: feet, ankles, knees, hips, spine, shoulders, head.
- **Movement Quality:** How the student moves — is it fluid or jerky? Free or restricted? Coordinated or dissociated? Movement quality often reveals information about the nervous system's state (sympathetic vs. parasympathetic activation, familiar vs. unfamiliar territory).
- **Breath:** Is the student breathing at all? Is the breath held (common in challenging postures)? Is it fast and shallow, or slow and full? Does the breath change with verbal cueing? The breath is the most reliable indicator of the student's actual experience.
- **Facial Expression and Body Language:** Clenched jaw, furrowed brow, and gripped neck typically indicate effort without release — either a posture is too demanding or the student has an unconscious habit of tension. A relaxed face usually indicates appropriate effort. Body language (whether the student turns toward or away from challenge) reveals psychological patterns as much as physical ones.
- **Compensation Patterns:** When one area of the body is restricted, others compensate. The student with tight hamstrings compensates with a rounded lumbar spine in forward

folds. The student with restricted thoracic rotation compensates with lumbar rotation in twists. Identifying compensation patterns allows the teacher to address the root limitation rather than the compensatory symptom.

Developing Observation Skills

Practical exercises for developing observation skills: watch video recordings of students practising and pause to notice specific details; peer observation exercises in teacher training where one trainee practises while another observes and shares observations; drawing exercises (sketching observed postures helps develop attention to spatial relationships); anatomy study paired with live observation (find the ASIS on a real body, not just a diagram). The capacity to observe accurately is developed through practice, just as any other skill.

11.3 Giving Effective Feedback

Feedback is the communication of observed information to the student for the purpose of improving their practice. Effective feedback has specific qualities that distinguish it from criticism, praise, or general commentary. The research on effective feedback in learning settings identifies four essential qualities:

Qualities of Effective Feedback

- **Specific:** Feedback must be precise enough to be actionable. 'Your Trikonasana looks good' is not feedback — it is praise. 'In Trikonasana, I notice your front knee is slightly collapsed inward — try rotating your front thigh slightly outward to align the knee over the second toe' is specific, actionable feedback.
- **Timely:** Feedback is most effective when given immediately after the observed moment, while the student can still feel and adjust their body in response. Delayed feedback (after the class is finished) is less kinesthetically effective, though it may be useful for reflective learning.
- **Positive and Growth-Oriented:** Feedback should be framed as information that supports growth, not criticism of failure. The sandwich model (positive observation — specific correction — positive encouragement) is a useful framework for novice teachers learning to give feedback. As you develop, the feedback can become more direct without the 'sandwich' — but always retain the spirit of growth-orientation.
- **Appropriate in Amount:** Students can only absorb a limited amount of feedback at one time. Offer one or two specific cues, not five. Trust that the most important feedback will have the greatest impact when it is given space to be absorbed.

Feedback in Different Formats

- Verbal feedback (individual): Quiet, private verbal cue during the class.

- Verbal feedback (group): General observation offered to the whole class: 'I notice many of us are gripping the jaw — let's collectively soften...'
- Physical feedback: Hands-on adjustment (with consent).
- Written feedback: Post-class notes to students, particularly in teacher training contexts.
- Visual feedback: Video review — recording and reviewing practice (in teacher training, this is an invaluable tool).

11.4 Student Self-Assessment Tools

Developing students' capacity for self-assessment is one of the highest aims of yoga pedagogy. The ultimate goal is for the student to become their own teacher — to observe themselves with accuracy, compassion, and wisdom, and to adjust their practice intelligently in response to what they observe. This is precisely what Svadhyaya (self-study) means.

Self-Assessment Practices to Build Into Class

- Check-in questions at the beginning of class: 'On a scale of 1-10, how tired is your body today? How agitated or calm is your mind?'
- Paired posture observation: Students observe a partner in a posture and share one neutral observation (not evaluation).
- Before-and-after comparison: 'Take Uttanasana now, notice what you feel. We'll take it again at the end of the warm-up and compare.'
- Journaling prompts: Weekly reflective writing connecting practice to life.
- Progressive video review in teacher training: Students watch recordings of their own teaching and identify three strengths and two areas for growth.

11.5 Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness

The yoga teacher's assessment of their own teaching is as important as their assessment of students' learning. Continuous improvement requires honest self-evaluation. Frameworks for evaluating teaching effectiveness:

Evaluation Dimension	Questions to Ask
Content Knowledge	Did I demonstrate accurate knowledge of anatomy, alignment, philosophy? Were my cues safe and precise?
Communication Skills	Were my verbal cues clear, specific, and appropriately paced? Did I use imagery and inquiry effectively?
Observation and Response	Did I notice individual students' needs and respond appropriately? Did I give specific, timely feedback?
Class Management	Was the class well-structured and timed? Was the environment safe, welcoming, and conducive to learning?
Differentiation	Did I offer appropriate modifications? Did I serve students of different levels and needs?

Presence and Energy	Was I genuinely present throughout the class? Did my energy support the class's aims?
Student Outcomes	Did students appear to receive the learning objectives? Did they seem safer, more capable, more present than at the start?
Ethical Standards	Did I maintain appropriate professional boundaries? Did I honour consent, confidentiality, and non-judgment?

Chapter 12: Ethics, Professionalism and the Teacher-Student Relationship

"The most powerful thing a teacher can do is model what it looks like to be a loving human being." — Parker Palmer

12.1 Ethics in Yoga Teaching

The ethical foundations of yoga teaching are rooted in the same principles that form the ethical foundation of yoga practice itself: the Yamas and Niyamas of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga. Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (right use of energy), and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) are not merely philosophical principles to be discussed in class — they are the living standards against which every yoga teacher's professional conduct must be measured.

12.2 The Teacher-Student Relationship: Boundaries and Power Dynamics

The yoga teacher-student relationship is inherently asymmetrical. The teacher carries authority, knowledge, and presence that the student may lack. Students often come to yoga in states of vulnerability — physical pain, emotional distress, spiritual seeking — that can intensify the psychological power differential. This asymmetry creates both an extraordinary opportunity for positive influence and a potential for serious harm.

Understanding Power and Its Responsibilities

When students come to yoga in states of vulnerability or seeking, they may project qualities of wisdom, safety, and authority onto the teacher that go beyond what any human being can actually provide. This phenomenon — called transference in psychotherapeutic terms — is natural and common. The ethical yoga teacher recognises transference when it occurs, does not exploit it, does not encourage unhealthy dependency, and redirects the student's seeking toward their own inner resources.

The abuses that have occurred in yoga communities worldwide — sexual misconduct, financial exploitation, psychological manipulation, and spiritual coercion — have, without exception, exploited this power differential. The yoga teacher has a non-negotiable ethical responsibility to maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times and to never use their position of authority for personal gain.

Professional Boundaries

- **Physical Boundaries:** Touch only with explicit consent; touch only in ways that serve the student's practice; touch only in contexts where it would be entirely appropriate if witnessed by a colleague; never touch in ways that have sexual overtones, regardless of the relationship's apparent openness.
- **Emotional Boundaries:** Maintain professional warmth without crossing into dependency-creating intimacy. Do not share your own emotional problems with students; do not accept a student as a therapist or romantic confidant. Know the line between teaching and therapy.
- **Financial Boundaries:** Do not offer services without clear, transparent payment agreements. Do not accept gifts that create feelings of obligation. Do not mix business and personal relationships in ways that compromise either.
- **Social Media Boundaries:** The contemporary teacher-student relationship extends into social media. Be thoughtful about what you share publicly; maintain professional standards in all public communications; be cautious about accepting students as personal social media connections.

12.3 Scope of Practice

Scope of practice defines the boundaries of what a yoga teacher is trained and qualified to do. Yoga teachers are not medical doctors, physiotherapists, psychotherapists, nutritionists, or personal trainers — unless they hold separate qualifications in those areas. It is essential that yoga teachers understand the limits of their scope and refer students to appropriate professionals when necessary.

Specific areas where yoga teachers must exercise scope-of-practice awareness:

- Medical conditions: never diagnose, prescribe, or offer medical advice. Refer to a physician.
- Psychological conditions: never diagnose or treat mental illness. Refer to a psychologist or psychiatrist when appropriate.
- Nutritional advice: general yogic dietary principles (Sattvic diet) may be discussed in a general context; specific dietary prescriptions are outside scope unless separately qualified.
- Physical therapy: general yoga-for-health information may be shared; specific rehabilitation protocols for injuries are outside scope without physiotherapy qualification.

12.4 Professionalism in Practice

Reliability and Punctuality

A professional yoga teacher arrives before students, prepares the space, begins and ends class on time, and follows through on all commitments. Cancelling class at short notice, arriving unprepared, and being inconsistent in scheduling communicates to students that their time and practice are not important to you. Reliability is one of the most important foundations of professional trust.

Continuing Education

The yoga teaching profession requires ongoing professional development. Committed yoga teachers regularly attend workshops, advanced trainings, and study groups; maintain their personal practice; seek supervision or mentorship; and stay current with developments in yoga research, anatomy, and pedagogical theory. SKM Yoga requires teachers in its community to complete a minimum of 30 hours of continuing education per year to maintain their active status.

Professional Documentation

Maintain accurate records: student health forms, class records, emergency contact information, and incident reports (if any). For therapeutic yoga work, session notes may be appropriate. Professional documentation protects both the student and the teacher, and reflects the seriousness with which you approach your teaching practice.

Chapter 13: Technology and Innovation in Yoga Teaching

"Technology is best when it brings people together." — Matt Mullenweg

13.1 Technology as a Teaching Tool

The digital revolution has transformed yoga teaching in ways that were unimaginable a generation ago. Online classes, video tutorials, social media communities, apps, virtual reality experiences, and biofeedback technology have all expanded the reach and possibilities of yoga instruction. The yoga teacher who understands and thoughtfully uses these tools can serve more students, create richer learning experiences, and build sustainable professional practices.

13.2 Teaching Online: Platforms and Practices

Choosing the Right Platform

The primary platforms for live online yoga teaching include Zoom, Google Meet, YouTube Live, Instagram Live, and specialised wellness platforms (like Mindbody, TeamUp, or SKM Yoga's own platform). Each has different capabilities for interaction, recording, participant numbers, and payment processing. For beginners in online teaching, Zoom is generally recommended for its stability, ease of use, and interaction features (chat, breakout rooms, reactions).

Technical Setup for Online Teaching

- Camera: Position at a height that shows your full body clearly. Avoid backlighting (don't teach in front of a bright window). Consider a separate webcam for better quality than built-in laptop cameras.
- Audio: Invest in a good microphone — audio quality is more critical than video quality for effective online teaching. Background noise should be minimised.
- Lighting: Soft, even, frontal lighting creates the most professional visual environment. Ring lights are a cost-effective solution.
- Space: A clear, clean, visually simple background communicates professionalism. Your yoga space in the background can be beautiful and inspiring if uncluttered.
- Internet: A stable, wired internet connection is preferable to WiFi for live streaming.

Pedagogical Adaptations for Online Teaching

Teaching online requires specific pedagogical adaptations: verbal cues must be more precise since students cannot rely on seeing small details in your body; check-ins must be more frequent ('How's everyone doing? Give me a thumbs up if Warrior II felt accessible'); your voice and facial expression

carry even more of the relational load; transitions should be narrated more explicitly since students may be looking away from the screen during practice.

13.3 Using Social Media for Yoga Education

Social media platforms — Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and increasingly TikTok — have become significant educational and community-building spaces for yoga. Short-form content (60-second tutorials, alignment tips, inspirational philosophical quotes, class snippets) can reach enormous audiences and introduce new students to yoga and to your teaching.

Effective use of social media for yoga education: prioritise content that is genuinely educational and safe over content that is merely visually spectacular (advanced postures filmed for likes create unrealistic aspirations and contribute to yoga-related injury); include diverse representations of yoga practitioners; share philosophical depth, not just physical techniques; be transparent about your expertise and limitations; and maintain the same professional standards online as in person.

13.4 Apps, Music, and Multimedia in Class

Yoga Apps as Student Tools

Many students use yoga apps (Down Dog, Yoga International, Gaia, Daily Yoga, and many others) between in-person classes. Yoga teachers can leverage this by recommending specific apps or practices that complement class learning, assigning home practice through app-based resources, and discussing what students are experiencing with their self-directed digital practice.

Music in Yoga Class

The use of music in yoga classes is a nuanced pedagogical decision. Research confirms that music influences mood, heart rate, movement tempo, and emotional associations. Music can support the class's energetic arc, create a contained and intimate sonic environment, and inspire deeper emotional engagement with the practice. However, it can also distract, create cultural exclusion (music with unfamiliar or triggering associations), or override the natural rhythm of the breath.

Guidelines for music in yoga class: choose music whose tempo matches the class's energetic requirement (slower and more spacious for restorative classes; steadier and more driving for dynamic practices); use instrumental music during active practices and deep silence for meditation and Savasana; always be willing to turn the music off if it is not serving the class; respect copyright law by using licensed music platforms (Spotify for Business, PRS-licensed sources in the UK, etc.).

Chapter 14: Self-Development – The Teacher as Practitioner

"If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete." — Jack Kornfield

14.1 The Teacher's Practice: The Non-Negotiable Foundation

Every great yoga teaching tradition shares one foundational insistence: the teacher must maintain their own practice. Not a practice they had last year, not a practice they remember from their training, but an active, alive, growing personal yoga sadhana that continues to challenge, surprise, and transform them. The relationship between the quality of the teacher's own practice and the quality of their teaching is direct, immediate, and irreplaceable.

Why is this so important? Because yoga is fundamentally experiential — it can only be conveyed from one practitioner to another, not merely from one reader or lecturer to an audience. The teacher who does not practise is like a musician who only teaches from sheet music without playing — technically correct, perhaps, but without the aliveness, nuance, and depth that comes from actually making music. Students feel the difference. They may not be able to articulate it, but they know whether they are in the presence of someone who lives what they teach.

14.2 Components of the Yoga Teacher's Personal Sadhana

Daily Asana and Pranayama

A daily physical practice — even if just 20-30 minutes — maintains the teacher's direct relationship with their body, their breath, and the living challenges of yoga postures. It is in your own practice that you continue to discover new layers of understanding, new physical limitations, and new experiences to share with students. Teaching becomes stale when it is disconnected from active personal exploration.

Meditation

Regular meditation practice is the foundation of the yoga teacher's psychological and spiritual fitness. It develops the quality of spacious awareness — the non-reactive, compassionate attention that is the hallmark of effective yoga teaching. Research has shown that regular meditators demonstrate increased activity in pre-frontal cortex regions associated with equanimity, compassion, and emotional regulation — exactly the qualities most needed in a yoga teacher.

Study: Swadhyaya and Philosophical Study

Swadhyaya — the regular study of sacred texts and the observation of one's own mind — is the intellectual dimension of sadhana. For the yoga teacher, Swadhyaya means: regular reading in yoga philosophy (Patanjali, Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Hatha Yoga texts); continuing education in anatomy, physiology, and psychology; engagement with contemporary research on yoga and health; and the honest, courageous examination of one's own mind, habits, and shadow material.

Satsang: Community of Practice

Yoga is not meant to be practised in isolation. The Satsang — the community of sincere practitioners — is one of the three pillars of yogic community (alongside the Teacher and the Teachings). For the yoga teacher, maintaining connection with a community of practice provides support, accountability, inspiration, and the corrective influence of other perspectives. Seek out teachers you respect; attend workshops and retreats; participate in professional communities; and cultivate genuine friendships with other practitioners.

14.3 Managing Teacher Burnout

Yoga teacher burnout — the state of chronic exhaustion, emotional numbness, cynicism, and reduced effectiveness that can afflict dedicated teachers — is more common than the yoga community typically acknowledges. The very qualities that make a person an excellent yoga teacher (sensitivity, dedication, empathy, a tendency to prioritise others' needs) are also qualities that make them vulnerable to burnout when not balanced by self-care.

Signs of Teacher Burnout

- Dreading classes rather than looking forward to them
- Going through the motions without genuine presence or care
- Increasing cynicism about students, the yoga industry, or the practice itself
- Physical exhaustion disproportionate to the workload
- Neglect of personal practice and self-care
- Emotional over-involvement with students' problems
- Seeking validation from teaching rather than from personal practice

Prevention and Recovery

- Maintain strict non-negotiable time for personal practice and rest — this is not a luxury; it is the source from which teaching flows.
- Set clear professional boundaries — do not be available to students outside of class hours without appropriate structures in place.
- Seek supervision or mentoring — having a more experienced teacher to process challenges with is invaluable.

- Diversify your professional identity — if your entire self-worth is invested in being a yoga teacher, any difficulty in teaching will feel existentially threatening.
- Practise what you teach: if you teach contentment (Santosha), cultivate it in your own professional life. If you teach non-attachment, practise releasing outcomes.

14.4 The Ongoing Journey of Teaching

There is a beautiful paradox at the heart of yoga teaching: the more you learn, the more you recognise how much remains to be learned. The horizon of mastery keeps moving forward, revealing ever-vaster territories of possibility. The yoga teacher who fully grasps this paradox — who greets their own ongoing development with curiosity and delight rather than frustration and shame — has understood something essential about what it means to practise yoga.

Teaching yoga is, ultimately, a form of yoga itself. The challenges of the classroom — difficult students, unclear cues, moments of disconnection, the occasional spectacular failure — are not interruptions to your practice. They are your practice. They reveal the places in you that are not yet free: the places where insecurity, reactivity, pride, or fear still run the show. Approached with the spirit of Svadhyaya and Santosha, the teaching life becomes one of the most powerful vehicles for self-knowledge available.

At SKM Yoga, we believe that every teacher training graduate carries within them everything needed to become an extraordinary teacher. The technical skills — the asana sequences, the anatomical knowledge, the lesson plans — can be learned. What cannot be learned but only cultivated over a lifetime is the quality of presence, the depth of compassion, the clarity of awareness, and the genuine love for the students who place their trust in your teaching. That cultivation is your life's work, and it begins today.

Appendices

Appendix A: Student Health Intake Form

This form should be completed by all new students before participating in yoga classes. Information gathered is strictly confidential and is used solely to support safe, individualised instruction.

Field	Student Response
Full Name	
Date of Birth	
Contact Number	
Emergency Contact Name and Number	
Doctor/Healthcare Provider	
Current medications	
Any recent surgeries, injuries or hospitalisation in past 12 months?	
Any chronic health conditions? (diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, asthma, arthritis, osteoporosis, cancer, etc.)	
Any history of back, neck, or joint problems?	
Are you pregnant, or have you given birth in the past 6 months?	
Do you have any history of anxiety, depression, or PTSD?	
Previous yoga experience (none / beginner / intermediate / advanced)	
Primary reasons for starting/continuing yoga practice	
Any physical activity or postures you wish to avoid	
Anything else you would like your teacher to know	

Appendix B: Lesson Plan Template (Blank)

Component	Your Plan

Class Date, Time, Duration	
Class Level	
Number of Students	
Special Populations Present	
Class Theme / Intention	
Learning Objectives (SMART)	
Required Props and Materials	
Opening / Centering (duration: ___ min)	
Warm-Up Sequence (duration: ___ min)	
Main Practice Sequence (duration: ___ min)	
Peak Pose / Highlight	
Cool-Down Sequence (duration: ___ min)	
Savasana / Integration (duration: ___ min)	
Closing Practice / Meditation	
Key Modifications to Offer	
Contraindications to Note	
Music Playlist	
Post-Class Reflection Notes	

Appendix C: Teacher Self-Evaluation Checklist

Self-Evaluation Item	Yes	Needs Work
I arrived early and prepared the space before students arrived.		
I welcomed all students warmly and greeted them by name.		
I collected health forms from new students.		
My lesson plan was prepared in advance and I knew the sequence well.		
I clearly set an intention or theme for the class.		

My verbal cues were specific, clear, and appropriately paced.		
I offered modifications for different ability levels.		
I observed students throughout the class and responded to what I saw.		
I used imagery and inquiry cues, not just anatomical instructions.		
I asked for consent before any hands-on adjustments.		
I managed time effectively and did not shorten Savasana.		
I maintained a warm, non-judgmental classroom environment.		
I closed the class with care and intention.		
I stayed within my professional scope of practice.		
I reflected on the class and noted insights for future planning.		

Appendix D: Glossary of Pedagogical Terms

- **Andragogy:** The theory and practice of adult education, as contrasted with pedagogy (child education). Coined by Malcolm Knowles.
- **Bloom's Taxonomy:** A hierarchical framework for categorising educational objectives, from simple recall to complex creation.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Adapting teaching methods, content, and assessment to meet the diverse needs of learners.
- **Experiential Learning:** Learning through direct experience and reflection, as described by David Kolb's learning cycle.
- **Formative Assessment:** Ongoing assessment during the learning process, used to guide and improve instruction.
- **Inquiry-Based Teaching:** A teaching methodology that uses questions and exploration rather than direct information transmission.
- **Kinaesthetic Learning:** Learning primarily through physical sensation and movement.
- **Learning Objective:** A specific, measurable statement of what a student will know, feel, or be able to do by the end of a learning session.
- **Neuroplasticity:** The brain's ability to change its structure and function in response to learning and experience.
- **Pedagogy:** The science and art of teaching.
- **Proprioception:** The sense of the body's position in space; joint position sense.
- **Reflective Practice:** The habit of reviewing and analysing one's own teaching practice to identify areas for growth.

- **Scope of Practice:** The boundaries of what a professional is trained and qualified to do.
- **Somatic Education:** Education that engages the body's intelligence and physical sensation as primary vehicles for learning.
- **Transference:** In psychology, the redirection of feelings or expectations toward another person (e.g. the teacher) based on prior relationships.
- **VAK Model:** Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic — three primary learning modalities.
- **Viniyoga:** The appropriate and individualised application of yoga practices to a specific individual.

Appendix E: Recommended Reading and Bibliography

Yoga Philosophy and Pedagogy

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