

Ideas for Teaching Yoga Students

Sheri Cohen and Buffy Owens practice and teach both yoga and Feldenkrais® classes. We asked each of them for their best tips and guidelines for Feldenkrais teachers who want to create interesting and useful lessons for yoga students. They also suggested some lessons for you to study so you can engage and intrigue this audience.

[Buffy Owens](#) suggests these lesson-starter ideas. Use any one of these as a focused series or create a set from these alone.

- Any See-Saw Breathing lesson with a discussion on freeing the breath from habits and constraints. This can be especially powerful for those who practice pranayama.
- Balancing Flexors & Extensors with an emphasis on not going to the point of stretch or strain. Moshe's lesson in the Basic Series was huge for me. There

are a lot of twists in Yoga, and experiencing improvement without stretching can be a big ah-ha moment... and an opportunity to bump-up against the compulsion to stretch.

- Mark Reese's lessons 1 & 2 from Moving Out Of Pain (or some variation) with a test movement of half pigeon can be lovely. These could progress to frog lessons as a full series. This is an excellent place to discuss on differentiation and integration.

I've also found lessons with the feet on the wall to be quite powerful for improving warrior poses.

[Sheri Cohen](#) suggests the following preparation and teaching strategies:

- Research your audience, as you would before any workshop. Don't know anything about yoga? Take a class! Not all yoga studios are the same. Is it a young, athletic crowd or a more mature, contemplative group? What's the style taught there? Some flow in constant movement (Ashtanga, flow yoga), and some hold-still shapes for longer (Iyengar, also sometimes referred to as "hatha yoga"). There are strenuous ("power" yoga), gentle

(Viniyoga), and restorative yoga classes (lying over bolsters). There is “adaptive yoga,” “senior yoga,” and “chair yoga.” There are hybrids and new styles appearing all the time.

- Even more mature yogis are used to working hard to “get it right.” Prepare to gently but firmly transition them into a practice of Constructive Disobedience.

A story: The first Feldenkrais lesson I taught in a yoga studio was to my fellow yoga teachers at a staff meeting. I chose a “Foot to Head” lesson, because what yogi doesn’t want to get their foot to their head? Many of my colleague-students felt no difference at the end of the lesson. Of course they couldn’t! They never were able to stop stretching and straining. Perhaps my inexperience as a teacher left them stranded with their habits—OR, perhaps the material I chose was too close to what they know of themselves.

Moral of the story? Don’t expect yoga students to find our process easy, just because they are movers.

Don't be afraid to invite yoga students into movement material that might not, on the surface of things, directly relate to yoga. Interfering, temporarily, with their sense of “knowing” will help them open to self-discovery. You can tie it in for them with a yoga pose or two at the end. I often will use their comfort during the opening and closing sits as a reference.

- My most successful strategy to invite yoga students into this new process is to give them something to care about. I explain that yoga and the Feldenkrais Method® of somatic education share a primary value—self-awareness. Most yoga practitioners, even the most athletic, are responsive to a reminder that the pose is not the goal.
- Choosing your movement material is not so hard— every yoga class tends to include movements in all the spinal planes: flexion, extension, lateral flexion and rotation. You can't go wrong picking a lesson that emphasizes one of these.
- Typically, a flow yoga practitioner can use help with transitions between poses—large steps forward and back—or with lowering to the floor in the shoulder-busting “chatturanga dandana.” An Iyengar practitioner might

instead appreciate help with the subtleties of arriving into a pose and then maintaining it comfortably. These distinctions are not hard-and-fast.

- There are many Awareness Through Movement® lessons that dovetail with certain yoga poses. Here is a short list (I am using nicknames for both ATM®s and yoga poses for legibility and convenience):

Foot to Head	Foot behind the head (& all flexion poses)
Spine Like a Chain	Bridge pose
Bridging	Wheel pose
M-Sitting, Side-sitting, Hook big toe with finger	All sitting poses
Erroll Flynn	All standing poses, arms wide
Pressing	Cobra (prone backbend)

Pecking	Plank, chaturanga
Homolateral rolling	Open facing standing poses, like Warrior 2
Contralateral rolling	Revolved standing poses, like Revolved Triangle
Coordinating Flexors & Extensors variations	All seated twists and revolved standing poses
Standing over the highest point of the hip	All standing balances, Half Moon pose
Pelvic floor awareness	Everything!

- Lastly, yogis LOVE breathing practices. Give them a see-saw breathing lesson, and they will cool!



When I teach yoga teachers anatomy in teacher trainings, I make it very clear that I think of both yoga and the Feldenkrais Method as practices toward better functioning in life. I do not use the Feldenkrais Method in my yoga classes solely to make a yoga pose more achievable. I blend Feldenkrais and yoga together to make standing, sitting, walking and breathing easier—through self-awareness.

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