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Resource: The Torch or the Firehose
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Epilogue: A Word about You

Although we hope you've been able to pick up something useful from this booklet, it is from the actual teaching that you will learn the most, both about the subject and about yourself. It can be rewarding and a lot of fun.

Once you've started teaching, it may be useful to pick up the booklet again to refer to specific problems you encounter. An outline and index on the next pages will help you with this.

No two teachers are alike. The suggestions in this little booklet are meant to apply to a wide variety of teaching styles, but in the end they are just suggestions. You have to choose and adapt them to your own personality and style. You must feel comfortable with what you are doing if your students are also to feel comfortable. Be yourself.

Remember that recitations also differ. If your particular section isn't going well, do all you can to improve things, but don't take it all personally and blame yourself. Even the most gifted teachers rarely have a recitation like the one we dreamt about in the Prologue.

Some teachers have a problem with over-commitment—they put so much energy into writing supplementary notes, seeing students in their office, writing elaborate comments on assignments, or preparing for class, that their own professional work suffers. You must pace yourself—you are going to be teaching for a while, a lifetime perhaps, and you can't sprint the whole distance. Instructors who give their utmost for one semester sometimes feel burned out the next semester; they just can't seem to get interested in doing it again. Save part of yourself for the future and look for a balance between your teaching and your other activities.

We said it a few times already, but it's worth repeating here at the end. One of your most important resources is the other teachers in the course. Talk to them about the course material and about problems you are having with the students or with pedagogy. Exchange classroom visits with them. Some courses sponsor a meeting of the recitation teachers (without the lecturer) after two or three weeks have gone by, so they can trade experiences or comments. But talk to the lecturer too—he or she needs the input from you about the course and may, in turn, have valuable suggestions to offer.

Good luck!

