

Teaching by the Spirit: Some Dos and Don'ts

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles suggested some dos and don'ts for teaching by the Spirit:

Do	Don't
1. Focus on the teaching moment by becoming settled and serene in your own heart.	1. Don't be upset by Martha-like anxieties. Recall how Joseph Smith was once ineffective after he and Emma had a disagreement? Inviting the Spirit is difficult, but it won't come if we are crowded with other concerns.
2. Be meek and "I will tell you in your mind" (D&C 8:2).	2. Don't try to impress in order to be heard or seen of men.
3. Have considerable eye contact with and listen to the students.	3. Don't be so busy presenting that either listening to the Spirit or to the students is not possible. Don't expect the class to listen to you when you are not listening to the Spirit.
4. Use inspired one-liners that will be remembered and retained.	4. Don't multiply words or concepts. Would we cherish the Sermon on the Mount if it filled three volumes?
5. Know the substance of what is being presented. Ponder and pray over its simple focus.	5. Don't present a "smorgasbord," hoping someone will find something of value. The lack of focus leaves the receivers uncertain.
6. Proffer relevant applications and implications of what is being taught.	6. Don't answer questions no one is asking.
7. Ask inspired questions.	7. Don't be afraid of questions.
8. Be prepared to learn from what you say while under the influence of the Spirit. I heard President Marion G. Romney say on several occasions, "I always know when I am speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost because I always learn something from what I've said" (in Boyd K. Packer, <i>Teach Ye Diligently</i> [1975], 304).	8. Don't be afraid to ponder in front of the students.
9. Provide moments of deliberate pause. The Spirit will supply its own "evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).	9. Don't be afraid of inspired silences.
10. Let the doctrines speak for themselves. "Every principle God has revealed carries its own convictions of its truth to the human mind" (<i>Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young</i> [1997], 72).	10. Don't end up "selling" the doctrines.
11. Bear your testimony appropriately and specifically.	11. Don't just say "I have a testimony."

Adapted from Neal A. Maxwell, "Teaching by the Spirit—'The Language of Inspiration'" (CES Symposium on the Old Testament, Aug. 15, 1991), 4–5, si.lds.org.

