

# Choosing your teacher

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This article is a sequel in the series of general articles that I have written for students –

- How to perform better in CA/CS exams  
(<http://www.caclubindia.com/articles/how-to-do-better-in-ca-cs-exams-4922.asp>),
- Why do we fail  
([http://www.caclubindia.com/articles/article\\_list\\_detail.asp?article\\_id=4959](http://www.caclubindia.com/articles/article_list_detail.asp?article_id=4959))
- How to attempt theory papers  
([http://www.caclubindia.com/articles/article\\_list\\_detail.asp?article\\_id=5097](http://www.caclubindia.com/articles/article_list_detail.asp?article_id=5097))
- How to study  
([http://www.caclubindia.com/articles/article\\_list\\_detail.asp?article\\_id=5294](http://www.caclubindia.com/articles/article_list_detail.asp?article_id=5294))

As these articles have evoked very good response (going by the number of comments received), I have thought about continuing the series.

## ***Who is your teacher?***

A teacher, like a book, is a guide to meaning, not an alternative to it. Unfortunately, most students look at the teacher as the one who does the tough job of reading, understanding, collecting and collating materials, and simply supplies the *pucca maal*, on a platter. Most students look at the teacher as supplier of a quick shot formula that helps in getting through the exams. No matter whether the subject is clear or not, if the teacher says – study from page 17 to page 19, that is what most students would do, without bothering about building that background on which page 17 to 19 might be resting.

If this is what you are expecting of your teacher, then whoever is teaching you is fine enough, and you may not even bother about the rest of the article as it surely cannot benefit you. On the contrary, if you are looking at a teacher who can be your mentor, your guru, your guide to meaning, then read on.

## ***Self study versus being taught by a teacher***

The proponent of Jainism Lord Mahavir says – there is no teaching for the one who sees himself. That is, if your perception is so good that you can read and understand the text, then there is really no need for a teacher.

Of course, the precondition for that is that the text that you are reading is clear, comprehensible and comprehensive. The problem with most texts, particularly with the ones compiled by professional institutes, is that they are jobwork done by the Research division of the Institute, or compiled by authors who would have been very poorly paid

for doing the job which is anyway not even acknowledged. Have you ever opened a study mat of the ICAI or ICSI and found the name of the author? That would mean, either an anonymous author wrote it, or the research division compiled it – which would mean the text is not the work of a great author. A good author would never write anonymous stuff, and the research division would rarely have great authors working there.

If the author himself did not have a clear view of what he is writing, it would be too much to expect clarity from what he wrote. Being an author of several books myself, I can safely (or unsafely as I am making aspersion against myself) say that very often, authors are not clear on what they are writing themselves – the tendency to quickly run to the next topic without clear explanation of the topic in hand is an evidence of this weakness.

So, if you do not have a great book to rely on, then, you would surely need a teacher. And even with the best of the books, you may still need a teacher, as books are not interactive – you cannot talk to a book, as you may converse with your teacher.

CA/CS students, unlike their counterparts in MBA courses, do not have the advantage of full time class room teaching. Hence, students do not have any alternative but to look at tutorial centers. But the way most tutorials currently are, they are a very profligate alternative to a classroom, for several reasons. One, they are very costly. Two, students run from one tutorial to the other, and in most cities, keep spending substantial amount of time in mere commutation itself. It is surely no alternative to the advantage of classroom that MBA students. Besides, most tutorials are one-way traffic – with the amount of crowd collected in successful teachers' classes, students do not even get to see the faculty properly, let alone interacting. Is there a way to address this? Surely yes, the Institutes could have attempted to get effective teachers teaching on the Institute's platform, but unfortunately, due to vested interests, that has never happened.

### ***Look for these minimum virtues:***

So, while you are still left to choose your own teacher and tutorial, what are the qualities of the teacher you should be looking at? Presently, the only quality with which students choose their teachers is – if XYZ Sir has more than 500 students, that is the mark of being a good teacher. Or, if XYZ Sir's students in the past have cleared the exams, that is the strongest evidence of being a good teacher.

I am not sure how does crowd in the classroom help students? If there are 500 students in XYZ sir's class, and only 50 in ABC Sir's class, how does the 500 help you? On the contrary, the larger the crowd, you lose your individual existence. On the contrary, if the teacher can attend to you, or at least ask you if you have understood, or give you a chance to ask questions that you were not clear on, that is exactly what you should be asking.

However, assuming that crowds will follow successful teachers, it is only a matter of time when ABC sir will also have a large enough batch. But then, there must be some minimum virtues that you should be expecting from your teachers:

- **How good was the teacher's own academic background:** It is quite ironical when people who have mediocre academic backgrounds themselves come to teach students and exhort them to excel. I surely believe that a good seed (that is a word of good advice) even if sown by a bad farmer would still grow, as well as a good seed sown by a good farmer. But teachers teach best by example. If the track record of the teacher's own academic performance has been average, one cannot expect the teacher to tell you the way to excel.
- **Teachers should be conceptually very very clear:** The hallmark of good teaching is the ability to impart conceptual clarity, the ability to see the whole of the picture of a subject and not just the bits and pieces that appear from the text that we read. Very few teachers have that ability – either because they are not clear themselves, or because they lack in communicative abilities. Communication skills is not all – there are plenty of teachers who keep their class in good humour, but I am sure every student can realize that you are not going into the classes for jokes and stories.
- **Wider knowledge is a great asset:** Subjects are increasingly becoming inter-disciplinary. For example, it is impossible to understand accounting standards today without knowledge of present values, as present values have become omnipresent in accounting standards. If your teacher lacks financial mathematics, you would find him rushing through examples on present value computation, as he would shy away from these examples.
- **Teachers should not shirk questions:** If the teacher evades or avoids questions, he is surely not fit to be a teacher at all. No teacher in the world can claim to have answer to every question asked – personally, I have had the occasion to teach in every continent of the world, some 30 countries, and to such different groups. And in many cases, there were questions for which I did not have an instant answer. But no one expects that I should be giving an impromptu answer, even if it is incorrect. I can always take time – say I will come back after the break, or tomorrow, as long as you make sure that you do.
- **Content matters, not just presentational skills:** I have had years of experience of public speaking, and I can very confidently say, though presentation is all about style *and* content, there are occasion where style matters, and there are those where content matters. In short lectures of about 15-20 min, it is style that matters. In long sessions, like classrooms, how much time can you kill with style? After all, it is content that surely matters more in classroom teaching.

### ***Ultimately, people get what they deserve***

Not too many students exercise discretion, and they tend to follow the crowds. I am not sure if many students do a careful evaluation of the available alternatives – most go by what their friends have advised. So, ultimately, they get what they deserve.

If you feel this article does any good to you, you may send me either a compliment or question at [vinod@vinodkothari.com](mailto:vinod@vinodkothari.com). If there are questions that I have not answered here, I will think of writing a follow up article – so, do post your questions. And don't forget that we have lots of student resources at [www.vinodkothari.com/tutorials/](http://www.vinodkothari.com/tutorials/).