



10 Tips for edTPA Success

By Amie Jette

Future educators, take it from me: The edTPA is tough. [← Back to Story](#)
I spent more than two months—with help from instructors and cohort-mates—preparing my portfolio and myself for this rigorous process of teacher assessment.

For weeks, I interpreted commentary prompts and wrote and rewrote my work. I watched hours of myself teaching, nit-picking everything from my instruction to my body language. I spent days analyzing assessments and gathering data on which students had (and hadn't) reached the learning targets.

While the edTPA process was difficult, it was an invaluable step in my preparation as a teacher. I practiced connecting learning targets to assessments and criteria that would show student learning, while providing quantitative and qualitative evidence to demonstrate a whole-picture understanding of my classroom. Most importantly, I practiced analyzing and thinking critically about my instruction—something that I will continue to do throughout my long career as an educator.

Here are 10 tips for finding success with edTPA:

- 1. Communicate with your cooperating teacher.** He or she is your most valuable resource. Your cooperating teacher will be familiar with your students and your strengths and weaknesses—and will help you make those important decisions like what lessons to teach, how to differentiate for students' needs in your instruction and assessment, and appropriate methods for incorporating student voice.
- 2. Find the right time in the school year to begin the process.** Make sure you know your students well before you begin planning and teaching your edTPA lessons. Your familiarity with students' contexts and where they are in the curriculum will not only make for informed instruction but also provide ample material for your commentaries.
- 3. Plan, plan, plan.** The edTPA requires **three to five lessons** from a subject-specific learning segment. Don't feel pressured to create a unit from scratch—but you should certainly adapt it to meet your students' needs and the **Common Core State Standards**.

Also, make sure you know the central focus and learning targets of your lessons before starting instruction. This will help you assess these both during and after instruction, and it will help you

clearly explain them in your commentaries.

4. Get acquainted with the portfolio platform. Once you know which platform your program requires (I used [Pearson's ePortfolio system](#)), get used to navigating it.

You'll find that you can download commentaries, type directly into documents, and upload them to your portfolio. One suggestion: Review the file types that the platform lets you upload, and choose one type for consistency (I saved all of my work as PDFs).

5. Quantify and qualify. Include a mix of qualified and quantified evidence in your commentaries. Both types of evidence show your understanding of the classroom as a whole, as well as your students' varied needs.

Some examples: Know the number of English Language Learners in your class, or specify that 21 out of 25 students are able to reduce fractions. Include any background information that is relevant to students' learning—this will help scorers understand students' backgrounds, the context of your classroom, and how you plan your instruction to accommodate both.

If you gather this information in advance, you'll have a helpful collection of evidence that you can refer to in your writing to justify your teaching choices.

6. Read the commentary prompts and rubrics before videotaping. Knowing the prompts beforehand will help you plan lessons that address the commentary topics—and generate additional evidence for your writing. For example, think of ways to show how you establish a positive learning environment, how you consider the needs and backgrounds of your students, and how you engage students in using the language functions of your lessons. Then, when it comes time to write, you'll already have evidence of how you did those things—rather than having to hunt for it in your lesson plans and video.

7. Videotape every lesson you intend to include in your portfolio. Things are going to go wrong during filming, and some lessons will be more successful than others. Videotape every lesson in your portfolio to ensure you have a wide selection and can choose the best video for your 15-minute segment.

It's also helpful to videotape yourself teaching before beginning the edTPA. The more accustomed your students are to the camera, the less distracted they will be by it during edTPA lessons.

8. Send out [videotaping permission forms](#) to families early. The earlier you send forms out, the more time you'll have to contact families who have not turned them in.

Keep in mind: You will probably have at least one student who will never return his or her form. Those students' faces or names cannot appear in the video.

9. Plan seating arrangements and camera placement before videotaping. In order to accommodate students who had not turned in their permission forms, I rearranged their location on the meeting rug to make sure only the backs of their heads were visible.

While students without permission forms are still able to participate, remember that you must not state their names during filming. This discouraged me from calling on those students, but I know teachers who got around this by gesturing or using eye contact.

10. Focus on student interactions during videotaping. By focusing on students' voices (rather than yours), you allow yourself—and the scorers—to really see what your students know and can

do. You'll have plenty of opportunities to justify your teaching choices and fill in the blanks of what isn't seen in the video in the commentaries.

Keep in mind, edTPA isn't meant to assess you for experience or expertise; the scorers know you're a novice. Make the best instructional choices you can based on your knowledge of your students, and make sure those choices are reflected in your commentaries and video. Let your true teacher self shine through.

While edTPA can't fully measure your content knowledge, your familiarity with your students, or how much you will improve over time, it does make you think critically about what you do well—and what you can do better.

This deep analysis of my practice is definitely something I will take away from the edTPA process—and apply to a lifetime career in the classroom.

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