



# JAVE

JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF  
VETERINARY TECHNICIAN EDUCATORS

WINTER 2024

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Advocating for Vet Techs

Tips and tricks for Adjuncts



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# Journal of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (JAVTE)

*The Journal of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (JAVTE) is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal. It is the official publication of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (AVTE). Its purpose is to act as a publication for disseminating evidence-based research to people working as educators in the field of veterinary technology. The journal emphasizes encouraging collaboration among veterinary technology educators through scholarly inquiry relating to the understanding and/or improvement of educational processes and outcomes, organizational issues in education, concepts of teaching and learning, and student engagement based upon research, observations, and experience relevant to the field.*

## Submission Process and Deadlines

Papers will be reviewed using the JAVTE double-blind peer-review process and should be prepared using the JAVTE author guidelines (see Editorial Policies and Peer Review Process). Submission of papers is the author's acknowledgement of and agreement to JAVTE's ethical duties of the author policy.

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*Cover photo submitted by  
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# Get published in the Summer '24 print edition of JAVTE!

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## Letter from the President of the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators

**Jennifer Serling, CVT, RVT, BVSc, AAS**  
*AVTE President*



Dear AVTE Colleagues and Friends.

Happy New Year!! I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits as we embark on an exciting new academic semester. As we venture into 2024, I am thrilled to announce that the overarching theme for the year is “Teaching Excellence.” At AVTE, we recognize the pivotal role that educators play in shaping the future, and it is our collective commitment to foster an environment that encourages and celebrates excellence in teaching whether you are new to the profession or what I like to call “vintage.”

Teaching excellence goes beyond imparting knowledge; it involves creating meaningful connections with students, embracing innovative pedagogical approaches, and constantly striving for improvement. This year, let us come together to share best practices, exchange ideas, and support one another in our journey toward achieving unparalleled teaching excellence in the classroom. Be on the lookout for upcoming events and information regarding this wonderful theme.

I am also excited to remind you of the upcoming highlight of our year – the annual conference scheduled for July 26-28, 2024 in Houston, Texas at the Sonesta Galleria. This conference serves as a platform for AVTE members to engage in insightful discussions, attend workshops, and network with fellow educators from around the globe. The theme of the conference aligns seamlessly with our focus on teaching excellence, providing a unique opportunity for us to delve deeper into this critical aspect of our profession. We have some amazing things planned including pre-conference events. Houston is a beautiful city and hopefully, it won't be QUITE as warm as Palm Springs 😊. Stay tuned for more details on the conference agenda, keynote speakers, and registration process. I encourage each one of you to actively participate in this event, as it promises to be a valuable and enriching experience for all. We would love to have you present your ideas to the community. Proposals are being accepted now!

As we navigate the academic landscape together, let us embrace the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning. Your dedication to teaching is commendable, and I am confident that this academic year will be marked by unprecedented achievements and growth for AVTE and its members.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to excellence in education. Here's to a successful and fulfilling academic semester ahead! Can't wait to see you all in Houston!!!



# Teaching Tips & Tricks

## Learning Anal Gland Expression in a Safe and Calm Environment

**Daniela Alvarez-Cervantes, RVT**

Have you ever struggled to find ways to practice anal gland expression in a safe and calm environment? One of the fundamental skills that a veterinary technician needs in their toolbelt and sometimes is difficult to understand until we have hands-on a patient.

Working with a live patient has its benefits ; understanding patient behavior, assessing comfort level. However, this may not be the right environment for all to learn.

Here is an inexpensive way to create faux-anal glands in a clinic:

### TOOLS

- 1 stuffed animal
- 1 glove (any size)
- Scissors
- 2 rubber bands
- 1 tube of Churu\*
- 1 18 gauge needle

\*Any soft paste will work. Examples : can of AD, squeazy cheese, nutella with crumbled up oreos.

Churu works well because it has the odor and consistency of infected anal glands.

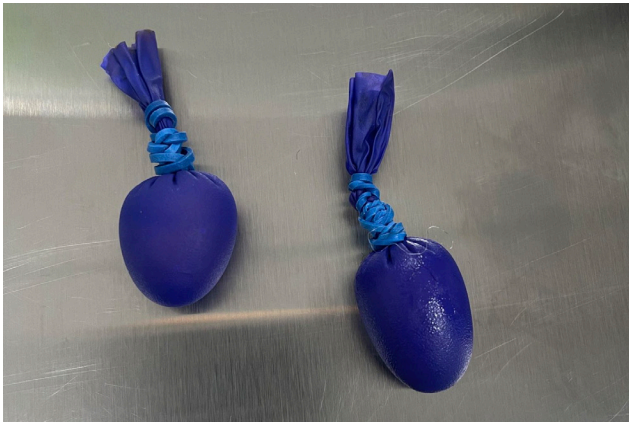
### STEPS

- Using the pair of scissors, cut a hole where the anus would be on the stuffed animal. On the lateral side of the middle hole make 2 more cuts. Now your stuffed animal is ready.



- Prepping the 'anal glands' . Using 1 glove cut 2 fingers off of the glove and fill them with Churu, or the filling you have chosen. Then use the rubberband to snugly tie it together. You should have a right and a left 'anal gland' at the end.





- Place the anal gland through the center hole of the stuffed animal as the end of the glove pokes out the lateral holes created.



Learning how to express anal glands is a crucial skill for veterinary technicians. Practicing in a safe and controlled environment is essential for skill development, and creating faux-anal glands can be a cost-effective solution.



- Use the 18 gauge needle to create the orifice of the anal gland. Then begin expressing the anal gland! Ensure that your student talking you through all the steps, what they are feeling, if there was a client in front of them how would them talk them through this.



**Ann Wortinger**  
**Appalachian State University**

As an online program, we faced special challenges with Clinical Pathology skills, especially the differentials. At AVTE 2 years ago I had discussed with Trisha Gorham how she handled this in her program.

Using Trisha's suggestions, I developed virtual differentials for our students. These are 50 WBC PPTs that are graded during their class. They get 10 points for submitting it but are not penalized for getting the answers wrong. Once I grade the submission, I send them the key to check what I called the cell and what they called the cell.

This method has been well accepted by the students, we do 3 different differentials over the CBC section of the class, and I can see an improvement in their performance.

As part of the CBC section of clin path, I also do live differentials for the students, using my digital microscope, and Zoom.

As a final reinforcer for them, I have taken all of the differentials I have collected and have, with the help of our Instructional Designer, created a CBC library for them in our LMS. All of the PPTs are there with the keys, all the videos are there, as well as the in-class abnormal cell PPTs. This allows access to the information even after they've completed the class, and I can include abnormal diffs that aren't a good match for newbie students to review.

[Click here to download the PowerPoint deck.](#)

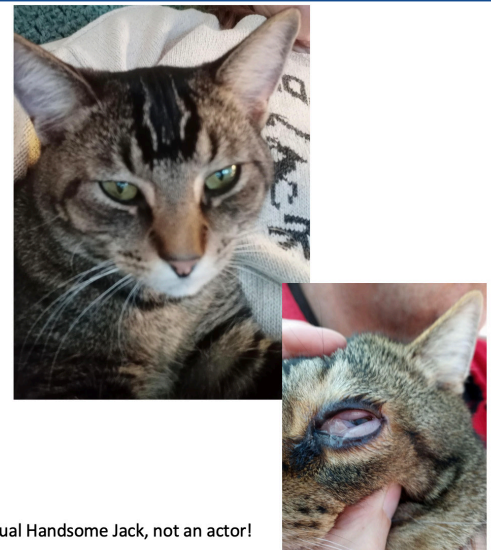
[Click here to download the Jack Differential Key.](#)

## Manual Differential

- Use a sheet of paper, google/word doc for the count
- Label paper:
  - S (segmented neutrophils)
  - B (band neutrophils)
  - L (lymphocytes)
  - M (monocytes)
  - E (eosinophils)
  - B (basophils)
- Evaluate and note any RBC c
- Note platelet numbers and p
  - Decreased, normal, increased

## Signalment

- Name: Jack
- Species: Feline
- Breed: DSH
- Sex: m/n
- Age: 3 yrs
- Hx of chronic unilateral herpes and mycoplasma bacterial infection.



This is the actual Handsome Jack, not an actor!

SAMPLE SLIDES FROM THE DOWNLOADABLE POWERPOINT DECK.

# Advocating for the Veterinary Technician

By **Courtney Gulick**, RVT, WSU Tech

The average veterinary technician goes to college for two years and puts their sweat, tears and life into the program and learning how to be a veterinary nurse. All this to go out into a clinic and not able to use a large percentage of what they learned in college. This can be highly demoralizing. I spent 12 years in clinical practice and rarely, if ever, performed a physical exam.

A credentialed veterinary technician, utilized appropriately, can net a veterinary clinic \$220K per year according to the AVMA. Some common ways we forget that we can utilize our veterinary nurses are:

- Client education on heartworm/flea/tick preventatives
- Puppy and kitten education
- Dental care
- Blood draws
- IV and urinary catheter placements
- Radiographs
- Call backs

Think about how much time a veterinarian could save, and how much money we could ask for as technicians, if veterinarians are doing only the jobs a technician cannot do.

As technicians, we need to advocate for ourselves to the veterinarians we work for. If you are experiencing underutilization, speak with your veterinarian about your skillset and how you can become more utilized. Having an open line of communication is very important. They need to

know what your skills are and that you want to expand your knowledge.

I had to advocate for myself multiple times at the very first clinic I worked at outside of school. One thing we did not do was put IV catheters in our surgical patients. When I brought this up with the veterinarian, his objections were cost to clients and having someone do them in a timely manner. We brain stormed, I advocated for myself (I know how to place an IV catheter!) and what we came up with was making an optional \$27 charge for the catheter. When checking in surgical patients, I would tell them it was optional but also discuss with them the importance of having a patent catheter during surgery. Once clients were educated about this optional cost, I always got an enthusiastic, “Yes!”. Suddenly, we were doing catheter placements on every surgical patient, and I felt more confident – all because I had a conversation with my veterinarian who was willing to listen!

When technicians do not get utilized, they experience burnout faster and do not feel a sense of fulfillment. Unless we change this, technicians will continue to leave the field and clinics will continue to be understaffed. Do not be scared to advocate for yourself.



# Confident Blood Smears: Tips and Techniques for Every Veterinary Professional

By **Elizabeth Stark**, CVT, BA, Heartland Veterinary Partners

Manual blood cell review is a simple, inexpensive tool that can give answers and insights into a patient's health or disease state. This AVMA-CVTEA essential skill is an underutilized diagnostic tool in a clinical setting.

Automated CBC machines work through impedance and other advanced technology where cell-specific algorithms allow cells to be differentiated. Cell numbers and types are reported in minutes, but machines cannot visualize inclusions, parasites, and cell anomalies. The veterinary medical personnel's ability to prep a sample can be the difference between diagnosis "ADR" and a guess as to why a patient may not be acting normally.

Well-mixed and properly diluted, EDTA-preserved samples should be used for mammals as it best preserves cell morphology. Heparin should be used for exotic species to achieve the same results. Slides should be cleaned with distilled water and a Kim-wipe® prior to making a smear. This ensures the slide is free from debris, grease, and other possible contaminants that may hinder the creation of a diagnostic smear. A pencil should be used to mark patient identification, as opposed to a Sharpie marker, which can rinse off during the staining process.

## FACTORS

Three controllable factors affect the creation of a blood film, with all factors involving the spreader slide.

The perfect diagnostic smear can be created through adjustment of these factors, regardless of the health status of the patient or the quality of the sample.

1. Spreader slide **angle**
2. Spreader slide **pressure** on the sample slide
3. **Speed** of spreader slide

## TIPS BEFORE BEGINNING

**TIP 1:** Start with a SMALL drop of blood.

- The creator will have more control over technique.
- Use a larger sample as the technique feels more natural.

**TIP 2:** Stand up when creating a smear.

- This reduces pressure during smear creation.

**TIP 3:** Know when to stop.

- Fifteen minutes two or three times daily will garner much better results.

## One-finger Method: (good when having a technical issue with the pressure)

The weight of the top slide will create the correct pressure for the smear, allowing the creator to concentrate on the speed and angle of the spreader.

1. Rest the spreader slide in the dominant hand (Fig. 1).

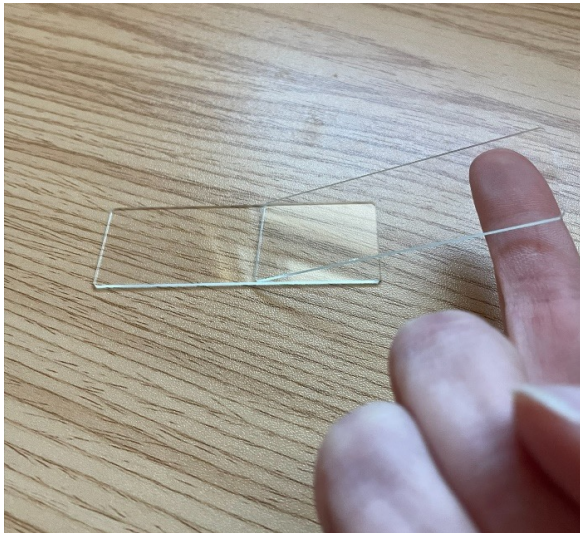


FIGURE 1

2. A small drop of sample should be added on the side of the dominant hand holding the spreader slide. A finger can be used to brace the sample slide and prevent it from shifting during smear creation. (Fig. 2).

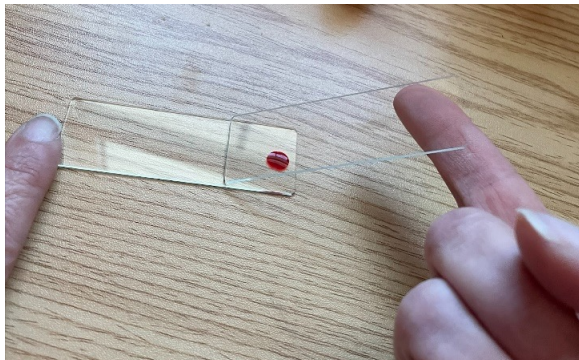


FIGURE 2

3. Back the spreader slide into the blood sample and choose an angle by moving the spreader up or down (Fig 3).

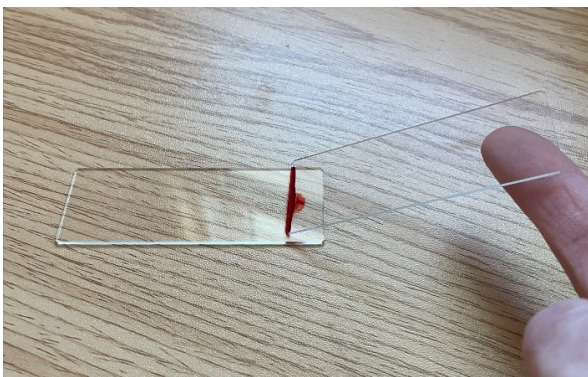


FIGURE 3

4. Move the spreader off the end of the bottom slide to create the smear.

**Inclined Slope Method: (good when having a technical issue with the angle)**

The creator can concentrate on the speed and pressure of the spreader slide as the technique creates the angle (Fig 1).

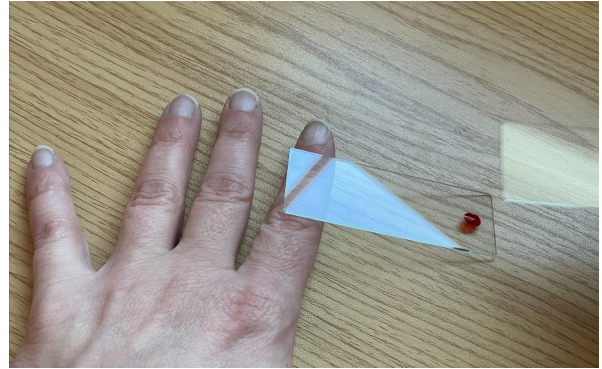


FIGURE 1

1. Rest the sample slide on top of the non-dominant hand.
2. Place a drop of blood on the end of the sample slide closest to the table.
3. Back up the spreader slide into the drop of blood until it spreads across the spreader slide (Fig 2).

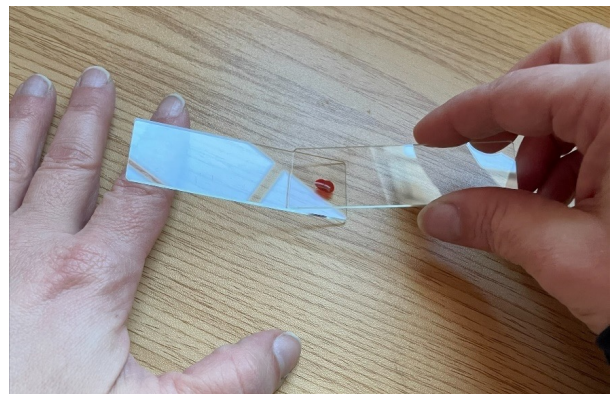


FIGURE 2

4. Move the spreader slide along the sample slide and create the smear (Fig 3).



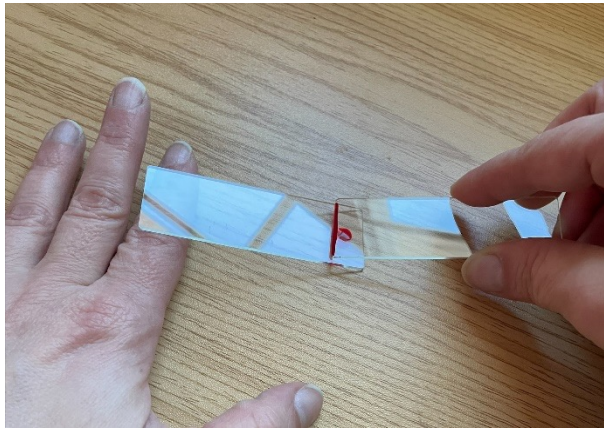


FIGURE 3

**Flat Slide Method: (This is a good method when more pressure is needed).**

1. Rest the sample slide on a flat surface.
2. Hold the sides of the spreader slide with the thumb and middle finger and rest the pointer finger on top of the spreader slide (Fig 1).

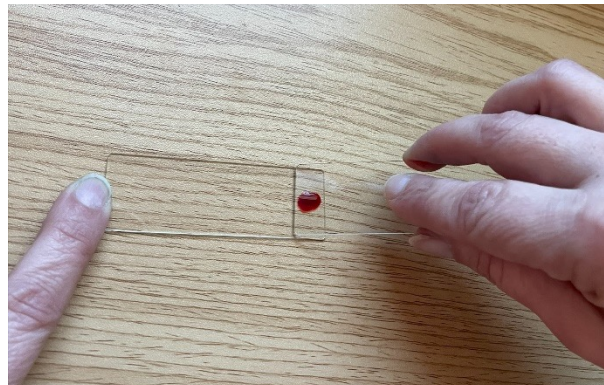


FIGURE 1

The middle finger controls the amount of downward pressure applied to the sample. A finger is placed at the end of the sample slide to keep it from shifting during the creation of the diagnostic smear (Fig 2).

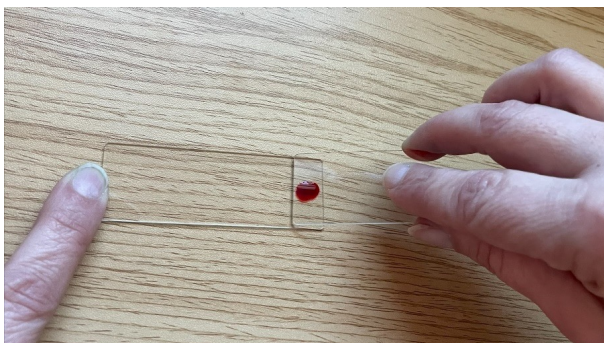


FIGURE 2

3. Move the spreader slide off the end of the sample slide to create your smear.

Many techniques exist, and consistent practice combined with technique analysis is key to success. There is a technique for everyone, and with time and practice, creating a diagnostic blood smear is quick, easy, and fun.

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# 10 Things I Learned In My Rookie Year As An Adjunct

By **Maranda Carter**, RVT, WSU Tech

First and foremost, let me start by saying I am absolutely no expert. I am a baby instructor and very much just started out on my teaching path, I taught my first semester in the Fall of 2022. If you are a seasoned teacher or program director: this article probably isn't for you. This article is written for the newbies, like me, who are just starting out on their own teaching paths.

We are all probably aware of the staggering statistics that surround attrition rates in veterinary medicine; including veterinarians, technicians and other support staff. We know we are losing people, for a variety of reasons. The demand for credentialed technicians is, however, growing. Thus, the demand for more accredited veterinary technology/nursing programs is also growing. Resulting in a demand for more veterinary technician educators, both full time and adjuncts, like myself. A quick job search on Indeed.com for "veterinary technician educator" yielded 41+ current job openings across the United States.

A lot of us, myself included, have no formal training or background in education. We work in the industry; often training technicians on the job in real life, and then somehow all of a sudden find ourselves in a role in academia. There is no rule book that comes with this transition (although that would be very helpful!). Teaching 15+ students in a classroom is also significantly different from training someone 1:1 in a fully clinical setting, who likely already has had exposure or education in veterinary medicine.

Courses I have taught include: Veterinary Business Management, Veterinary Nursing Seminar (VTNE prep), Avian, Exotics & Laboratory Animal Medicine, and Introduction to Veterinary Nursing. The following are 10 things I learned in my rookie year as an adjunct veterinary technician educator:

## 1. If you give an inch, they'll take a mile.

- I was asked to change all the due dates in my first semester. I also tried really hard to be accommodating my first semester, and while being accommodating is important, there needs to be boundaries with it or students absolutely will try to take advantage of you.

## 2. If you have a "captive audience", you have to go the extra mile to be engaging.

- Likewise, if you are virtual, you have to go even further to be engaging.
- I am sure almost every veterinary technician educator reading this has "captive audiences", in the sense that the courses in our programs are not optional.
- My go to tools - Mentimeter, Kahoot!, quizizz, slido, etc. I also like to do warm up questions at the beginning of class that usually contain big key points/definitions for the day, things in the chapter that they absolutely need to know. You can also do a question of the day on a social media page if your program has one. I will often share videos or pictures from my clinic of related topics as well.



- Mentimeter - an interactive presentation website, I like to use it for a variety of things. I use it to poll or quiz at the beginning of the class, or for mini quizzes (2-4 questions) to break up large sections of lecturing. I have also used it as an exit ticket tool where students have to share one thing they learned that day, or for feedback about what they liked most or least about the lesson. The possibilities are endless!
  - Kahoot! - a learning app that students love! I use Kahoot! for bigger reviews like for midterms or finals. My students get really competitive over a Kahoot! review. They not only get points for correctly answering questions but also get more points the quicker they answer. There is multiple versions of game play as well. I usually offer the winner to pick a prize (from conference freebies) as well!
  - Quizizz, Slido - are both other websites that you can build quizzes, polls and the like for lessons.
  - A good resource for engaging content: Chad Littlefield, who is kind of regarded as a celebrity to my college. We love Chad! His website is: <https://weand.me/>
- 3. You'll have better lessons/lectures than others, and that's okay. You cannot "hit it out of the park" every lesson.**
- It's also okay to have some lessons you feel more passionate about than others. For example: I love lecturing over animal behavior and low stress handling techniques. In comparison, I have very little large animal experience, so lecturing over that subject is just not as fun for me. I am honest to my students about "this is my strong suit" vs "I am not as well versed in this domain".
- 4. You are going to feel dumb sometimes for putting your foot in your mouth and saying the wrong thing.**
- Along with this, backtracking and correcting yourself, feels really uncomfortable and makes you feel vulnerable, but I believe it is extremely necessary. I also believe that some students will respect you more for it.
- I think it is also helpful for students to know that you don't have to know every single thing under the sun to be a great technician and be successful in this industry. Showing them it is okay to be wrong sometimes, is an important concept in itself.
- 5. Each group of students is going to be completely different.**
- I have now taught 3 different cohorts of students and each group has been entirely different in its variety of ages, experience levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, and all over general vibes. I suspect any future cohorts will follow suit in being completely different.
- 6. Each course itself is going to be completely different.**
- For example, my Business class is very light reading, and heavy on soft skills. My Exotics class is heavy reading, and lots of technical skills, working hands on with birds, rabbits and lab animals. Another class, Introduction to Veterinary Nursing - is an easier class, but very much a building block class with lots of reading and concepts that we will continue to build on throughout the rest of the program.
- 7. Not all your students are going to like you, and they don't have to like you.**
- After some very harsh feedback from one particular student in my first semester, my boss told me to keep in mind the concept of "friendly, not friends". This also goes along with the first point - if you give an inch, they'll take a mile. At the end of the day, you are their instructor, not their friend. That first semester, I really cared about being liked by all my students, I quickly learned this is both impossible and unnecessary. This can be tricky when they are entering a closely

knit industry like veterinary medicine, and could end up being your colleagues. I also have worked with some students at the local emergency hospital, prior to them being my students. Keeping in mind, “friendly, not friends” with your students is an important, and tricky balance.

- As a rule, I also do not accept social media friend requests from students until after they have graduated.

#### **8. There are different types of students.**

- Just as there is a variety of personality types, you will likely experience a variety of student types. You may have some students who have great soft skills but cannot get the content down. You may have some students who are so smart and understand all the content, but are an absolute trainwreck when it comes to their people skills. You’ll have some students who you KNOW are not reading their book and are googling everything.
- You may also have students who attempt to squeeze you for every point or half point. Exercise patience, but stand your ground when needed for grade decisions.

#### **9. You need to discover your “why”.**

- I am sure it will come as a shock to no one reading this, that extra money is not the reason for many of us adjuncts. After childcare costs, I hardly make enough money teaching to break even.
- So, why am I here? For me, it is legacy related. I am passionate about veterinary technology. I have never wanted to be a veterinarian, but when I discovered veterinary technology, I immediately

found “my people”. I believe it is incredibly important to help nurture and mentor the next generation of technicians to be strong patient advocates who know how to practice high quality medicine, who also know the importance of advocating for themselves, and who squash the toxic clinic cultures that have been prevalent in veterinary medicine for far too long. This fuels me.

- I also sometimes think about the impact that we can have. If I sit back and think about every single animal I have laid hands on, even if the outcome didn’t end up being what we wanted (as it often isn’t). If I laid my hands on that animal, I was holding them with the intention to help them and care for them. Now, think about every animal you have touched, but then also think about every technician you have taught/trained/mentored, and think about every animal they have touched. Wow. Literally countless animals, countless souls touched. The impact of one person is astronomical in that way. This fuels me, and also makes me incredibly emotional. Each educator needs to discover their own “why” and it won’t be one size fits all.

#### **10. Roll with the punches, or the punches will roll you.**

- Between a pandemic, online teaching, technology issues, student issues, accreditation standards that will always be changing, and the fact that medicine is also constantly evolving... You just have got to be able to roll with the punches, or they WILL roll you. Keep up the good fight and godspeed.



A background image of a city skyline with various skyscrapers and buildings under a blue sky with light clouds. The text 'Save The Date' is overlaid in a white, cursive font.

*Save The Date*



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EDUCATORS**

**2024 Annual Conference**

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