A Resource Handbook for Teaching Assistants at Carleton University 2009-2010
A Resource Handbook for Teaching Assistants at Carleton University

FOURTH EDITION

MANAGING EDITOR
Margaret Cusson

COPY EDITOR
Amber Hildebrandt
Joe Lipsett

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS
Ashleigh Ewchuk
Kevin Johns
Established in 2002, the Educational Development Centre is dedicated to the support of teaching excellence at Carleton University. The mission of the EDC is to provide a comprehensive range of technological and pedagogical teaching tools and resources to faculty members, contract instructors and teaching assistants in order to ensure an exceptional learning experience for students in the classroom and beyond.

Educational Development Centre
410 Dunton Tower
Carleton University
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6

Phone: 613 520-4433
Fax: 613 520-4456
E-mail: edc@carleton.ca
Web site: www.carleton.ca/edc

Layout and cover design by Amber Hildebrandt
Icons designed by Kevin Johns and Matthew Di Giuseppe

©2009 Educational Development Centre
# Contents

Acknowledgements 9  
Welcome from the Dean 11  
Preface 13  
A Guide to the Handbook 15  

## Chapter One: Before Your First Class 1  
- Preparing for Class 1  
- Expectations and Your Duties 5  
- The Logistics of TAing 10  
- Your Life: Managing the Dual Role of TA and Student 12  

## Chapter Two: You and Your Students 18  
- The Typical Student 18  
- Mature Students 19  
- International and ESL Students 20  
- Students with Disabilities and Impairments 21  
- First Year Students 24  
- Gender Issues 27  
- Embracing Diversity 31  
- Learning Styles 35  

## Chapter Three: International Teaching Assistants 37  
- The Informal Classroom 37  
- Language Issues 37  
- Teaching Strategies 40  
- Resources 42  

## Chapter Four: Teaching Strategies and Tools 44  
- Getting Through Your First Class 44  
- Office Hours 50  
- Discussion Groups / Tutorials 54  
- Class Participation 61  
- Managing Difficult Student Behaviours 66  
- Using Technology for Teaching 70  

## Chapter Five: Specialty Classes 76  
- Review Sessions 76  
- Group TAing 79  
- TAing a CUTV Course 81  
- Leading Labs 85  
- TAing for Statistics Courses 92
Chapter Six: Evaluation
Grading and Feedback 95
Grade Challenges 101
Gathering Feedback on Yourself 106
University Grading Guidelines 111

Appendices:
Appendix A: University Policies and Procedures 113
Appendix B: Signs of Student Distress 115
Appendix C: List of Support Services 117
Appendix D: Reference List 133
Acknowledgements

This handbook would not have been possible if not for the many universities, manuals, guides and dedicated people who came before us. To name but a few that were especially helpful:

So you’re a TA – A Handbook on Teaching and Learning for New TAs at York University (York University), Survival Guide: A Guide for first time Teaching Assistants at the University of Guelph (University of Guelph), Guide for Teaching Assistants at UTSC (University of Toronto at Scarborough), Handbook on Departmental GSI Development (University of Michigan), Becoming Teachers (Yale University), UVic TA Manual (University of Victoria), A Handbook for Graduate Student Teachers in the Humanities (University of Saskatchewan), University Teaching and Learning: An Instructional Resource Guide for Teaching Assistants at Dalhousie University (Dalhousie University), and many, many others.

We cannot thank them enough for the work that they did in putting together their handbooks and guides. We sincerely appreciate their generosity in sharing their work at conferences and on their university websites. They were extremely helpful and provided guidance and answers when we were lost.

We have included a reference section at the back of the handbook and provided source information throughout the handbook.
Welcome from the Dean

Congratulations on your appointment as a teaching assistant at Carleton University.

Teaching assistants play an important and integral role in the quality of undergraduate education offered by our institution. Two of Carleton’s strategic themes are to ensure student academic success and to ensure an outstanding university experience for students. Teaching assistants are important in the realization of both these goals. By developing a good rapport with the students with whom you work, you can assist greatly in the understanding of course material, in getting students excited and motivated about the subjects they study, in piquing their curiosity, in developing essential skills in critical thinking, research, and oral and written communication, and in helping students identify and find appropriate solutions to the problems and challenges they face. The difference you can make in a student’s life can be especially valuable to first year students, who are making an important and often difficult transition from high school.

In doing all this, you will be able to draw on your own experiences as an undergraduate. However, working as a TA will also be a learning experience for you, and a valuable one. You will be able to develop your own professional, interpersonal skills in working with students, as well as your skills in critical thinking and oral and written communication. In marking or leading discussion groups, you will have to analyze what students are saying and formulate appropriate responses, sometimes within a relatively short time period! But, above all, you will gain the satisfaction that comes with the knowledge of having made a difference in the lives of others.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you for the contribution that you will make to learning and education at Carleton, of wishing you well in your work as a TA and, not least, of wishing you every success in your own academic endeavours.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. John Shepherd
Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
Preface

Welcome to your first teaching assistantship! We are proud to have you join the Carleton community and thrilled to welcome you to your teaching assignment.

The tongue-in-cheek title of this manual was chosen to reflect the sense of alternate identity you are about to assume in your new job as a teaching assistant. To your students, you are the TA, a title which carries a certain amount of respect and responsibility. In creating this handbook, we wanted to provide you with a comprehensive resource to smoothly guide you through your first year as a teaching assistant.

This new TA handbook is a complete revamp from the previous one to reflect, among other things, the many changes that have occurred at Carleton. New support services and departments have been created and changed the culture at Carleton. We wanted the TA handbook to reflect that. We also wanted this handbook to be exactly that — a handbook! A small, handy guide that fits easily in your backpack and that could be referenced for teaching tips at a moment’s notice.

When we started to work on the TA handbook, we realized how big it could get and how un-handy it could become. We could have literally filled hundreds of pages with just tips and advice. To a certain extent, we have included some of that, but the real point of this handbook is to familiarize you with your new duties and responsibilities, and also to provide you with the tools to complete those duties confidently and successfully.

We are excited to present you with the new teaching assistant handbook and we hope that you eagerly dive into it.

With much thanks from the Educational Development Centre to Ashleigh Ewchuk, Kevin Johns and Amber Hildebrandt, as well as other faculty members, TAs and staff who contributed to the creation of this handbook.

Sincerely,

Margaret Cusson
Manager, Teaching Development and Support, EDC
A Guide to the Handbook

Wherever possible, we’ve gone above and beyond providing you with the essential information by adding complementary tips and techniques in sidebars and special sections. Each special feature is branded with its own unique logo so you can easily spot them when flipping through the handbook.

Teaching Tip
Look to the pencil for a quick, useful tip to consider incorporating into your teaching repertoire.

Spotlight
Under the spotlight, you will find a feature focusing on a specific pedagogical approach, a combination of tips or a unique idea.

Fact File
The Fact File focuses on interesting statistics regarding Carleton University, its TAs and the students that they teach.

TA Testimonial
For eyewitness reports and tips from actual TAs in the teaching trenches, just look for the conversation balloon.

Extras
Look to the stack of books to lead you to extra resources you can find at MacOdrum Library, the EDC Library or on-line.
Before Your First Class

The beginning of any job is all stomach flutters and awkward moments. A teaching assistantship is no different. The best you can do is prepare yourself mentally in advance for the exciting adventure you are about to embark on by researching as much as possible about the position. This chapter provides the perfect starting point: a rundown of how to prepare for your first class, what your responsibilities might be and the formal details of your position in the union.

Preparing for Class

“One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation.” – Arthur Ashe, American Social Activist and Tennis Player, 1943-1993

Preparing for your first class as a TA is a lot like preparing to write an essay. You can’t just go full steam ahead and start writing. You start by collecting materials, researching information and jotting down preliminary ideas. It is best to approach your first class with similar techniques. Preparation will not only keep you organized, but it will resolve any foreseeable problems that could contribute to the stress of the first day of class.

Preparation is Key


Being prepared does require effort, but is well worth the additional time because:

- You will be better able to explain difficult concepts.
- You will be better organized.
- You will be able to focus your classes on your students and their understanding of the material.
- You will be able to respond to questions quickly with confidence and clarity.
- You will increase your self-confidence and your students’ confidence in you.

What and How to Prepare

You’ll be hard-pressed to find someone that is going to hold your hand and walk you through your first class. There are, however, a variety of
ways that you can prepare yourself ahead of time. One of your best resources is the course instructor who can help clarify issues, assist you with problems or direct you to someone who can. The key is to take initiative and come prepared with a list of questions to ask them. Below is a list of deadlines and questions you should resolve before class begins to save yourself from first day anxiety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Before First Class</th>
<th>What to Prepare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| As early as possible     | Meet with the course instructor to discuss your duties, the objectives and content of the course, and the administrative details:  
  • Class list for grades and attendance  
  • Office information about keys, location, telephone, and whether it will be shared or private  
  • Keys and location for discussion group  
  • WebCT usage  
  • Photocopying  
  Obtain a syllabus from the instructor to familiarize yourself with:  
  • Instructor contact information  
  • Course objectives  
  • Assignments  
  • Readings  
  • Tests  
  • Papers  
  • Exams  
  • Academic conduct policy |
| Several days before      | Review course policies:  
  • Lateness and absence  
  • Grade determination for course  
  • Academic honesty and policy for group work  
  • Student lab attire |
| A couple days before     | Preview the classroom:  
  • Lab safety features:  
    Fire extinguisher  
    Safety shower and eye wash  
    Emergency phone  
    Emergency contact person  
  • Chalkboard and chalk  
  • Overhead projector  
  • Seating arrangement |
A day or so before
Review lab safety procedures
Obtain registration lists
Check that your materials are ready such as:
• Handouts
• Demonstrations
• Props
• Audio/Visual Equipment
Organize your first class using an outline
Practise the first 15 minutes of your presentation

Adapted from Graduate Teaching Fellow Handbook (2004), Center for Excellence in Teaching, Boston University

Get to Know the Educational Development Centre

The Educational Development Centre is one of the most helpful resources, not only for preparation but for guidance, throughout the year. The EDC hosts frequent workshops that cater to common concerns of TAs. Regular workshop topics include the grading and feedback of essays, introductory sessions on WebCT, as well as workshops on making labs and discussions work and the challenges of a global classroom.

Attendance in these workshops counts as credit towards the Certificate in Teaching Skills, which aims to help new Teaching Assistants develop their skills and become more comfortable performing their duties. This is one of the two Teaching Assistant Certificates offered by the Centre. The second - the Graduate University Teaching Skills Certificate - is new this year and targets Teaching Assistants interested in pursuing a career in academia. Information on both certificates is available on the EDC website.

In addition, the EDC also keeps TAs connected through the semi-annual TA Talk newsletter, which carries informative articles and tips from faculty members and fellow TAs. Archived newsletters are available in pdf format on their Web site. A wealth of books, newsletters and journals are also available in the EDC Library, located in their office. A searchable database is also available on their Web site.

Located on the 4th Floor of Dunton Tower, the EDC is dedicated to the support of teaching excellence at Carleton University. Their mission is to provide a range of technological and teaching services to faculty members, contract instructors and teaching assistants in order to ensure an exceptional learning experience for students in the classroom and beyond.

Drop by the EDC and explore the many services they have to offer!
Get to Know your TA Mentor

The TA Mentorship Program, offered through the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, is designed to help TAs with discipline-specific support in the teaching and learning that they perform at Carleton. The program employs experienced TAs as mentors to provide new TAs with one-on-one advice, teaching skills workshops, classroom observations, and resources on WebCT. The programs designed by the mentors will also focus on offering professional development opportunities for experienced TAs.

Attendance at TA mentor workshops counts as credit towards the 5 hours of mandatory training that TAs are required to do each year. Some of the Mentorship training opportunities may also count towards the Certificate in Teaching Skills, offered by the EDC.

By having experienced TA mentors that can pass on their knowledge, skills and sense of professionalism to other TAs, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research hopes to enrich the classroom experience of TAs, faculty members and undergraduate students alike. To find out who your TA mentor is, check out the FGSR website. This year there are TA mentors in the following departments: School of Art and Culture, Biology, Business, Chemistry, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Communication Studies, Computer Science, Economics, Electronics, Geography, History, Journalism, Law, Mathematics and Statistics, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology/Anthropology, and Systems and Computer Engineering.
1.2 Expectations and Your Duties

“Our duty, as men and women, is to proceed as if limits to our ability did not exist.”
–Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, French Philosopher, 1881-1955

As a TA, you need to be an academic jack-of-all-trades prepared to assist both instructors and students in a variety of ways. Your role within the university is a complex one, for you are now a student, a teacher, a representative of your department, a role model, and an intermediary all in one tiny, yet surprisingly resourceful package.

Though many TAs worry that they will suddenly be shouldered with the responsibility of teaching a university course, this is simply not the case. As your job title indicates, you will be assisting an instructor in the teaching of a course. Though the duties assigned to a TA vary according to department and even the personal preferences of your instructor, the tasks will be specific in nature. Often, TA duties include proctoring, marking, tutoring, laboratory supervision, occasional lecturing and the leading of discussion groups.

Know Your Rights

Take the time to familiarize yourself with your rights as a unionized employee of Carleton University. As a member of CUPE Local 4600, your collective agreement clearly outlines what can and cannot be asked of you as a teaching assistant. For example, full-time graduate students may not engage in work for more than ten hours per week (taken as an average over the term) for the period they are registered as full-time students.

In addition, any disputes you may have with your assigned instructor can in no way affect your academic record. If you feel like work-related disputes are negatively affecting your grades, or if you are doing more work than you are being paid for, ask your department’s union steward for advice or call the union office.

Meeting with the Instructor

This first meeting with your instructor will likely be the best, and possibly the only, opportunity you get to discuss the details of your role as a TA. Don’t take it for granted. Come to the meeting armed with questions that you’ll need answered in order to function to your best ability. These questions should cover everything from minor details, such as how to get in touch with the instructor, to larger issues, including
an understanding of the course's long-term objectives. Once the year is up and running, it may be difficult for the two of you to find time to discuss the details of your job, so it is extremely important that your duties are clearly established and mutually understood early on.

During your first meeting together, make sure that you ask your instructor:

- What are your goals and objectives for the course? (A great way to get this question answered is to review the course syllabus together.)
- What tasks will I be assigned?
- How long will I be given to do each task?
- How much responsibility and control will I have over the activities assigned to me?
- How often (and how long) will we meet to discuss my duties? A regular weekly meeting may be required.
- Am I expected to attend the lectures?
- If a student wants to request an extension or make up a missed test, who should they speak to?
- What texts will the course be using and will I be supplied with copies? (Often you are given complimentary copies. If not, copies should be made available to you through the library or other means. You will not be expected to purchase any books for the course that you TA.)
- How will you provide me with feedback on my performance? (For more information on this, see the “Gathering Feedback on Yourself” section of the handbook.)

All instructors manage their TAs differently. One may watch your work closely, while another may rarely see you. One may give you a lot of responsibility, and another may give you virtually none. Like with most relationships, communication is key. The more you speak with your instructor, the more you will understand his or her pedagogical style and what he or she will expect of you. While the initial meeting with your instructor is your first opportunity to begin developing a co-operative and mutually respectful relationship, it is essential that you maintain this contact throughout the year to make sure that the course objectives are being met.

Assignment of Duties Form

You and your instructor will need to fill out an Assignment of Duties form. This form, developed by your union and the university, clearly establishes how your assigned hours are going to be spent. Weekly duties such as office hours, preparation time, discussion groups, lecture atten-
dance, lab demonstration, supervision and cleanup, as well as other duties like grading and proctoring are all outlined in the Assignment of Duties form.

Rather than rushing to fill out the form, you and your instructor should take the time to clearly establish, in writing, what will be expected of you over the next few months. First, work out a draft of your hours to make sure that they are realistic and will cover all of the duties that the instructor expects you to carry out. If you are interested in taking on additional duties such as guest lecturing, this is your opportunity to negotiate for it. Your duties are not set in stone, and you can discuss any changes you’d like to see with the instructor while filling out this form. Carefully filling out the Assignment of Duties form ensures that you, your instructor, and the university will know exactly what is expected of you. It is also essential that you treat this as your contract and keep a copy of the form in case hours or duties are disputed later on.

**Ethical Behaviour**

As a teaching assistant, you are in a position of authority and thus expected to act responsibly and ethically. Certain standards need to guide daily interactions with your students inside and outside the classroom.

Above all else, you must always treat your students with respect. This extends beyond the classroom. You should never share confidential information with others. You should never ridicule students behind closed doors.

Treating your students with respect should extend to grading and marking. You should always mark your students according to the work they produce, not the person that they are. Strive to grade fairly and consistently. Plagiarism and cheating should be dealt with swiftly.

Your behaviour is bound by ethics beyond the classroom as well. As a teaching assistant, you must be aware of your influence outside the classroom and make sure that your relations with the students are appropriate.

**Friendships with your Students**

It is often difficult to decide at what point one has become too friendly with a student. It is always great to develop new friends, but you will want to use a great deal of good judgment when you are socializing with students. Since it is likely that you will form friendships with some students, you should be careful that your friendliness with your students isn’t taken by them as a licence to do as they please. Make it
clear that your relationship in the classroom is a professional one, or your new-found friendship could easily sour.

If someone who is already a good friend of yours signs up for a course in which you will be a TA, make sure that they understand that they won't be treated any differently than other students. If you are particularly concerned about compromising the health of your friendship, you may want to ask your supervisor (or another TA in the course) to mark whatever assignments your friend turns in. That way, you will never have to worry about a conflict arising.

"The most important thing I've learned as a TA is to maintain a 'teacherly' relationship. We're in a unique position because we're sometimes only a couple of years older than our students and sometimes, in fact, we're younger than they are! And so because we're young we're easier to come to and sometimes this is our first opportunity with power and we don't always know how to handle that. It's a delicate balance." — Robyn Smith, Department of Sociology

Intimate Relationships with Your Students

Socializing with students, and having occasions to spin out ideas and arguments can be a rewarding part of your teaching role. Though you want to maintain amicable relations with your students, it is unacceptable to step beyond the boundary of your role as a TA and become intimate with one of your students. All sexual and romantic relationships between teaching assistants and students in their charge are unacceptable.

Of course, many students will look up to you, their teaching assistants, as mentors and role models. Teaching puts you at the centre of attention of a class, and the enthusiastic presentation of new ideas often creates a natural attraction between people who share them. But the relationship between a TA and a student can never be one in which the two parties are on an equal footing. Even though the ages and experience may seem relatively similar, the fact that one person has the right to mark papers and otherwise define success in a course gives the TA a significant amount of power. This power must be handled in a professional manner: TAs must therefore understand that it is not acceptable to ever date one of their students.

Beyond the ethical arguments against sexual or romantic relationships with your students, it is crucial to remember that you run the risk of becoming involved in serious conflicts of interest if you pursue such
relationships. For example, it is unlikely that a TA could give fair marks to a person with whom he or she is romantically involved. Certainly other students would view the student with a special relationship as a favoured one, and would look upon all of the course marks as suspect or unfair. Even more problematic is that you might have mistakenly imagined that a student you find particularly attractive shares the same feelings for you. If you were to act on these incorrect assumptions, a surprised student may justifiably interpret your actions as sexual harassment. To avoid these professional dilemmas, simply adhere to the following policy: Do not become intimate with a student.

Even if one of your students “hits on” you directly, or frequently, you need to respond in a way which underlines that the focus of your relationship is a teaching and learning one. Let them know that a romantic or sexual relationship is not appropriate, and that you are not available for one. Contact your supervising instructor for help – they will be able to give you advice to coach you through a tricky situation.

If at any point, you need advice on dealing with inappropriate relationships, whether with your students or the course instructor, you should never hesitate to turn to someone for advice. Another TA or Equity Services could be sources of great help in dealing with these situations.

---

**Spotlight**

**Effective Teaching**

It is expected that you will strive to be the most effective instructor that you can be. Here are some qualities which effective instructors demonstrate:

- Knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject matter and teaching
- Good organization of subject matter and course
- Effective communication
- Positive attitudes towards students
- Fairness in examinations and grading
- Flexibility in approaches to teaching

1.3 The Logistics of TAing

“The pain goes away on payday.”
– Larry Fine, American Comedian, 1902-1975

Getting Paid

In order for Human Resources and Payroll to give you your green, you need to complete the fairly simple and straightforward documentation process. If you have never before been paid by Carleton, you will need to be assigned an employee number. This will be done after a documentation session in which you provide HR with the appropriate information. You must be fully documented before payment can be made to you.

Carleton University pays all employees by direct deposit, therefore, it will be necessary to bring the following to your documentation session:

- Your banking information, including the name of your bank and the account and branch number. A voided cheque is sufficient for this.
- A photocopy of your social insurance card.
- Your study or work permit, and a photocopy of your passport if you are an International TA.

Once documented, you will not be paid for the first two weeks of each term you are TAing in. At Carleton University, there is a two-week pay delay. Your first pay will come about a month after you start, and this payment will be for the first two weeks you worked. Therefore, you will be paid at the end of each month for the beginning of every new term, i.e., September, January, and May, and twice a month for all other payments. Your pay statement of earnings and deductions will be sent to the department that you are working in. Check with your department to see how they distribute the pay statements on payday.

You will need to contact Payroll if you have questions regarding your T4, record of employment, or any other payroll-related enquiries.

Union Membership

As a TA at Carleton University, you are now a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 4600. The Carleton Teaching Assistants make up Unit 1 of Local 4600 and the Carleton Contract Instructors make up Unit 2.

As part of a union, you are bound by your collective agreement and have a voice in determining your own working conditions. The union actively
encourages student involvement at various levels, including membership, departmental, and executive council meetings. Keep an eye out for notices of meetings, socials and other events by frequenting the CUPE 4600 Web site or by dropping by the Union Office.

Your Collective Agreement

As a unionized employee, your working conditions and the work relations with your supervisor and department are clearly spelled out in your collective agreement. This contract is the product of many years of negotiations between your union, CUPE 4600, Unit I and Carleton University, and is intended to ensure the fairest and best possible working and learning environment here at Carleton.

While many of the problems TAs may encounter can potentially be resolved by the mechanisms of your collective agreement, not every difficulty can be predicted ahead of time, so the contract is periodically updated and revised. The evolution of your contract has relied on employees making their concerns known to your fellow TAs in the union. Should you have any suggestions that you are unable to resolve with your supervising instructor or departmental chair, bring them up at a general meeting, or talk to your steward or the business agent.

A copy of the current collective agreement is available on the Human Resources and CUPE Web sites at www.carleton.ca/hr and www.4600.cupe.ca.
Your Life: Managing the Dual Role of TA and Student

“We can be sure that the greatest hope for maintaining equilibrium in the face of any situation rests within ourselves.”
—Francis J. Braceland, American Psychiatrist, 1900-1985

Bruce Wayne and Peter Parker have been doing it for years, now it’s your turn. You have been handed the dual identity of student and teaching assistant. Though it’s no secret, you’re still going to have to learn to balance these two roles, using a combination of cunning, wit and time management skills. Tights and cape are, of course, optional.

Student First

Although being a TA is an incredible opportunity that will help lay the foundation for your career in academia or beyond, remember that this is not the reason why you chose graduate school. You are first and foremost a student pursuing your research interests, and as a student you should ensure that your job does not hinder your studies. Before taking a job as a teaching assistant, you should be certain that the time devoted and the income you receive will warrant the time that is being taken away from your own studies.

In addition to being a TA, you may also feel like a first year student in many ways. You are dealing with a new set of experiences, such as the unfamiliarity of attending a new school, the challenge of navigating around a new city or even country, or perhaps dealing with the uncertainty of your academic future, classes, research and instructors. All of these challenges can be very exciting, but it is important to keep it all in perspective and establish a list of priorities. Don’t shortchange your studying time to meet your TA obligations. How are you supposed to be instilling good studying practices in your students, if you don’t lead by example?

Your time commitment will vary according to what roles and responsibilities you assume as a TA. It is important to be flexible and give yourself the ability to manoeuvre. If you do find yourself consistently spending double the time allotted to complete tasks, speak to your instructor. The majority of the time, instructors will offer to lighten the load either through assisting in grading assignments or by making changes in your work schedule. Remember, back in the day these same instructors were once standing in your shoes and can relate to the challenges that you are facing.
Your Role as a TA

Adapted from University Teaching and Learning: An Instructional Resource Guide for Teaching Assistants at Dalhousie University (1992, 1993). Centre for Learning and Teaching, Dalhousie University

During the first meeting with your instructor, you will go over the Assignment of Duties form and determine what your main responsibilities will be and how many hours each will take. Your responsibilities as a TA will seem clear cut on paper. In the classroom, however, you will face the responsibility of filling many shoes. In fact, not only will you take on the dual identity of TA and student, your role as a TA will cover a number of fluid sub-roles, such as:

Teacher
Your primary role as a TA is in helping your students to learn. Aside from being knowledgeable in your subject, you have to find ways of imparting your knowledge to the students in new and innovative ways. Try out new teaching approaches, assess the results, and make changes to help improve your teaching. (See Discussion Groups/Tutorials on page 54 for suggestions on teaching methods.)

Instructor
You will be teaching undergraduate students in classrooms or marking student work. You will likely have previous experience in the subject at hand but will probably find yourself having to brush up on it a bit. Allow yourself the time to plan carefully for your classes and don't be afraid to admit being wrong to students or seeking out the instructor for guidance.

Representative of your Department
Different disciplines have varying methods and standards. Find out what they are, since you will be seen as a face of the department you TA in. Discuss with your instructor what constitutes a reasonable set of standards to impose on your students in line with the regulations put in place by the department.

Role Model
Being only a few years older than students will make you a prime role model for some of your students. Students will recognize that you are a successful student and may be inspired to follow in your footsteps. As a TA you should be conscious of this important role and display idealism, enthusiasm and high standards.

Friend
You are also a fellow student, so your students might want to share common frustrations of impending deadlines and full schedules. Not
only are you a teacher but you will also become a support system for students as they make their way through this difficult yet exciting transition.

**Intermediary**

TAs are ideal intermediaries between faculty members and students because they understand both sides of the coin. You can explain the rationale of the instructor to the students, but you can also provide an early warning to the instructor by relaying student feedback.

As a TA, it may seem like your role is to be all things to all students, but there is a fine line between being the best TA you can be and trying to do too much. It’s all about striking a balance between your time commitments.

**Time Management**

At universities everywhere there is a well-known disease that preys upon TAs called “going above and beyond the call of duty.” Symptoms include finding yourself wanting to spend an exorbitant amount of time helping your students succeed, endlessly preparing lesson plans, constantly responding to student e-mails, scheduling office hours several times a week, meanwhile wreaking havoc on your own coursework, research and personal life.

The good news is that it’s treatable. The remedy is simply finding a balance between your own coursework and helping your students with their work. The fact is, if left untreated, not only will your own work suffer, but you will become an ineffective TA because you will be constantly scrambling to keep up, which will likely lead to an eventual burn out. Striking a balance can be done by following these three easy steps:

1. **Set reasonable goals**
   Establish goals for what you’d like to accomplish in each section and limit how many hours you’ll allow yourself to accomplish them. All time spent on these teaching duties should be accounted for in your contract. You are not required to spend time that is not accounted for in your contract to become an expert on the course material. Don’t forget about setting goals outside of teaching including volunteering, researching, etc.

2. **Set boundaries**
   Limit the amount of time you spend accomplishing your teaching goals.

   Schedules: Recognize that during the course, there are going to be
busy and light times. Do advance planning by preparing a plausible and realistic master schedule with blocks of time allotted for each activity, keeping in mind downtime during the course.

Packing it in: When you are doing teaching prep, it may seem like you are never really finished. There are always students to e-mail, another handout to make, one more reference to verify. There does, however, come a point when you just have to stop. Not every discussion group has to be a mind-blowing exercise. Students will forgive you.

3. Prevent others, particularly students, from encroaching on those boundaries.

Make student responsibilities clear: You are not responsible for the success and failure of every student in the class and you are not required to tailor the course to meet the individual needs of every student. Often the most demanding students are the ones that are putting the least amount of effort in the course. Explain to students that you are not a personal tutor and that in order to provide the most effective assistance, it will require effort on their part (regular tutorial attendance and doing the readings). It is fine to make accommodations for students on a case-by-case basis, but don't make this a regular practice.

Be reasonable with student meetings: You are not required to meet with students at the most convenient time for them. Direct them to your office hours and if they are unable to attend, arrange a mutually convenient time.

Share the burden: If you are having a particularly hectic week, consider asking your students to share the burden by having a student-led discussion. Then review what went wrong in your time management scheme.

From Becoming Teachers (2004). McDougal Graduate Teaching Center, Yale University

Being a TA means understanding that you must constantly struggle to keep your competing roles in balance, but accept that there will be times when things will inevitably get out of control. Just remember to sit back and evaluate your goals and boundaries. But if you can't come up with a solution, remember that there are other resources available to help you out.
“Don’t be afraid to ask for help – from your instructor or from other TAs. Know your rights, especially when it comes to workloads and deadlines for grading. After all, you are also a student with your own schoolwork to juggle. Try to live a balanced life, and enjoy yourself. “
– Shamima Khan, Department of Psychology

Building a Master Schedule

Being able to manage your time effectively is one sure-fire way to long-term success. By developing a realistic master schedule, you can prioritize responsibilities to help you meet both your academic and personal objectives. To build a master schedule, print off a weekly calendar and do the following:

Block off chunks of time for:
- your own courses – you’re a student first, a TA second
- your work (attending classes, office hours, etc.)
- family/home

Build in time for travel, eating, etc., and the following:
- inflexible family/household responsibilities or personal care time (for example, laundry, cooking, showering)

The resulting empty time blocks are available for studying, grading and leisure:
- Schedule breaks (15, 30, 40 minute breaks, depending on your working style)
- Take into account your own work style: Are you better in the morning or evening? Do you change topics at regular intervals or work through to completion on one task?

After a week or two, evaluate your schedule: did you over or under estimate the amount of time you needed to study, or grade? Did you find conflicts, did you work better at some times rather than others?

Beware of major time-wasters and try to compensate for:
- Lack of direction or purpose
- Perfectionism
- Indecision/lack of confidence
- Procrastination
- Disorganization
- Fatigue or over-exertion
When creating your own schedule, make sure you don’t overbook yourself. Keep your schedule realistic and don’t underestimate the amount of time it will take you to complete a task. If you fill your schedule to capacity, you will find yourself struggling to keep up and stressed by the mounting “To Do” lists on your desk. Make sure to clearly set your priorities, but also allow for a bit of schedule flexibility and a few trade-offs from time to time.

Who Can Help

If you are encountering difficulties while TAing by no means do you have to go through it alone. There are a variety of people you can speak to who can offer advice and solutions depending on the problem. In times of need, don’t hesitate to consult the following people:

Experienced TA
TAs with previous experience have a wealth of knowledge and can provide you with tips on the ins and outs of a department, leading discussion groups or dealing with students. Often you may find that your problems are not that unique and more experienced TAs can offer easy advice for solving them.

Supervising Instructor
The most important thing in developing a successful TA/instructor relationship is maintaining open communication. Speak to the instructor about scheduling weekly fifteen-minute meetings (usually before or after class) to review how the class is going and voicing any concerns you may have. You may be surprised at how accommodating instructors will be.

Clerical, Technical and Administrative Staff
These individuals support the instructional staff and are often a treasure trove of information and a source of assistance. They are often aware of the most efficient way to get things done.

---

**Spotlight**

**Tips on how to deal with e-mails**

1. Make sure your students know how often you check your e-mail so that they don’t have unrealistic expectations of response times.
2. Save every e-mail message you receive and send to your students.
3. Create a separate folder for each course and save it for at least a term.
4. For important or difficult e-mails (missed assignment, failing, etc.), make sure to copy the instructor of the course on the e-mail so that they are aware of the situation.
You and Your Students

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their colour.
– Maya Angelou, American Poet

The Typical Student

The typical student is increasingly difficult to describe. Statistics on undergraduate students at Carleton University show that there are more female than male students, the majority of first year students come from Ontario and the average age of full-time students is 20. However, with increasing demographic diversity in our society, university classrooms have come to witness more students of colour, more non-traditional students, more students with disabilities and others whose unique characteristics may or may not be visible.

As a result of these changes in the composition of the classroom, faculty members and TAs should be cognizant of the ways in which they teach. By getting to know your students and by acknowledging your students as individual learners and contributors, each bringing their own strengths to the classroom, you will help to create a more inclusive learning environment that promotes success among all your students.

2008/2009 Carleton University Undergraduate Student Profile

Admission average of students: 82%
Percentage of female students: 50.1%
Percentage of male students: 49.9%
Median age of full-time students: 20
Median age of part-time students: 24
Percentage of undergraduate international students: 9%
Percentage of graduate international students: 14%
Percentage of first year students from Ontario: 84%
Percentage of full-time students whose mother tongue is not English: 21%

From the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, Carleton University
Mature Students

At Carleton University, 17 per cent of undergraduate students in the 2008-2009 academic year were over the age of 25. These students often face a difficult balancing act between managing their studies and their other responsibilities which can include full-time employment and families. In addition, mature students often come to university after years of absence from school resulting in weakened writing and studying skills, as well as a lack of confidence and unwillingness to speak in the classroom. However, they are often eager to contribute their personal experiences to the class. It is important to keep in mind that mature students come back to university seeking an education that is relevant to their present work or personal experience. Many of them have made sacrifices and adjustments to transition into university which can be particularly stressful, therefore, here are a few suggestions on how to accommodate their needs:

- Be tactful when providing comments and feedback (both oral and written), and offer positive feedback as often as you can.
- Offer special assistance and tips for studying and writing or recommend remedial workshops and courses.
- Encourage mature students to participate using real world experiences while still relating it to theory.
- Manage group dynamics by ensuring that mature students are not marginalized from the rest of the students.
- Take into account work and family-related demands.
- Give sufficient time to complete computer assignments, as some mature students may not have access to computers at home.

BECAMPS, or the Bill Ellis Centre for Mature and Part-time Students, is a Carleton-based centre dedicated to supporting the growing number of mature and part-time students, who often require services that differ from mainstream students. The centre offers an emergency hot-line, social events, a March Break Day Care, as well as workshops on a variety of topics such as an introduction to computers, study skills and stress management.
Moving across the country is one thing, but moving from another part of the world is quite another as you must adapt to a different language, culture and educational system. International and ESL (English as a Second Language) students face many obstacles as they transition into university life in Canada. Language can be a significant barrier in getting international or ESL students to participate in class if they are self-conscious of their accent or have difficulty understanding ours. International students may also notice cultural differences in classroom dynamics that may be hard to adjust to. Here are a few suggestions for accommodating their needs:

- Take the time to try to understand what all of your students are trying to say.
- Rephrasing questions and responses might help comprehension.
- Encourage international and ESL student to participate in class by creating an open and supportive environment, but don’t push too hard if you sense they are uncomfortable.
- Approach students after class to ensure they understood the material.
- Encourage students to take advantage of the Writing Tutorial Service to improve their writing skills.
- Speak clearly and carefully.
- Avoid using culture-based examples and slang.
- Use visuals, synonyms and examples to help them understand.
- Face the students when speaking.
- Learn how to correctly pronounce the student’s name.
- Manage group dynamics by ensuring that international and ESL students are not marginalized from the rest of the students.
- If necessary, ask the instructor about allotting them extra time for quizzes and exams.

At Carleton University, international students can visit the International Student Services Office to get help adapting to their new home and life in a foreign university environment. The ISSO offers a variety of workshops and events throughout the year, as well as a comprehensive orientation at the start of each term. As well, they run an English Conversation Circle and an English Language Writing Support service free of charge.
2.4 Students with Disabilities and Impairments

In the academic year 2004-2005, 1,001 students were registered at Carleton University as students with disabilities or impairments. The impairments can range from visible disabilities such as a physical impairment to non-visible learning impairments such as attention deficit disorder.

Here are some things that you should consider in creating an inclusive learning environment:

- Students who ask for accommodation are required to provide official documentation to the instructor from the Paul Menton Centre. The Letter of Accommodation provides you with information regarding any arrangements that may have to be made.
- Ask the instructor to inform you of any students with learning disabilities in your section.
- Support your students' ability to be organized by providing an oral or written summary at the beginning of each class of what will be covered and what was discussed during the previous class.
- Be flexible in your presentation style by answering questions using various techniques, such as sketching concepts or listing key points.
- At the conclusion of each class, summarize the key points and allow time for questions.
- Confirm dates, rules, assessment percentages and all other such course details in advance.
- Be conscious to make yourself available to students in a variety of ways such as face-to-face and through e-mail.
- Print clearly in large print and in an organized fashion on the board.
- Be sensitive, but refrain from giving the students any undue attention.

The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) is the appointed agency at Carleton University that provides educational and support services to students with disabilities. The PMC assesses students to evaluate their need for academic accommodation, and then coordinates the necessary services. In addition, the PMC has developed an information booklet for faculty members and TAs that provides essential information about policies and procedures for accommodating students with disabilities. It is available on-line at www.carleton.ca/pmc/faculty.
Your Responsibilities
Adapted from Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities

All in-class tests and exams that are not administered by Examination Services are primarily arranged by the instructor, however, you may be asked to fulfill the accommodations. Students are required to submit their Letters of Accommodation to the instructor two weeks before the date of the test. As a TA, you may be asked by the instructor to make arrangements for student accommodations throughout the year. Here are the steps for arranging accommodation for your students.

1. Obtain the Letter of Accommodation from the instructor and review the specific needs of the student. The Letter of Accommodation states the name of the student, contact information, specific accommodation requirements and resources needed, i.e., additional test time, quiet classroom, computer to write the test or exam, etc.

2. As early as possible, attempt to make test/exam accommodations on the same date and time of the regularly scheduled test/exam. If the student requires a quiet space to write the test or exam, speak to the departmental administrator of the course you are TAing about reserving a room. If a student requires a computer to complete their test/exam, it is your responsibility to find the necessary equipment for the student either by asking the departmental administrator to reserve a computer lab or arranging to reserve a laptop computer from the PMC yourself.

3. Contact the student via e-mail to confirm the date, time, location and specific accommodations of the exam along with a reminder to bring a disk if their exam is going to be written on a computer. Make sure to copy your instructor on the e-mail.

4. Arrange with the instructor to determine who will be proctoring the exam. If the instructor suggests that you proctor it, obtain a copy of the exam and an examination writing booklet from them.

5. Arrive 15 to 20 minutes prior to the test/exam time. If there are other students currently using the room announce that an exam will be taking place at the designated time. Place a sign on the door indicating that an exam is in progress, the course code and the hours of the exam.

6. If you have questions or concerns about specific accommodation recommendations and how to implement them, contact the coordinator indicated on the Letter of Accommodation.
For more information on policies and procedures for accommodating students with disabilities, refer to the “Information Booklet for Faculty and TAs 2004-2005” from the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities. Available on-line at www.carleton.ca/pmc/faculty.

The MacOdrum Library provides a variety of services for students with disabilities including research assistance, book retrieval, coordination of alternate format services, use of adaptive technology, and training on selected adaptive technology. More information is available on-line at www.library.carleton.ca/joymclaren/disabinfo.html.
First Year Students

Although it was years ago, close your eyes and you can vividly remember your first year as an undergraduate student. Not only were you perhaps leaving home for the first time, but you also had to get used to a whole bunch of unfamiliar faces, and accustom yourself to the unstructured university lifestyle. These new changes can bring with them a sense of freedom along with increased anxiety. A first year student can feel much like a small fish in a big pond.

Recognizing this challenge, Carleton established the First Year Experience Office (FYEO) with a core mission of providing outreach to first year students to ensure their success and retention. This office, now the Student Experience Office, provide a variety of programs and services designed to assist first year students with their transition into the Carleton community.

As a TA you can serve as a valuable link between your first year students and the university, ensuring that they hang in there for their first year and the years to come. Working alongside the university, you can provide support to your students by developing an interest in their academic progress and directing them to the appropriate support services available on campus. Learning Support Services (LSS), located in the Learning Commons on the 4th Floor of MacOdrum Library, is the first place that students should be referred to when seeking ways to improve their academic performance. LSS offers one-on-one drop-in sessions, skills development workshops, information sessions, learning resources, group study rooms and tutor referrals that can assist students in achieving their academic goals. Please see the List of Support Services in the Appendix for further on-campus resources.

16 Ways of Encouraging Student Retention

Taken from Ideas to Encourage Student Retention, faculty seminar at Jefferson Community College, Kentucky.

Students that are prone to dropping out will be unprepared for class, isolate themselves from their peers, will be unmotivated and stressed out. Take an interest in your students and incorporate some of the following techniques to encourage a successful academic life.

I. Draw similarities among the students. Have a discussion early on to find those similarities. Find out everyone’s majors and intentions after university. Who is coming straight from high school, who has finished a college diploma and who is a mature student? Does anyone have experience in the course or is the material brand new to them? What does everyone expect to get out of the course?
2. At the end of each class period, single out a student who is doing well or struggling and ask them to stay for a minute to chat. Note their progress to them. This kind of attention can make all the difference for a student who may feel isolated.

3. Instead of returning tests, quizzes and assignments in class, ask students to stop by your office to pick them up. This presents an opportunity to talk informally with students and see how they are progressing.

4. Learn the name of each student as quickly as possible and use the student’s name in class.

5. At the first class meeting, pair up the students and have them get acquainted with one another. Switch partners every five minutes.

6. Encourage your students to develop a support network of people around them that they can relate their academic frustrations with. This may be other students in the course, but does not have to be. Encourage study groups for all courses.

7. Have the students establish a “buddy” system for absences, work missed, and assignments. This will help to keep them connected to the course and allow them to catch up relatively easily.

8. Circulate around the class as you talk or ask questions.

9. Prior to giving out any graded assignments, meet with the instructor to go over any areas that you as a TA could focus on to help correct common mistakes or to help guide struggling students.

10. When you answer a student’s question, be sure they understand your answer. Direct your answer to the student asking the question, but make sure to look at the other students to see if they needed to hear your answer as well. Find a way to make the student repeat the answer in his or her own words without putting them on the spot.

11. Get to class before the students arrive; be the last one to leave.

12. Stress a positive “you can handle it” attitude. But do accept that some students may be struggling, so provide some extra help when needed.

13. Capitalize on opportunities to praise the abilities and contributions of students whose status in the course is in doubt; well-timed
encouragement could mean the difference between retention and attrition.

I4. Urge students to talk to you about problems, such as changes in work schedule, before dropping the course. Refer them to the course instructor if need be.

I5. Encourage students that require extra help developing their university writing skills to attend one of the free workshops or one-on-one sessions at the Writing Tutorial Service.

I6. Point out the relevancy of your subject matter to the concerns and goals of your students.

"For first year students in particular, I feel TAs need to be not only an expert in their discipline but, more importantly, a support system that the students can count on. Yes, it can take up a lot of our time, but knowing that I can make a difference in a new student's academic life makes it worthwhile for me and I hope it will for new TAs too."

– Karen Rishel, School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

**Extras**

The Student Academic Success Centre provides a range of services that can assist students in:

- understanding rules and regulations of the university;
- choosing or changing degree programs, majors, minors, and specialization or concentration areas;
- academic improvement planning;
- developing effective study skills, and;
- exploring academic difficulties that students may be facing.

Students are encouraged to schedule one-on-one appointments with an Academic Advisor whenever they have questions about their academic success at Carleton.

SASC also offers Peer-Assisted Study Sessions, which are free weekly, one-hour study sessions with trained facilitators in a selected number of undergraduate courses in a wide variety of academic disciplines. It provides students with the opportunity to improve their understanding of the material and improve their grades.
“If women are expected to do the same work as men, we must teach them the same things.”
– Plato, Greek Philosopher, 428-347 BC

During the 2005-2006 academic year, there were more women enrolled in Carleton undergraduate programs than men. Despite this fact, there are still instances of lower performance expectations for women than men, assigning leadership roles to men over women, and sexist language and jokes in the classroom.

These patterns of behaviour can lead to the marginalization of women in the classroom, and discourage women from achieving their full academic potential. Even subtle language or behaviour, including using a distinct tone of voice that is either overly harsh or undermines a student’s intelligence, can be seen as sexist behaviour. Clearly establish early on that sexist behaviour will not be tolerated in the classroom and take the initiative to monitor your own behaviour at all times.

Five Tips for Dealing with Sexism in the Classroom

1. Extra care should be taken to ensure that no student is persistently interrupted while they are speaking during discussion and that all students are given equal attention during lectures and discussions.
2. Judge students on their academic merits and give similar praises for all academic successes.
3. Facilitate the enrichment of your students’ education by not discouraging your students from pursuing certain occupations, fields of study or research projects.
4. Use gender neutral language in the classroom.
5. If you think a joke may offend someone, then don’t tell it or tolerate others telling it.

Studies Show…
From Association of American Colleges, Washington, D.C.

• Men tend to formulate their answers as they speak and respond to questions more confidently, quickly and aggressively regardless of the quality of their response.
• Women tend to wait longer to respond to a question in class, choosing their words carefully and constructing an answer before they speak.
• Women tend to be interrupted more frequently than men.
• Women tend to abandon scientific majors in greater proportions after first year than men.
How to Encourage Women to Participate in Class
Adapted from Tips for Teachers: Sensitivity to Women in the Contemporary Classroom (2002). Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University.

While the following suggestions were developed with women in mind, they can be adapted to all classrooms to foster a positive learning environment for all students.

It is important to create an underlying invitation to speak without putting them on the spot for quiet women, shy students or any other hesitant students. To create openings for them to speak, try the following:

- Ask all students to take turns at presenting material.
- Assign the class to small groups or supportive pairs to solve a problem.
- Give students time to answer and be sure to indicate that you are paying as much attention to the hesitant ones as to others.
- Credit a quiet student by making them the expert of the moment.
- Refer back to the comment of a quiet student to make it a pillar of discussion.
- Refer to a silent student's written work in an affirming way.
- Avoid interruptions. Your own impulse to complete your students' thoughts for them, or that of other students, may discourage quiet students.
- Resist filling every uncomfortable pause with your own voice.
- Pose a question at the end of the class announcing that this question will start the next week's discussion, giving students a chance to reflect and take advantage of the opportunity to participate.

**Spotlight**

Women in Sciences and Engineering

Although the engineering and science communities have witnessed a marked increase in women entering the field, at Carleton University women still make up only one-sixth of the undergraduate engineering program. As a result of these enrolment numbers, women tend to stand out in these fields more than their male counterparts. This can sometimes lead to their mistakes being accentuated in class. Women thus become less likely to take risks by asking “dumb” questions or even to take a stab at answering questions. Women's progress in academia can be severely hindered by these factors. Often gender biases are not deliberate, and are produced and perpetuated subconsciously by students, instructors, and TAs. As a TA it is your responsibility to actively create a supportive academic environment, which encourages women to pursue scholarly interests in their field.
Sexual Harassment

It can be difficult to balance your roles as both a TA, with the powers and authority associated with it, and a graduate student, subject to the power of the faculty over your academic record. As a result of this dual role, you could encounter some form of harassment from both ends of the spectrum including harassment by a student or faculty member or be perceived as harassing another individual. In all cases, Equity Services (See List of Support Services) does offer help by providing confidential advice and assistance in a safe and private environment.

Carleton University’s Policy on Sexual Harassment

Carleton University is committed to maintaining a study, work and living environment that is free from sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual conduct.

Sexual harassment can involve:
1. When an individual engages in sexually harassing behaviour or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature that is known, or ought reasonably be known, to be unwelcome.
2. A single, serious incident or a series of related, repeated incidents.
3. A written or spoken comment and/or physical or sexual assault.
4. Accompanied by threats or promises regarding work or study opportunities and conditions as a means of coercing you to accept the harassment.
5. An abuse of actual or perceived power.

“TA Testimonial

“I would say that sexism is a pretty major challenge in TAing. Out of all of the people that aggressively challenged or disrespected me they were younger guys. They quickly realized I wouldn’t deal with that behaviour.”
– Lisa Marie Freeman, Department of Law
Extras

For more information on gender issues and dealing with sexual harassment, see:

Romano, Renee. “Gender issues in teaching. Does nurturing academic success in women mean rethinking some of what we do in the classroom?” Speaking of Teaching 6 (1), 1-5. (Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching).


Embracing Diversity
Adapted from TA Guide to Teaching and Learning at Brock University (2003). Centre for Teaching, Learning and Educational Technologies, Brock University

In the classroom, those that explore and celebrate diversity are more likely to enjoy a rich teaching and learning environment. Understanding and incorporating this diversity into the classroom setting by incorporating a variety of teaching methods will work to enhance the overall experience.

- Primarily, you want to establish an atmosphere that embraces diversity yet highlights peoples’ similarities. This can be done through first using icebreakers that showcase what students have in common in order to create a friendly environment that is free of fear and full of mutual respect and trust.

- Students of a different cultural background should never be assigned to an “official group” or be forced to assume the position of a particular group. It is important to understand that students that attend Carleton are here as individual learners and should not be treated as a racial, ethnic or religious category.

- When arranging group activities, make an effort to combine people of different backgrounds so students can learn to identify with others. Also try to acknowledge a diverse group of voices during class discussions.

- If disagreement arises during discussion, invite the student to defend their position as well as explain the position of the other person, and vice versa, thus creating an opportunity for students to learn both sides of the coin. If the argument becomes abusive, intervene.

- While teaching, find opportunities to point out how cultural diversity has worked to improve our country and how destructive some stereotypes have been in the past and how our society has grown to not tolerate them.

- Use only gender neutral, non-racist language.

- Help build self-respect by referring to the valuable contributions that students have made in past classes.

Working Towards an Inclusive Classroom
As a TA it is your responsibility to actively create a supportive academic environment that encourages men and women from all walks of life, international and ESL students, mature students, and students with disabilities to pursue scholarly interests in their field.
In working towards an inclusive classroom it is important to remember that as a TA you cannot create an environment specifically for a particular group of students. It would be impossible to have approaches for one group and a different set of approaches for another group. Keep the overall goal in mind: an inclusive classroom and developing teaching techniques that address the range of learning styles in the classroom and develop policies and guidelines in your classroom that meet the multiple needs of your students.

The following are some techniques that you can use in helping you to create an inclusive teaching environment.

- Beginning each class with an oral or written summary of what will be covered and what was discussed during the previous class.
- At the conclusion of each class, summarizing the key points and allowing time for questions.
- Confirming dates, rules, assessment percentages and all other such course details in advance and on paper.
- Being conscious to making yourself available to students in a variety of ways such as face-to-face and through e-mail.
- Printing clearly in large print and in an organized fashion on the board.

- Be tactful when providing comments and feedback (both oral and written), and offer positive feedback as often as you can.
- Offer special assistance and tips for studying and writing or recommend remedial workshops and courses.
- Encourage students to participate using real world experiences while still relating it to theory.
- Manage group dynamics by ensuring that NO students are marginalized from the rest of the students.
- Take the time to try to understand what all of your students are trying to say.
- Rephrasing questions and responses might help comprehension.
- Encourage all students to participate in class by creating an open and supportive environment.
- Encourage students to take advantage of all learning support services on campus.

- Ask all students to take turns at presenting material.
- Assign the class to small groups or supportive pairs to solve a problem.
- Give students time to answer and be sure to indicate that you are paying as much attention to the hesitant ones as to others.
• Credit a quiet student by making them the expert of the moment.
• Refer back to the comment of a quiet student to make it a pillar of discussion.
• Refer to a silent student’s written work in an affirming way.
• Avoid interruptions. Your own impulse to complete your students’ thoughts for them, or that of other students, may discourage quiet students.
• Resist filling every uncomfortable pause with your own voice.
• Pose a question at the end of the class announcing that this question will start the next week’s discussion, giving students a chance to reflect and take advantage of the opportunity to participate.

Co-operative Learning
Adapted from University Teaching and Learning: An Instructional Resource Guide for Teaching Assistants at Dalhousie University (1993), Centre for Learning and Teaching, Dalhousie University.

Want to get your students to work together? Co-operative learning is one of the best types of teaching strategies for promoting positive relationships among students. As well, when students have the opportunity to work together they are more likely to learn faster and more efficiently. This is not a way of getting you off the hook of being a teacher, but a way of teaching students that the success of the team depends on the contributions of each team member.

| Think, Pair, Square | This is similar to the Think, Pair, Share method, however, once students have completed their assigned pair task, they are to join with another pair to compare their conclusions. The instructions to the newly formed “squares” may be to reach a consensus within their groups or to explain their conclusions to the other pair who has joined them. |
| Integration Information Gap | Choose a complex problem. Divide the information needed to solve the problem into 2-3-4-5 parts (whatever is logical), then divide students into groups containing the same number as the number of parts to the problem. Give each person in the group a card with a part of the information needed to solve the problem. Students may share information on their card orally, but may not show information to anyone. Through discussion students arrive at the solution to the problem. |
### Jigsaw

In groups of four, students are assigned a “chunk” of material or a multi-faceted problem. Each member of the group then selects or is assigned a particular aspect of the problem on which to focus.

Next, students move into expert groups, again four students, which consist of students who are responsible for mastering the same material. Students may be given the necessary material at this point or may have been responsible for learning it beforehand. In these expert groups, the students ensure that they all understand their portion of the material and also know how they will teach it to their original group of four.

Students then regroup into their original foursomes, and each student teaches his or her material to the others. Individual mastery of the entire topic can be evaluated through quizzes.

### Active Listening: three minutes each way

This activity encourages students to reason more clearly and to push the limits of their reasoning as far as possible by thinking through a topic out loud, without interruption. Students work in pairs. Try to pair up students with opposing or differing views.

One person speaks and one person listens until time is called, then speaker and listener switch roles. Listener ONLY listens – the listener may bring speaker back to topic if necessary, but does NOT offer suggestions, or opinions, and does NOT bail the speaker out. Students could write a “one-minute paper” after this exercise in which they discuss how their opinions differed from their partners’, why they seemed to differ, what they learned from their partner’s perspective, etc.

### Extras

For more information on resources available for accommodating diversity and preventing discrimination in the classroom, see:


Equity Services, 421 Tory Building, Carleton University
Ph: 520-5622
Web site: www.carleton.ca/equity

## Learning Styles

Many TAs go into their first TA experience attempting to emulate their favourite instructor or TA. Sure, you may have loved to do group work day in and day out, but this may not be the case for all your students.

The truth is there’s no one right way of teaching and every student learns differently. By incorporating different presentation methods into your style students will have the opportunity to process the information in several different ways and the learning will become more effective and exciting.

In order for instructors and TAs to ensure a better learning experience, they need to be aware that learning differences do exist. The following chart lists and explains the characteristics of the three basic learning styles that some experts have identified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Learners</th>
<th>Auditory Learners</th>
<th>Kinesthetic Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual learners process information best by seeing it presented in pictures, diagrams or charts that allow them to “see” concepts.</td>
<td>Auditory learners prefer to hear information, and learn well in a traditional lecture setting.</td>
<td>Kinesthetic learners absorb material best through hands-on activities and often like to break information down into steps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These learners:</td>
<td>These learners:</td>
<td>These learners:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• take numerous detailed notes</td>
<td>• sit where they can hear but needn’t pay attention to what is happening in front</td>
<td>• need to be active and take frequent breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• tend to sit in the front, are usually neat and clean</td>
<td>• may not coordinate colours or clothes, but can explain why they are wearing what they are wearing</td>
<td>• speak with their hands and with gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• often close their eyes to visualize or remember something</td>
<td>• hum or talk to themselves or others when bored</td>
<td>• remember what was done, but have difficulty recalling what was said or seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• find something to watch if they are bored</td>
<td>• acquire knowledge by reading aloud</td>
<td>• tinker or move when bored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• like to see what they are learning</td>
<td>• remember by verbalizing lessons to themselves (if they don’t they have difficulty reading maps or diagrams or handling conceptual assignments like mathematics)</td>
<td>• rely on what they can directly experience or perform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• benefit from illustrations and presentations that use colour</td>
<td></td>
<td>• activities such as cooking, construction, and art help them perceive and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are attracted to written or spoken language rich in imagery</td>
<td></td>
<td>• enjoy field trips and tasks that involve manipulating materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• prefer stimuli to be isolated from auditory and kinesthetic distractions</td>
<td></td>
<td>• are uncomfortable in classrooms where they lack opportunities for hands-on experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• find passive surroundings ideal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diversifying your instructional methods to accommodate a variety of learning styles can help your students absorb the material in a way that meets their needs specifically without having to change the course content.

9 Teaching Techniques to Address All Learning Styles

When choosing what balance of teaching techniques you would like to use in class, keep in mind these general teaching techniques that can be used for all learners:

1. Motivate Learning. As much as possible, relate the material being presented to what has come before and what is still to come in the same course; relate it to material in other courses, and particularly to the student’s personal experiences.

2. Provide a balance of concrete information (facts, data, real or hypothetical experiments and their results) and abstract concepts (principles, theories, models).

3. Use pictures, schematics, graphs and simple sketches liberally before, during and after the presentation of verbal material. Show films and provide demonstrations, hands-on if possible.

4. Incorporate technology into your teaching whenever appropriate.

5. Do not fill every minute of class time lecturing and writing on the board. Provide intervals, however brief, for students to think about what they have been told.

6. Provide opportunities for students to do something active besides transcribing notes. Small-group brainstorming activities that take no more than five minutes are extremely effective for this purpose.

7. Assign question sets to provide practice in the basic methods being taught, but do not overdo them. Also provide some open-ended problems and exercises that call for analysis and synthesis.

8. Give students the option of co-operating on homework and class assignments.

9. Talk to students about learning styles. Explaining how they learn most effectively may be an important step in helping them reshape their learning experiences so that they can be successful.

Extras:

For excellent quizzes for determining learning styles, see:


“What’s your style?” University of South Dakota. Available on-line at www.usd.edu/ce/StudentServices/LearningStyles.cfm
International Teaching Assistants

“Diversity in the world is a basic characteristic of human society, and also the key condition for a lively and dynamic world.”
– Jintao Hu, President of China

Carleton University is proud to have one of the most diverse university communities in Canada. As a reflection of the multicultural classroom, a large number of TAs come from foreign soil as well. International teaching assistants, or ITAs, bring a fresh perspective to the classroom thanks to their unique cultural and educational backgrounds. However, ITAs also encounter their own set of challenges.

The Informal Classroom

The first thing that might surprise you is the informal nature of the Canadian classroom. Informality is the accepted standard in dress, speech, and interpersonal relations in Canada, so what may appear to be rude behaviour to you is often just typical Canadian student conduct. Though your students may refer to you as Mr. or Mrs., they will otherwise approach you in the same manner that they will other students. If you would prefer to be addressed more formally, then indicate so at the first class, otherwise, you might find that some students will address you by your first name.

Dress is almost always casual and, because of Carleton’s tunnel system, some of your students may even arrive to class in pyjamas! They may talk, eat and drink during your class, but you should not take this as a sign of disrespect. This is not to suggest that you must put up with disruptive behaviour; you must simply keep in mind the informal approach that your students are used to when you establish the guidelines and expectations for your class. If at any point, you find any behaviour, be it talking/eating/drinking, does become disruptive, you should address it immediately and clearly state your expectations of appropriate behaviour.

Language Issues

Informality is the standard for language in Canada as well. It is acceptable and welcomed to ask for clarification if there is something you do not understand fully – both in your own courses and in the courses you are TAing. Despite this, using English to communicate with your students
may still be one of the largest hurdles you’ll need to overcome as an ITA. Your students may have problems understanding you, but you may also have problems understanding your students. Even if you are already fluent in English, it’s important to remember that some of your student may not be, and that cultural allusions and colloquialisms can easily become confusing when you are in a new culture. Many of the techniques for overcoming language obstacles are also good pedagogical techniques in general:

• Introduce yourself and share a bit about your background and where you are from and let students know that they should feel free to approach you if they are having difficulties understanding you, and that you will do the same with them. In your first class, you could also ask your students to share a bit about their backgrounds. By sharing a bit about yourself and having them do the same, this will help you build rapport with your students.

• Actively work to improve your comprehension by speaking English as much as possible and by familiarizing yourself with local colloquialisms. The International Student Services Office offers English Conversation Circles that can help introduce you to these colloquialisms, and allows you to share your new experiences while improving your English speaking skills. (See end of section.)

• Make an effort to ensure that your students understand you by speaking slowly and repeating ideas often.

• Encourage your students to raise their hands and tell you if they are having difficulty with comprehension.

• If you are not sure of the pronunciation of a word, ask an English speaking friend, TA or instructor for help, or check with the dictionary.

• Practise what you are going to say before class, and when preparing, avoid using words that you have difficulty with.

• Make your presentations as visual as possible; use the chalkboard, overhead projector, and other technological aids that are available to you for communicating ideas.

Remember, a good teacher communicates ideas clearly, creates an environment where students feel valued, contributes to the learning process and fosters understanding of diverse opinions and ways of learning.
Non-Verbal Communication Techniques

One way of dealing with language barriers is to rely on non-verbal means of communication. Here are some tips:

1. Become an actor. Great skill is not necessary, just a little boldness. If there’s a key word you don’t know in English, use your hands, body and facial expressions to act it out. Don’t be afraid of acting silly or looking funny. Do whatever you need to do to get your point across and learn to laugh with the students. For example, try using your hands to demonstrate the difference between “fission” and “fusion.” Your students will appreciate your efforts and enthusiasm.

2. Use a chalkboard (or a piece of paper) continually whether you are dealing with one student or a whole class. Write down the key words you use as you talk about them, or draw a simple picture, map or diagram of what you are talking about. You can usually sketch examples of what you mean.

3. If you are afraid that someone misunderstands you, draw a picture of what you don’t want the students to do or think, and then draw a big X through it to show that’s not what you’re talking about.

4. When you give instructions for a lab, go through the motions of the lab while you are explaining it and then do it again more quickly to make sure everyone understands.

5. If you don’t know the English word for something, but you manage to get the idea across and the students don’t know the English word either, teach them the word in your language. Afterwards, pause whenever you use it, to make sure they remember what it means. Learning a few words in another language never hurt anybody, right? Tell them the correct English word in the next class.

6. Instead of explaining a formula or an equation, SHOW how it works, and if the students don’t understand the first time, show them again and again, and AGAIN. Teaching takes patience.

7. Be creative. Visual aids aren’t just for children; good language teachers use them all the time, and if you’re trying to explain chemistry or physics, you are teaching another language! Have models available whenever you can, and consider using the...
students themselves to model how something works.

8. As a TA, don’t think of yourself as a person with authority over your students even if you have some. Try to think of yourself as a helper and friend. If you are willing to step out of your shyness and do all you can do to communicate with them, they will really appreciate it, no matter how good or bad your English is.

A good philosophy to remember: who cares how you say it, as long as you communicate.


### 3.4 Teaching Strategies

Here are some useful strategies for ITAs to keep in mind when entering a Canadian classroom:

**Be prepared!**
Initially, you may feel uneasy about going into a class with students who speak another language and have a different culture. If you know your material, understand what you want your students to learn, and have prepared yourself before class, you will be less anxious. Good preparation can solve many problems.

**Rehearse!**
Rehearse, especially for the first class. Be particularly careful about your pronunciation, enunciation and rapidity of speech. Avoid using words or terms that you find hard to pronounce. If you are unsure of pronunciation, check with a peer before class.

**Familiarize Yourself!**
Familiarize yourself with Canadian classroom culture as much as possible. The teacher and student behaviour in the classroom is culturally influenced; be aware of your posture and body movements, make eye contact, smile, gesture.

**Be Patient!**
Although your oral language proficiency may not be the same as your Canadian counterpart, this disadvantage can be overcome or compensated for by good preparation and practice. Preparation and practice are the best and most important confidence builders. There will occasionally be misunderstandings with instructors and undergraduate students. Don’t take these problems as personal failures but as part of the culture-learning process.
Encourage Feedback!

To check on your progress, you may want to ask one or two thoughtful members of your class for feedback. Ask whether your instruction was clear and comprehensible. Also, you can stay for a few minutes after class and invite students to talk to you about any problems they encountered. Finally, encourage your students to contact you if they have questions. E-mail can be the easiest method for both parties, as it does not require a time constraint. It can also keep the student-instructor relationship at an appropriate distance outside of the classroom. Though sometimes, a face-to-face meeting is far more effective. E-mail can help you schedule a mutually suitable appointment.


---

**Spotlight**

6 tips for the new ITA

International Student Advisor Laura Cohen suggests the following tips for dealing with multicultural issues:

1. Talk to Canadian TAs to gain an understanding of undergraduate students in Canada and what to expect from them while teaching.

2. Understand at first it will be hard to be an ITA, this is also a new experience for you as a graduate student. You may experience culture shock and it may take some time for you to feel comfortable – remember that this is normal and part of the adjustment to a new country. However, if it continues or you feel worse, it is very important to touch base with the International Student Services Office or Health and Counselling Services.

3. Being open to new learning experiences will help ease the transition into a Canadian classroom.

4. Use the resources available on campus. Don’t be shy – they’re here for you.

5. Relationship – define the relationship between you and your instructor. There must be an understanding of their expectations as well as your expectations when it comes to such things as office hours, time spent on marking, giving feedback, and teaching styles.

6. Keep in mind that being a TA in a Canadian classroom will be totally different than what you may be used to and that is okay. Even though it is different at first, it will slowly become easier.

From TA Talk, Educational Development Centre, Carleton University. Volume 1, Issue 1. Fall 2004
Resources

International Student Services Office
The ISSO is the liaison between you and Carleton University. They are always available to address your concerns and to support you as an ITA. The ISSO organizes orientations, workshops, special events, and other services designed specifically for international students. The ISSO also administers health insurance (mandatory for all international students and their families).

English Language Support Services
The ISSO has a number of English language support services, including the English Conversation Circle (ECC). The ECC is a free, non-academic, informal group that meets once a week to practise conversational English for an academic and non-academic environment. It is a great place to get to know other international and Canadian students, while improving your English. ECC is open to all students and their spouses.

Educational Development Centre
The EDC and the ISSO co-host an ITA Orientation in early September designed specifically for ITAs and intended to address cultural issues they may face in the classroom. This half-day orientation will provide ITAs with practical classroom management, teaching and learning information. Throughout the year, additional workshops related to TA duties and various teaching topics are offered and are typically announced in the TA newsletter, TA Talk.

The International Student Centre
The ISC is a student-based, volunteer organization that provides you with a place of your own on campus. You can go to the ISC to socialize, to study, to eat lunch or to read the many international publications available to you. In addition, the ISC publishes its own newsletter. The ISC organizes a variety of social activities, and administers the Student Guide program, which pairs you with another Carleton student for peer support.

Carleton International
Carleton International was created in 1976 to cultivate and manage relations with the international community. They are a resource centre for information and professional expertise on international opportunities, exchange programs, and projects. This office is the principal point of contact between the university and the international community.

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
As part of the TA mentorship program, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research offers a series of workshops designed to help...
ITAs from all departments develop communication and teaching skills. Workshop activities include short speeches, giving feedback to students, discussions of cultural differences in the Canadian classroom, as well as an opportunity to receive feedback from a video-taped teaching session. The TA mentor for ITAs is from the School of Linguistics and Language Studies and is available to offer training and support to ITAs from all departments.

Extras:


Teaching Strategies and Tools

“The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.”
– Bertrand Russell, Philosopher, 1872-1970

Just like every carpenter needs a sturdy old toolbox to rummage through for the perfect tool, every TA needs a compilation of handy tips and pointers to flip through in their hour of need. This section includes all your basic tools for long-term teaching success, as well as handy bite-size ideas to save you during crunch times. From how to jump-start discussions to prying shy students from their shells, it has a little bit of everything to get you through your first year.

Getting Through Your First Class

Getting through your first class as a TA is a lot like going on a blind date; it’s all about first impressions, laying out the ground rules and dealing with awkward moments of silence. Remember– this is a new situation for both you and your students. First classes can be nerve-racking, but with a little preparation, you will gain the respect of your students and develop a lasting relationship for the rest of the term.

Be Prepared

The need to prepare before your first class cannot be overemphasized. Go into class with a list of items that you would like to cover to keep yourself organized and your nerves calm. Having something that you can refer back to helps if you’re at a loss for words or feel that you’ve covered everything before class is finished.

First Impressions

First impressions are very important. From the very moment you enter the classroom, you should begin by telling your students about who you are and how your class will be structured. Body language, clothing and tone of voice can strongly influence the students’ first impressions of you. To set a friendly comfortable atmosphere, arrive ahead of time and chat with the students who arrive early. To set a more formal tone, arrive just before class begins with a coffee in one hand and your briefcase in the other.
Introductions

Once you have made your entrance, make sure you know exactly how you are going to begin the class. Have everything you need (handouts, chalk, syllabus) organized and ready ahead of time. Make sure that your opening remarks are pre-written and well-rehearsed. Preparation and organization are the key. Fumbling through a binder while mumbling, “I know that syllabus is around here somewhere…” probably isn’t how you want to start the term. The goal is to set the tone for the entire course during the first few minutes of that first class.

When preparing your opening remarks, remember that it’s important for your students to get a sense of who you are. Are you the goofy, yet brilliant TA next door? Or are you a mysterious assistant to the instructor? Is your style serious and formal or more laid back?

Unlike the instructor, you are also a student and can easily relate to the difficulties of balancing classes, part-time jobs and new instructors while still trying to have a life outside of school. Tell the students about yourself, what you are studying, your academic interests, where you are from, what you hope they will get out of the experience and what you as a TA will do to help them get there. On the board, write your name, the location and time of your office hours, your e-mail address, and how you can be reached outside the office.

Go around the room and get to know each of the students on a personal level by asking them to share similar information with you. The more comfortable they are with you, the more likely they will approach you for help. Try bringing in some candy and pass it around the room while people are getting to know one another.

Learning Students’ Names

Most students say that the TAs that made the greatest impression on them were the ones that took the time to learn their names. Getting to know your students by name promotes inclusiveness and increases familiarity amongst the students. Trying to connect names with faces can be a difficult task but can be made easier with the following tips:

- Ask students to write their names on a folded piece of paper and use this as a name card on their desk.
- During the first couple of classes, when students answer a question ask that they say their name first and then answer the question.
- When students answer a question, make a written note beside their name on your class list that will help you to identify them.
Coming to class prepared includes knowing what you are going to say and what you should bring. The following is a survival kit of things you might want to include on your first day of class:

- the course syllabus
- a handout with your relevant contact information
- a recent class list with attendance sheets if required
- the course text and readings
- visual materials, artifacts, cartoons that are relevant to the day's topic
- an interesting journal or newspaper article relevant to the day's topic
- transparencies, overhead pens, chalk
- calculator
- extra pens/pencils
- a bottle of water

— From So you’re a TA – A Handbook on Teaching and Learning for New TAs at York University (2004). Centre for the Support of Teaching, York University

Breaking the Ice

Not only is it important for you to establish a good rapport with your students, but the class atmosphere will be greatly determined by how your students interact with each other. To ensure they feel comfortable speaking in front of their classmates, encourage them to get to know one another during the first few classes. This also gives you a good opportunity to assess their prior knowledge and learn the needs of the students. Here are some activities that will help:

- On a piece of paper, have the students write down their name, major, previous related courses they have taken, why they are taking the course, and issues or questions they hope will be addressed during the tutorials. If your tutorial class is small, encourage the students to share this information by going around the class introducing themselves.

- Bring a magazine or newspaper article to class that highlights the value of the concepts that they will be learning when applied outside of an academic setting.

- Move everyone into a circle. Have one person say their name. Have the person next to them say that person's name, and then their own. Continue around the entire circle in this manner so that when it finally comes to you, you have to name the entire class before saying your own name. Once you have gone around the circle, start over again going the other direction.

- Develop an informal light-hearted quiz about general course questions. This will show students that communication, participation and interaction are essential components of the class.

- Give the students a brief demonstration of how they will be able to apply the skills that they are going to be learning from the course. In an English class, go over an essay analyzing one of the course's texts. In a math course, solve a difficult problem that the students will be able to complete by the end of the course. This will give the students an understanding of what they are going to learn and what level their skills should be at by the end of the term.

- Involve students in a game of free-association with a key word in the title of the course. Ask students to call out their associations, and then write them on the board without comment. Once the board is filled, work with the students to evaluate these words into positive, negative or content-oriented categories. Follow with a discussion.
• Take your students on a “campus tour” walk. Point out important rooms and buildings as you pass by. Finish the walk off at your office. This ensures that students know where your office is and how to get there from the classroom.

• Have students write out their expectations for the course and their own goals for learning. Then split them into groups where they will share what they have written with one another. Have the group present the most common goals and expectations to the rest of the class.

• Conduct a “living” demographic survey by having students move to different parts of the classroom: size of high school, rural vs. urban, consumer preferences, date of birth, etc.

For more icebreaker ideas, just do an Internet search and adapt the ideas you find to your class. You’ll be surprised at how creative some of them are and how easy they are to adapt. Plus, your students and you may need the warm-up activity at the beginning of class, especially if it’s scheduled first thing in the morning or late in the evening.

Establishing Expectations

During the first class, time should be allocated for getting general administrative matters out of the way, including details about your expectations and grading criteria. Make sure to cover as many issues as possible. This is not the time for a “less is more” approach. The less you say, the more you leave open to negotiation later on. When covering policies and expectations, make sure to include the following:

• Explain the course structure and how the course fits into the overall program curriculum.

• Outline your expectations and what your students can expect from you, i.e., preparation and accessibility.

• Provide a brief overview of the text and any additional readings that will be required of them. Outline your expectations for class readings and the level of preparation students should come to discussion groups with.

• Discuss all deadlines and policies at the beginning of the class including those concerning the grading and weight of assignments, deadlines and what constitutes the grading of an A, B or C. Explain the criteria for the awarding of participation grades, if applicable. If not, explain why attendance and participation are still important. Mention that discussion groups provide a forum for review of key points from the lectures and how they will prepare students for
exams and assignments.

- Outline penalties for late submissions, plagiarism or missed assignments. If you are willing to make exceptions, specify the criteria and circumstances.

- Develop ground rules for class participation, discussions, projects and general classroom behaviour.

---

**Spotlight: Managing your nerves**

Your heart is racing, your palms are sweaty and your throat is as dry as the Sahara. You may think it impossible to get through that first class, but there are ways to manage your frazzled nerves and get through it unscathed.

- Don't forget that you know more about your subject than your students, so don't doubt your abilities!
- Nervousness may result in accelerated speech and disorganization so make a conscious effort to speak at a moderate pace and maintain your focus. Keep notes of what you want to cover and concentrate on slowing down your rapid speech.
- Practise, practise, practise. There is no substitute for ample advance planning and preparation.
- Make a strong start. Begin with an engaging and memorable introduction.
- Concentrate on your students instead of your feelings of nervousness.
- Bring a bottle of water.
Extras

For further ideas and resources on your first day as a TA, see:


4.2 Office Hours

“Office hours are from 12 to 1 with an hour off for lunch.”
– George S. Kaufman, American Playwright, 1889-1961

Used correctly, office hours can be an invaluable teaching tool that promotes good relations with your students and allows for individualized teaching solutions. Be careful not to underestimate the importance of this informal face-to-face time. When filling out your Assignment of Duties form, you and your instructor will jointly establish how many of your ten weekly hours will be allocated to office hours. (For more information on the Assignment of Duties form, see page 4.) Office hours provide a set time, usually one to three hours per week, when your students can visit you outside of the classroom. It’s a great opportunity for you to observe how well students are absorbing course material and to identify where problems or opportunities for improvement may lie. Often, talking to individual students can help to guide your teaching of the class as a whole.

Scheduling Hours

The biggest problem you may face in arranging office hours is not what time is convenient for your students, but what time the office is vacant of other TAs. It is likely that you are going to be sharing an office with other TAs, so to ensure a comfortable atmosphere for your students you’ll need to work out a schedule whereby you have the office to yourself during your office hours. No student likes to discuss the fact that they failed the last test while in a room full of TAs. Students often attend office hours to discuss issues which they are not comfortable addressing in the more public forum of the classroom, so you’ll need to do everything you can to make them feel welcome and at ease.

When scheduling your office hours, keep your students in mind. Due to the hectic schedule of student life, some students may not be able to attend your office hours. Also, inconvenient office hours such as eight a.m. on a Monday morning are unlikely to be well attended. To accommodate students, most TAs and instructors are willing to schedule appointments outside of their regular weekly hours, but do so at your own discretion. If you decide to make yourself available outside office hours, be sure to include the words “available by appointment” when you write your office hours on the board or in a handout.

Student Issues

Realize that you are often going to function as a liaison between your students and their instructor. Students will ask you all the questions
that they are too intimidated to ask the instructor and often they will come to you with complaints about the instructor. This is always a tricky situation for a TA to be in. You need to appear sympathetic and understanding to the student, while at the same time always remaining respectful of the instructor. Explain to the student that different instructors have different teaching styles and that not every style appeals to every student. Remind the student that university is about personal research as much as it is about instructors passing on information through lectures, and that you are there to help with any difficulties the student is experiencing. If several students are approaching you with similar complaints, consider passing the information along to the instructor. Instructors, just like TAs, need feedback from their students.

While sometimes your students will be looking for help with course-specific issues, other times they will just be looking for a confidant. You need to be able to assess your students’ needs and respond accordingly. However, be careful not to overstep your boundaries as a student and TA. If students are dealing with serious issues or issues that go beyond the classroom, the best way to help is to direct them to the appropriate on-campus resources.

## On-campus Resources

Here are some common student issues that you may be faced with during office hours and places where you can direct your students for further assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Contact Info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic issues unrelated to your course</td>
<td>Ombuds Services</td>
<td>511 University Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph: 520-6617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression or stress</td>
<td>Health and Counselling Services</td>
<td>2600 CTTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph: 520-6674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic troubles</td>
<td>Awards Office</td>
<td>202 Robertson Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph: 520-3600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International student issues</td>
<td>International Student Services Office</td>
<td>128 University Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph: 520-6600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship issues</td>
<td>Health and Counselling Services</td>
<td>2600 CTTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph: 520-6674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual or racial harassment</td>
<td>Sexual Harassment Officers at Equity Services</td>
<td>503 Robertson Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph: 520-5622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roommate and residence-related issues</td>
<td>Floor Rep or the Housing Office</td>
<td>261 Stormont House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph: 520-5612</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Office Behaviour

It is essential that you set a good example both inside and outside of the classroom. Your office hours are a less formal environment than the classroom, but you must still be acutely aware of the tone you set and of the language that you use. When discussing delicate matters with a student, do so at a moderate tone. Your students don't want everyone in the hall and in neighbouring offices to hear their problems.

Most TAs make it a practice of never closing their office door while chatting with students, both for their own security and for that of their students. Even if your student closes the door, make sure to open it. You or your students may be uncomfortable with a closed door. Plus, there are no witnesses if you close the door and something happens.

Office hours provide you with the rare opportunity to interact with students on an individual and personal level. Getting to know your students is one of the foremost things you need to do as a TA, so make sure you take full advantage of office hours.

Encouraging Students to Attend

You may be surprised to discover that one of the most difficult aspects of running effective office hours is actually getting your students to show up! Here are some techniques to make sure that you don't end up sitting alone in your office week after week.

Ask Them to Attend!

If you want students to attend your office hours, then ask them to. It sounds obvious, but for some reason many TAs seem reluctant to do it. If you have students who are clearly experiencing difficulties, talk to them after class and schedule a meeting to review the material with them during office hours. When providing written feedback after marking assignments, ask students who seem to be experiencing specific problems (or any student who receives a C or lower) to visit you during office hours. You can't make your students attend office hours, but most will do so willingly if you specifically ask them to.

Drop Off and Pick Up!

Have your students hand in and pick up their assignments during office hours. This encourages your students to learn where your office is and gives them a taste of what office hour discussions are like.

Themed Office Hours!

Many TAs find it helpful to have a specific theme for discussion each week during office hours. Saying “This week in office hours we will be...”
discussing issues of the Gothic as they relate to Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Raven’” will ensure that students interested in receiving further help on this specific topic will attend. Try preparing the themes ahead of time and providing your students with a schedule of office hour themes to go along with the course syllabus, or base them on topics that your students seem to be having trouble with as the course is taught.

Provide Additional Information!
Use office hours to provide your students with further information including additional readings, lab reports, or sample tests or quizzes. Giving your students a sample test a week before the real test is a great way to get them to stop by your office and review the material.

If your students are not attending office hours, here are some questions you should ask yourself:

- Are my office hours at a convenient time for my students?
- Are my students aware of when and where my office hours take place?
- Do I encourage my students to visit me during office hours on a regular basis?
- Am I presenting myself to the students as approachable and friendly?

Spotlight

Decorating your office

One of the best things about being a TA is having an office. No more fighting for space in an overcrowded library! You’ve earned yourself your own little home away from home within the university. Your office is not only a valuable resource for you, but more importantly, for your students.

Part of creating a comfortable atmosphere for your students involves decorating your office. Decorating your office is an opportunity to tell your students something about yourself and to make them feel more comfortable with you on a personal level. That Pamela Anderson poster that you love so much might not set the right atmosphere, but a poster of good ole Albert Einstein just might do the trick! Or how about a poster of an edgy and yet easily recognizable figure like Jack Kerouac? Being able to say, “Hey, that’s the dude who wrote On the Road!” will make your students feel both hip and academic!
Discussion Groups / Tutorials

“When a teacher teaches a student, what is learned is always greater than what was in the book.”
– Anonymous

Discussion groups can be one of the most challenging, yet rewarding ways of facilitating learning. Whereas the instructor may lecture to the students, as a TA you have the opportunity to engage students in the learning process through the use of effective discussions. The ideal tutorial is one in which all students are actively participating in a focused discussion, and not merely chatting about a topic. As a TA, it is your responsibility to direct the discussion that is taking place without obvious levels of intrusion. To that end, this section concentrates on the use of constructive questions and methods for establishing and maintaining focused discussions.

Six Levels of Questioning
Adapted from Project TEACH Materials, University of Nebraska at Lincoln

Questions are not created equal. The quality of the question will quickly determine the level of the discussion. It can spark a discussion, breathe life back into it or increase the intensity by focusing it on a specific issue. When choosing a question, though, it is also important to keep the variety of personalities within the group in mind, while also trying to raise the standard of the discussion as far as you comfortably can to challenge the students. The following is a list of six types of questions you can ask:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>These questions have simple answers that students are expected to know. These questions are used to determine student’s knowledge about factual information (who? what? when? where?).</td>
<td>“Describe the events of D-Day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>These are questions that ask the student to explain, interpret, give examples, or summarize concepts in his or her own words. These questions are used to determine a student’s understanding of a subject.</td>
<td>“State in your own words what the Canadian contribution to D-Day operations was?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>These are questions that require students to apply what they have learned to other topics and situations. These questions are used to help students widen their scope of application.</td>
<td>“How is ... an example of ...?” “How is ... related to ...?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Analysis questions require students to apply principles in new settings. These questions require student’s to take existing knowledge and synthesize new knowledge.</td>
<td>“How does invasion of D-Day compare/contrast with the war in Iraq?” “What evidence can you list for...?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>These questions require students to combine ideas to form a new whole.</td>
<td>“What solutions would you suggest for...?” “How would you create/design a new...?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>These questions involve making a value judgment to express an opinion or make a decision. This is the highest form of questioning and does not have right or wrong answers.</td>
<td>“Do you think that D-Day was the deciding moment during World War II?” “Do you agree with...?” “What criteria would you use to assess...?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Types of Questions that Limit Discussions

Adapted from the Gwenna Moss Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Saskatchewan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Problem with the Question</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes or No Questions</td>
<td>These types of questions do not stimulate discussion.</td>
<td>“Was Stan Lee the creator of Spiderman?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run-on Questions</td>
<td>These are series of questions with no pauses for student responses. Run-on questions tend to confuse students and inevitably some of the questions in the series will never get answered.</td>
<td>“Was Frank Miller’s work on Daredevil in the early 1980s less influential than his later work on Sin City in the 1990s and if so, do you feel like it was the editorial constraints of working for Marvel Comics that stifled Miller’s creative energy?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions with a Programmed Response</td>
<td>The answer to such a question is implicit in the question itself. These questions do not allow the students to think for themselves.</td>
<td>“Is Brian Bendis’ skilful and confident writing in Ultimate Spider-man superior to his more rudimentary and unpolished self-published work?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put-down Questions</td>
<td>This is a demeaning question that subliminally insults a student.</td>
<td>“You don’t really think that superhero films are better than comic books, do you?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuzzy Questions</td>
<td>These questions make it difficult to determine what specifically is being asked.</td>
<td>“Why is Batman the way that he is?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Keeping the Ball Rolling: Maintaining Discussions

Even though you have planned and prepared your discussion group to a T, some discussions will inevitably go better than others. Before you decide to hand in your letter of resignation, the following are a list of situations you may encounter and how best to deal with them:

**One or two students have taken over the floor:**
When there are a few students that are monopolizing the discussion you
can be left in a sticky situation. You don't want to reject the one student for participating too much but you also don't want to alienate the others that feel as though they can't get a word in edgewise. There are two ways to handle this. First, you can use their comments to bring the discussion back to the class ("You've raised an interesting point, would anyone like to comment?")) or acknowledge the comments and suggest another time to discuss them in depth ("Those ideas deserve a lot more time. Maybe we can discuss them after class.").

The sound of silence:
Every discussion has its highs and lows and reaching a lull in the discussion is by no means a need to panic. This could be an indication that the topic has been exhausted, or students may need a few moments to reflect on what they have heard. However, if you are noticing that this happens frequently, look back on the topics that have been chosen for discussion and choose a more appropriate way of teaching it to the class.

The TA becomes the centre of attention:
If the students are speaking only to you instead of to each other this is probably because you are staring too intently at the speaker. Instead, lead with your eyes to other students in the classroom, the speaker will likely begin to look at others as well. Walk around the room to keep from sitting always at the "head of the table."

You don't know the answer:
As a TA you are not expected to be the omniscient Yoda of the course material. Sure, you should have a good grasp of the subject, but there will inevitably be instances when you may not have an answer. In this case, there are several different ways of handling the situation. First, you can explain that you don't have an answer but will find out by next class. Second, you can throw the question back at them ("Well, what do you think?"); allowing the student to work out the question orally, they develop their problem-solving skills, and potentially also give you insight on their understanding of the issue.

They just didn't do the readings:
This happens in all classes, especially during mid-terms and the end of the term. This is not to say that students should get a free ride, but it is important to be mindful during these periods and to structure classes whereby the main points of the readings are explained to the students. Giving them discussion questions in advance might also help them to focus their reading when pressed for time.

The discussion that goes off track:
As the train's conductor, your job is to keep the train on the track and to stop it from heading to Timbuktu. To keep discussions on track, list
the questions or issues to be covered on the board, or summarize the discussion on the board as it proceeds. It may also help to stop and ask a student to summarize the discussion to help illustrate all the relevant points together.

Material is done before the class is:
Ask students if there are other topics that they might be interested in discussing. If not, let them go early. Don’t just keep them there if there is nothing left to teach.

Wrapping It Up
Adapted from Becoming Teachers (2004). McDougal Graduate Teaching Center, Yale University.

“Well, enough of that. Let’s get out of here.” After the 60 minutes are up, you may be tempted to cut the discussion off and send the students on their way. Don’t! This can leave the discussion a bit disjointed forcing students to attempt to connect the relevant points from the discussion on their own. Discussions should be somewhat choreographed to include an introduction, a discussion and a conclusion that ties things up nicely. Concluding the discussion 10 minutes early will give you sufficient time to summarize all of the relevant points and to draw connections between the points. This will help the students to organize the issue and to give them some perspective. Some ways that you might want to wrap up discussions are to:

• summarize the discussion and perhaps reiterate its relation to the course as a whole
• indicate how what you covered in that section will relate to subsequent lectures or sections
• make an observation of how the discussion illustrated how controversial or difficult the material was
• reference back to your opening especially if you spoke about a particular text
• incorporate some positive feedback praising the students for engaging in the material
• highlight well-articulated arguments, use of evidence or problem-solving strategies

Taking a few minutes to debrief after the discussion will send the message to the students that the discussion was valuable and was worth more than just a participation mark. It will also help to motivate students to continue to attend when they recognize the value of the discussion.

For some TAs, discussion groups can be the bread and butter of your TA experience. Planning and orchestrating an effective discussion group can be time consuming but can bring a great pay off when you see your
students grasping the material. Don't worry if your discussion didn't go quite as planned, some discussions will inevitably go better than others especially when the material is dry or the students are bogged down with other course work. It's important to be flexible and adjust your teaching strategies by keeping your format fresh and engaging. This will not only help to draw the students in but will better enable them to process the information more fully each session.

Extras

For further ideas and resources on leading discussions and teaching in tutorials, see:


Preparing to Teach


Being a good TA requires planning and organizing activities so that each seminar has a clear format and structure: an introduction, a clear development and a conclusion summing up what was covered will go a long way in helping students along. However, be realistic and flexible to incorporate discussions and activities that flow more with students’ interests. Students will generally learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process. Keep the following things in mind when planning and facilitating your discussion:

• Think about three to five teaching points that you would like to get across in your discussion group. Students cannot retain stacks of information in a one-hour time period.

• If you are working in a non-fixed seating arrangement, consider changing the layout of the classroom around so students are facing one another to facilitate discussion.

• Ensure that all of your students are working from a similar knowledge base before you start discussion on a topic. Provide a quick ten-minute review of the major points prior to beginning.

• Encourage students to respond to or build on the points made by other students. Get them to interact with one another rather than look to you for answers and leadership.

• Repeat important points in different ways to maintain interest.

• State a goal for the discussion and evaluate how effective the discussion was in reaching the goal.

• Recognize the diversity in your classroom, i.e., race, gender, disabilities, year level. Keep this context in mind as you facilitate your discussion.
Class Participation

“Freedom of inquiry, freedom of discussion, and freedom of teaching—without these the university cannot exist.”
- Robert Maynard Hutchins, American Educator, 1899-1977

As Madonna said, “You’ve got to make him express himself hey hey hey hey.” Now while you may not have Madonna’s talent for producing discourse, creating opportunities for your students to express themselves is essential. Class participation boils down to getting your students comfortable enough to put themselves out there in front of their classmates. Expect that from term to term and even week to week, participation will vary in terms of the liveliness and length of the discussion due in large part to the dynamic of the group.

As a TA it is your responsibility to establish and maintain an environment where individuals feel that they can speak openly and confidently without fear of being shut down. While you may not make chatterboxes out of naturally shy people, with a few helpful hints you can create an environment that encourages students to express themselves and to learn from others.

Establishing Expectations

Since every TA and student has a different idea of what constitutes participation, it is essential that you outline your expectations during the first class. It is the responsibility of the TA to clarify the type of participation they expect, by what criteria participation marks will be awarded and what is considered a relevant contribution. Without clarification at the beginning you run the risk of grade confrontations later and mock participation during discussion groups, such as students merely repeating what others have said in order to get the participation mark.

Ground Rules for Class Participation


In building a positive learning environment, it is important to establish a set of guidelines and expectations for the way your students communicate with others in the classroom. Ensure that the students are aware of the guidelines and that they will be held accountable for communicating in an appropriate manner. The following is a guideline for creating an atmosphere of mutual respect which you should review with your students.

• Respect others’ rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. Challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
• Listen carefully to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said.
• Be courteous. Don’t interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking.
• Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
• Allow everyone the chance to talk. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit. If you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.
• If you are offended by something or think someone else might be, speak up and don’t leave it for someone else to have to respond to it.
• Share and discuss concepts and ideas freely, but the personal stories or issues raised are to be kept confidential and property of the class.

Encourage your students in the first class to come up with their own rules. You might be surprised to see what they find important or unimportant.

Encouraging Participation

Part of encouraging participation involves creating an environment that is conducive to student learning. Here are seven ways TAs can build an open learning environment:

**Build rapport.**

When students do take a risk and participate during discussion, comment positively on their contribution. Instead of saying “good point,” paraphrase or summarize what they said. If possible, follow-up on their comment to keep the discussion going. This will show the other students that they won’t be undermined if they speak up.

**Non-verbal cues.**

Take a genuine interest in what students are saying during discussion by smiling or nodding while they are speaking.

**Draw students in.**

Try to encourage the greatest amount of class involvement by asking students to comment on statements by others.

**Create opportunities to speak early on.**

The more weeks that go by without students talking the less likely they will ever participate during class. Make sure that every student has the opportunity to speak during the first few weeks of class. You may have to get creative here and use an icebreaker to accomplish this.

Give special encouragement.
Some shy students may just need extra encouragement to gain confidence to speak in front of the class. Foster this by rewarding them with a smile, writing their comments on the board to show that their contributions are valuable, or assigning a small specific task for them to report about the following week.

**Discourage monopolizers.**
This doesn’t mean you have to shun monopolizers from ever contributing, but this can be limited through less eye contact and actively seeking the responses of others in the class.

**Tactfully correct wrong answers.**
Incorrect answers can be corrected without ruining someone’s confidence to speak again. Point out aspects that are positive about the response and encourage the rest of the class to build upon those points.

---

**Spotlight**

**Connecting with shy students**

Special effort may be required to get shy students to talk. It can be tricky. Some people believe that if you just pick them out, the shy students probably have the right answer and will say something. But beware of the opposite occurring. When you do call out on these individuals they may feel embarrassed. They may even stop coming to class because they fear being called on.

Instead of directing questions specifically at them, consider facilitating discussion by changing the environment. Students are naturally willing to participate if they consider the environment to be non-threatening, accepting and respectful. If students are having a difficult time speaking independently, try to organize small group activities. In addition, TAs can arrange other forms of participation such as submitting journal entries or posting written responses on WebCT. You might also consider speaking with shy students one-on-one just to make sure that they’re connecting to the material. Ask them about upcoming assignments and whether they are enjoying the topic. If your reactions are positive and show interest in the student, it could help in making the shy student feel more comfortable in expressing themselves in class later.

As a TA you should be most concerned that learning is taking place. When a shy student chooses not to speak, it doesn’t mean they aren’t learning. As students become more comfortable with the material, classroom environment and their fellow students, they will likely begin to show a greater involvement in the discussions.

---

Ideas for Active Learning

Every student approaches course material in different ways. Some students learn best by working independently, while others prefer to develop ideas by working in a group. By using a variety of teaching techniques you will be able to encourage the largest number of students to participate. Here are a few ideas to get your students actively participating in the course:

- Weekly discussion questions
- Case studies
- Media variety (i.e., chalkboards, video, PowerPoint)
- Student presentations
- Problem solving
- Journals
- Debates
- Structured controversy
- Practice exams
- Fishbowls (See below.)
- Questionnaires

...and many more. If you’re really stumped for ideas, a quick way to find some new ones is to search the Internet. Feel free to adapt ideas from other sources into the course.

Here’s an activity you can try to engage your students called “Fishbowls.” They consist of an inner ring discussion group (A) and an outer ring observation group (B) where each group is made up of four or five learners. Group A is given an assignment, such as a discussion or exercise to perform, while group B observes. After 10 to 30 minutes, the groups exchange (group A observes while group B performs the activity). They can either perform the same activity, a modified version, or a new activity.

A couple of different configurations include:

I. Place an empty chair in the inner-circle. A person from the outer circle may sit in it at any time and interject her or his viewpoint or comment for one minute or a given time period.
2. Every three or five minutes, a member of the outer circle replaces someone in the inner circle. This continues until everyone has had a chance to participate and observe.

3. Once the inner circle has performed for a set time or procedure, they turn around in their chairs and receive feedback from the outer circle on a one-on-one basis.

Extras

For further resources on encouraging classroom participation and grading participation, see:


Managing Difficult Student Behaviours

“Behaviour is the mirror in which everyone shows their image.”
– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German Philosopher, 1749-1832

The worst assumption you can make as a TA is that if you treat your students like adults, then they will act accordingly by treating one another and you with the appropriate amount of respect. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Developing a comfortable, yet respectful environment takes a lot of work and no matter how hard you try, there will inevitably be one or two students who will create problems for you. They range from the merely chatty student to the downright disruptive.

Late Students

One particularly frustrating behaviour practised by many students is tardiness. Part of what makes it so frustrating is the fact that students often seem oblivious to how disruptive their late entrance is. Often the discussion has to stop completely while the late student finds his or her seat. This behaviour is disrespectful to you, as well as the students in the class. Make your students aware that this behaviour is simply unacceptable in the first class. After establishing rules for your class, be prepared to enforce them.

There are several ways of dealing with late arrivals:

• If the class has an attendance mark, inform the students that if they are not seated at the beginning of class, they will be marked absent no matter what.
• Give pop quizzes in the first few minutes of class. Any late arrivals get a zero on the quiz.
• When you begin class, lock the door and do not let the late students enter until a break in the lecture or discussion.

Chatty Students

Every student chit-chats with their neighbours from time to time, but this behaviour can easily get out of hand. There are several ways to deal with a chatterbox:

• Make eye contact with the disruptive students. This may often be enough to get them to stop.
• If the talking does not stop, pause the class and ask the students
to stop talking. This is one of the few situations where putting a student on the spot is an appropriate disciplinary technique. Often the students quiet down immediately and will even make an effort to join in the discussion to make up for their embarrassment.

- If it is two friends or a group who are consistently chatting, ask them to sit separately.
- If possible, move the desks in your classroom into a circle. This format encourages participation and cuts down on chattering.
- Make sure you create an environment where students are comfortable asking you questions. Sometimes when students are chatting, they may be discussing class-related material that for one reason or another they feel intimidated to ask you.
- Make sure that you incorporate a variety of pedagogical techniques into your teaching. Students are less likely to chat if you are providing an engaging classroom experience.

Vocal Students

An essential skill that you will need when handling classroom behaviour is the ability to make the distinction between a merely vocal student and a genuinely disruptive one. The distinction won’t be as clear-cut as white and black, and instead will show itself in shades of gray. We all remember that student (there is one in every class) who would continually pontificate at length. Though these vocal students can be annoying and often threaten to take over any class discussion, if kept in check, they can become a valuable resource for a TA leading a discussion group. Reigning these students’ energy into a focused discussion can help to keep conversation flowing in an otherwise quiet classroom.

Keep the discussion on topic.
A vocal student isn’t necessarily a problem until they start taking the class off topic. If they seem intent on discussing off-topic material, suggest that you continue the conversation with them in office hours.

Enlist the student to help you.
Point out that there are some people in class who aren’t as vocal as them and that you need their help to get more discussion out of the quiet students. Making them feel like they are helping you is often more effective than asking them to be less vocal! If you have to ask them to be less vocal, do so after class or during office hours to avoid embarrassing them.

Though these students require extra effort on your part, handling them effectively can easily turn these vocal students into an asset for your classroom. The genuinely disruptive students are a different matter and will require conflict resolution skills on your part.
Conflict Resolution

There are a variety of negative and disruptive ways a student can behave in the classroom, but all of them are going to require similar conflict resolution skills on your part. Like in any conflict, a calm and patient approach is going to be your most effective means of dealing with difficult student behaviour. Problems are best dealt with after class or during office hours. Giving the student a public forum to debate with you is probably just the kind of attention they are looking for.

When discussing behavioural problems with a student, clearly explain what was inappropriate about their behaviour, but also allow the student to vocalize their own concerns. It is helpful to summarize and clarify your understanding of the student’s point of view and to appear empathetic. Rather than simply disagreeing with the student, try to build on what has been discussed, while also providing opportunities for the student to back down without losing face. One way of doing this is allowing students to generate their own solutions to the problems at hand.

Behaviour to Watch For

The following disruptive behaviours can quickly lead to problems in the classroom and should be dealt with immediately.

- Grandstanding
- Sleeping in class
- Prolonged chattering
- Excessive lateness
- Overt inattentiveness
- Active cell phones
- Unexcused exits from class
- Verbal or physical threats to students or faculty
- Disputing the instructor's authority or expertise

– Coping with Misconduct in the College Classroom: A Practical Model, College Administration Publications, Inc. 1999.

Defer to the Instructor

Never be afraid to bring problematic behaviour to the attention of your instructor. Even if you are able to resolve conflicts on your own, you should always keep your instructor informed of what has taken place. Though you should, of course, make an effort to deal with any troublesome behaviour, ultimately if you are dealing with an excessively disruptive student, it may not be worth your time and energy. Your job is to facilitate the learning of those students who want to be there, not to try and control those who do not. If a student's behaviour is consistently inappropriate, inform your instructor of the situation and let them deal with it accordingly. Don't feel like you have to wait until you are at your wit's end before asking for help and advice and do not feel like a failure in this situation. Any situation which you do not feel comfortable dealing with should immediately be deferred to the instructor, who will be able to take appropriate action.

If disruptive behaviour escalates and at any time you feel uncomfortable, threatened or harassed by a student, inform your instructor immediately. They may be able to help you come up with a solution or they may refer you to Equity Services, and together, you will determine the best course of action.
Tips for dealing with problematic behaviour

- Communicate classroom rules on the first day of class.
- Model the behaviour you expect from your students.
- Be consistent and fair about what is and is not tolerated in class.
- Learn students’ names.
- If there has been a problem, try to re-engage the student within the class.
- Positively reinforce good student behaviour.
- Always document events that are of concern to you for future reference.
- Take some time, and a deep breath before you say or do anything.
- Make an effort to speak to the student in a setting that you feel is safe but affords some privacy.
- Keep the course instructor informed of all exceptional behaviour.
Using Technology for Teaching

“The Internet is the most important single development in the history of human communication since the invention of call waiting.”
– Dave Barry, American Writer

Let’s face it, the days of those old rickety 16 mm film projectors showing faded prints of 1960s educational films are long behind us. The world of digital technology has opened up a vast array of technological tools that TAs can and should take full advantage of in their teaching. Today’s undergraduates enter university with a high degree of technological competence. By tapping into this pre-existing knowledge base, you not only appeal to them through a familiar medium, you can also enhance your students’ learning experience.

Technological resources can also help you to keep in contact with your students. Communication technology not only increases student access to you, but also allows you to share useful resources and on-line information. Communicating through e-mails, blogs, message boards and instant messaging can be especially helpful for shy students who are intimidated by the classroom environment. Many students are willing to share thoughts, insights, and questions on-line, which they would not have the confidence to voice in a face-to-face situation. Communication technology can also be helpful for TAs and students for whom English is a second language. By communicating electronically, each party can take a bit more time to interpret what has been said and to compose a response. When used appropriately technology can help you to create a dynamic learning environment where participation and contribution from a diverse group of students is encouraged.

Your Classroom

The first thing you need to do is familiarize yourself with the technology available in your classroom. Undoubtedly, your classroom will be outfitted with the most basic of teaching tools – the chalkboard. In addition to that, the majority of classrooms are equipped with an overhead projector as well. If not, a projector is available for loan from Instructional Media Services (IMS). Though your use of these tools is unlikely to wow your students, they can still be effective teaching aids when used properly. Chalkboards and overheads, like all of the digital technology now available, should be used to enhance your students’ learning experience. It should not be a crutch for you to fall back on.

If you are lucky enough to have an electronic classroom, a vast array of technological tools are already available at your fingertips. E-classrooms include a console outfitted with a computers with an Internet connec-
tion, data projector and DVD/CD player. Carleton currently has 60 electronic classrooms and counting. If you have an electronic classroom, it is not only advisable but essential to practise using the console before your first class. IMS provides training not only on its Web site, but in person if you book an appointment in advance. If you are not in an electronic classroom, many of these items can be borrowed from IMS.

Getting Help

Even a few minutes of technological floundering mid-lecture can seem like an eternity to both you and your students. Therefore, it is important not only to know what technology is available, but also how to use it properly. The two main resources at your disposal are Instructional Media Services (IMS) and the Educational Development Centre (EDC). If you need to rent any classroom equipment or find out what your classroom is equipped with, contact IMS. If you will be using an electronic classroom, IMS provides on-line and in-class training with an appointment. The EDC, on the other hand, trains TAs in the use of WebCT, PowerPoint and any other tools that may be used in the teaching of your course. They hold regular WebCT workshops, the schedule of which is located on their Web site, and they also welcome drop-ins for minor questions.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help. As a TA, it is essential that you know the ins and outs of the technology you are using.

Why Use Technology...

...in the classroom?
You need to decide for yourself on a class-by-class basis whether the use of technology will be an aid or a hindrance to your students’ learning. You must decide which medium will provide the most effective learning experiences for your students. Don’t use technology for the sake of flashy presentations. A chalkboard can be just as effective as a PowerPoint presentation if understanding is accomplished.

...during office hours?
You may find students more willing to communicate with you electronically than in person during office hours. Be aware of the time it takes and the infringement on your personal time. If you decide to communicate via e-mail or instant messaging, let your students know that you will only be checking e-mail on specific days (even if you check it more often) and set aside only an hour or a limited time for instant messaging. Otherwise, you will find yourself flooded with the overwhelming expectations of your students pressuring you for an immediate response.
WebCT

As a Carleton University student, you are probably already familiar with WebCT, the university’s chosen on-line course management system. All courses at Carleton University are automatically given a space on WebCT, though it is up to the instructor to determine how active it will be. WebCT features a wide range of educational tools such as discussion boards, whiteboard, internal e-mail and the ability to upload and release grades. It is the latter function that you as a TA will have the most involvement. If you are TAing a WebCT course, it is likely that you will be asked to use the GradeBook section of WebCT to organize, manage and post student grades. Your instructor should be able to show you how to do this, but if not, the EDC does offer help via on-line guided tutorials and workshops.

PowerPoint

Chalkboards and projected transparencies are increasingly being replaced by PowerPoint presentations. Using and erasing chalk can be a time-consuming (not to mention messy) process, as can overhead projectors. Meanwhile, PowerPoint presentations can be prepared before class and provide opportunities to spice up your lectures while communicating valuable visual information. The EDC provides workshops on using PowerPoint and can help you produce an effective presentation.

Be careful not to rely on PowerPoint too much. It’s not always the right medium to relay information and can stifle the potential for discussion. Use it only when it’s right for the material you want to relay. If you do decide to use PowerPoint, here are some tried-and-true rules:

- Use fonts 28 points or larger for the text.
- Use dark type and a light background.
- Avoid USING ALL CAPS.
- Use italics or colour rather than underlining.
- Limit each sentence to seven words and each slide to eight lines.
- Keep the room lights on and avoid showing slides in a dark room for more than 15 minutes at a time.

Scantron Grading

Perhaps you remember using a pencil to scribble in circles for a multiple choice test in your first few years of university? If so, you’re already familiar with Scantron grading forms (or bubble sheets), Carleton University’s multiple choice exam answer sheets. As a TA, you may be handed a stack of 500 Scantron sheets with the simple instruction to get them marked. The EDC is the only place on campus that can do this for you. The
turn-around time for processing the grading is 24 to 48 hours, so please
don’t bring them in last minute. The best time is usually right after the
exam is written, or at least the morning after. This way, you get the grades
back to the students quicker and the instructor is eternally grateful.

The Chalkboard

Just because you have been using chalk since you were a child doesn’t
mean you know how to use it in a classroom! Writing on the blackboard
in a clear and effective manner is more difficult then you may think. Here
are some tips to keep in mind:

• Write legibly. This means staying away from cursive and avoiding the
  urge to sacrifice clarity for speed.
• Before class begins, erase everything on the board. Leaving behind a
  few stray words from the previous class can quickly become confusing
  for your students.
• Try to use all of your blackboard space before you start erasing. The
  longer it is on the board the more time your students have to absorb
  the information.
• Start writing on the board at the left and work towards the right.
  This sounds obvious, but it is easy to find yourself simply writing
  wherever you happen to be closest to the board.
• Bring your own chalk. The university’s custodial staff cleans the
  blackboards and supplies chalk to classrooms on a regular basis,
  however, this chalk can easily disappear before you get there, so it is
  always best to be prepared and to bring your own. Your departmental
  administrator should also be able to supply you with some.
• Try to talk while you write. Dead time can kill any rhythm you’ve
  worked up.
• Once you have written something on the board, get out of the way.
  Refer to it by pointing to it from the side while facing the class.
• Keep in mind that students consider anything written on the board
to be important.

TA Testimonial

“I was surprised to discover that students don’t come to office hours, but they LOVE
to e-mail questions. Be prepared to spend a lot of time answering questions on-
line. Much more so than in person.”

— Shamima Khan, Department of Psychology
Extras


More information on WebCT at Carleton University can be found on-line at webct6.carleton.ca.
While teaching a class of almost 500 students, Carleton University Professor Robert Burk was receiving an average of 30 to 40 e-mails a day. His solution? Instant Messaging! Quick messaging systems can be a fantastic way for you to communicate with your students outside of the classroom. There are several benefits to communicating with students in this way:

- students get their answers immediately
- unlike one-sided e-mails, instant messaging allows for “conversations” to take place
- students can receive answers to their questions during study time
- a chatroom can be established where the questions of several students can be answered all at once
- students in the same class can communicate with one another and work together
- instant messaging significantly decreases the amount of e-mails sent by students

Most students and TAs are already comfortable instant messaging friends and family, so shifting this tool into the academic realm should be a fairly easy transition for students and TAs alike.

Consider offering some of your office hours using MSN. Much like conventional office hours, specify the days and times when you’ll be on-line and treat them like you would any other office hours. You’ll be surprised at how active and grateful students will be.
Specialty Classes

Every TA, depending on the nature of the course and the instructor that they work with, has different duties. Whether they vary slightly or charter a completely new path, you need to be prepared to adapt to the characteristics of your course. This chapter includes a roundup of the most common class anomalies you might encounter.

Review Sessions

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”
– Alvin Toffler, American Writer

Adapted from Teaching at Stanford: An Introductory Handbook for Faculty, Academic Staff, and Teaching Assistants (2004). The Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University.

When teaching a review session, you are faced with a unique challenge because the students have already heard all of the material before. Providing new approaches to topics already covered requires a bit of innovative thinking on your part, as does putting together an effective review session as a whole.

Organizing Your Review Session

During a review class, time is always a factor. You may have several months worth of material to cover in only a few hours. You will want to challenge students to think for themselves about the topics addressed during the term, but you’ll need to avoid lengthy discussions that consume valuable class time. It will likely be impossible to cover all of the material in as detailed a manner as you may want to. You will have to make a choice between a general overview briefly covering all of the material or an in-depth analysis of specific sections. Pick clear goals and decide which method is best going to achieve them and also prepare the students for the exam.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review</th>
<th>How It’s Done</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Overview</td>
<td>Provide your students with a survey of the course’s themes and topics. Attempt to “bring it all together.”</td>
<td>Briefly reviewing all the important topics to remind students of which parts of the information they already know and which parts they will need to brush up on.</td>
<td>This approach does not cover specifics and will require that students investigate, on their own, specific areas that they are having difficulty with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth Analysis</td>
<td>Concentrate on areas that students seem to be having problems with or difficult technical formulas that they will need to be familiar with for the exam.</td>
<td>This approach ensures that students have learned specific aspects of the course material.</td>
<td>Students will have to investigate on their own how these sections fit into the overall structure of the course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During a review session, especially one in which students are asking a lot of questions, you will undoubtedly find yourself side-tracked. Since time is so short, you have to try to get back on track as quickly as possible. Here are some ways to deal with digressions:

- Respond to a question briefly, and then invite the questioner to pursue the topic with you further in office hours.
- Explain that the issue raised is a good one, but too complicated for the time you have left.
- Indicate that you will pursue it in the future, or suggest further readings for those who are interested.

**Information Retention**

It is especially important during a review session to make sure that the students understand the material that is being discussed. To ensure information retention:

- Use plenty of examples to make your points.
- Give short problems for your students to solve.
- Give examples of the kinds of applications that they should be able to make if they have really grasped the major concept.
- Ask your students to provide examples on a point of discussion.
Here are some review activities that can help to keep a review class interesting and aid knowledge retention:

**Student-Generated Questions**
Have students make a list of questions before the review session, then compile the list and distribute it to the whole class. Assign questions from the list to individual students and have them research the answer. Each student will be an “expert” on the question during the review session. Or, alternately, have the students work in small groups where they answer each other’s questions. They can call you over for help if an answer cannot be found.

**Student-Created Review Handouts**
Have students generate questions for a review sheet which the class will complete. Ask them to think of key questions they would ask the class if they were the instructor to assess what they’ve learned. Go over the different types of questions that exist (from simple recall questions to ones that ask students to synthesize information). Ask them to write down questions of all different types. Compile the questions, and have the students work on the review questions individually. When they are done, review the questions as a class asking the students who wrote the question to offer the answer if they know it.

From “Teaching Strategies and Ideas for Activities,” Center for Talented Youth, Johns Hopkins University.

**Jeopardy**
This can be a fun way to run a review session! Before class, prepare a large number of course-specific questions that can be placed into different categories. For an English class, you might have a “Quotes” category with lines taken from poems that the class studied or in a math class you may have different “Formula” sections. Break the class up into two groups, or better yet, join your section with a fellow TA’s section. Have the two groups compete, by choosing different categories and answering trivia questions related to the course material. Awards can be given to the winning team or to students who answer questions correctly.
Coffee time! Set up a weekly get together with other TAs at a coffee shop or in your office to discuss any issues you may have regarding the class.

5.2 Group TAing

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.”
– Andrew Carnegie, American Businessman, 1835-1919

With the busy schedule instructors work under, many simply do not have the time to provide the guidance and support a TA might need and expect. Often TAs find themselves planning lessons, leading labs, grading essays, and marking exams with little to no feedback from the course instructor. This may seem like a daunting task, but it is a challenge that need not be undertaken alone. If you are feeling overwhelmed and abandoned by your instructor, then there are probably many other TAs out there who feel the same way. Seek them out!

Help may be closer than you think. Often several TAs are assigned to different sections of the same course. Your instructor may gather you together to explain and establish certain rules and standards for the course. Instructors and students alike need to feel confident that any one TA’s approach to grading assignments and exams is the same as all the others. This can only be achieved through communication among the TAs themselves. Not all instructors make it a goal to bring together their TAs, despite the importance of this type of communication, so don’t be afraid to explicitly ask to be put into contact with other TAs. Even if your instructor provides you with a marking scheme, you will still need to exchange information with your fellow TAs on a frequent and regular basis. Communicating with other TAs in your section is a way of making sure that everyone is on the same track.

“My one piece of advice to new TAs is to talk to other people. People are grad students because they love to learn and if they stay in grad school it’s because they love to teach as well and so people are really willing to share their experiences. You don’t have to listen to everything everyone tells you but if you’re not asking others then you’re never going to hear anything at all!”
– Robyn Smith, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Being in contact with other TAs gives you the opportunity to work as a team to improve the educational experience for your students. Bouncing lesson plans off one another is a great way to develop exciting new activi-
ties and lectures. Course content can, likewise, be reviewed and analyzed with the help of your fellow TAs. Organizing a discussion group or putting together a stimulating lab can be an intimidating task. Talking it out with other TAs will help to alleviate some of the pressure you may be feeling.

Experienced TAs can also be an extremely helpful resource. Many have been a TA for several years and have learned much from both their triumphs and their failures. They may even have taught the course which you are now TAing and have several helpful tips to pass along to you.

Ask to sit in on a fellow TA’s class and have them do the same for you! Peer observation is a wonderful way for you and your fellow TAs to improve your teaching ability. You may choose to do this if you feel uncomfortable about your approach in your class, or if you just need an objective observer to let you know how you’re doing.

Peer observation benefits both the observer and the observed. Reciprocal observations and feedback can result in a collaborative, team approach to the classroom, with some or all of the following benefits:

- exposure to alternative teaching styles
- a chance to see how other instructors respond to classroom situations
- the possibility to learn different ways of teaching the same content, e.g., when visiting someone teaching another section of the same course
- an opportunity to observe students and their reactions to different methods of teaching
- a chance to develop observational skills
- feedback on their teaching including positive reinforcement and suggestions for change
- an opportunity for exchanging ideas about teaching with a peer
- peer support
- developing your own skills to handle critique
- something for your teaching portfolio should you wish to pursue an academic career

5.3 TAing a CUTV Course

“All television is educational television. The question is: what is it teaching?”
–Nicholas Johnson, U.S. Government Official

CUTV allows students who live off campus or who are juggling busy schedules to time shift their learning by viewing courses online or on Rogers Ottawa Digital Cable television channel 243 (as of August 18, 2009). CUTV courses are produced by recording an on campus class, so you’ll often be TAing a mixture of students who attend a face to face class and students who view their courses in one of three different ways:

1. By subscribing to the CUTV Internet Video on Demand (VOD) service, which allows students to watch via video streaming and downloadable podcasts.
2. By watching the video stream of the television broadcast at the CUTV website (www.carleton.ca/cutv).
3. Viewing the Ottawa Rogers Digital Cable television broadcast on Channel 243. Students can watch their courses on-line via video-streaming during the regular scheduled time slot from the CUTV Web site, www.carleton.ca/cutv.

For you, TAing a CUTV course section presents unique challenges in that you will be asked to interact and engage students accessing the course via different media. You will likely never meet your students and sometimes office hours may mean that you’re making long distance phone calls to BC or Florida to answer questions. Be ready for this, but know that there are strategies that you can employ to make this experience rewarding and enriching for your students and yourself.

Communication with Students

CUTV classes often have hundreds of students enrolled, making student communication with the instructor even more difficult than normal. Students in CUTV courses are much more likely to feel unsure of themselves and distant from the classroom experience. This translates into a greater need for contact and reassurance. As a TA for a CUTV class, you will likely spend a large amount of time communicating with students through e-mail and over the phone. Many students will contact you just to check in and to make sure that they are “on track” while others will contact you with lecture-specific questions. It can be difficult dealing with hundreds of anonymous students, so work hard to remind yourself that each and every e-mail and phone call is from a unique individual equally deserving of your time and energy.

In the Winter 2009 term, CUTV streamed over 12 terabytes of data! That’s the equivalent of 18 000 CDs or 2400 DVDs of information.
WebCT

All CUTV courses use WebCT or a course website to facilitate communication and learning for both the in class and CUTV students. Ensure that you gain access to the WebCT course by asking the instructor to add you as teaching assistant (page 48 of the WebCT Instructors Guide).

Voice Mail

Although the majority of communication with CUTV students is via email, all CUTV courses continue to be supported with a course voice mail service provided by Carleton University Television administrators. The voice mail service may be added to the instructor’s office telephone, or a separate course voice mailbox may be established. Your instructor may give you the task of accessing the voice mail and answering questions. To facilitate telephone communication with students who live at a distance from the campus, CUTV administrators will also provide long distance calling cards to instructors who request them.

Office Hours

Though most CUTV students live off campus and will likely communicate with you by e-mail or telephone, that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t still have weekly office hours. Office hours can provide CUTV students with the sort of one-on-one interaction they cannot get from their recorded classes. As a CUTV TA, you’ll also want to block a specific period of time where you will answer e-mails and voice mail. Informing your students of your schedule will ensure that they do not have unrealistic expectations of how quickly you will get back to them.

A highly recommended practice is to set online office hours and use MSN messenger, Skype, WebCT’s Chat or Elluminate (an online virtual classroom) to hold real time conversations with students. For help with these tools contact the Educational Development Centre or CUTV staff.

Helpful Tips

There are several things which you and the instructor can do to help the students in your CUTV course:

• Go on the air and introduce yourself – show them that you are human and a student, just like them, and that you welcome contact with them.
• Encourage students to contact you by asking them to introduce themselves
• If your instructor isn’t using WebCT or another e-learning platform,
suggest WebCT and offer to develop it for them.

- Reinforce contact by telephone and e-mail: “Thank you for your message on [date…]. It was great to hear from you…”
- Get the instructor to mention individual CUTV students on air: “Sarah Churchill in Sudbury has asked this question…”
- Put open-ended course-related questions into WebCT’s discussion board and reinforce all responses.
- Ask other students in the class to respond to newsgroup questions, rather than giving the answer yourself.
- Provide a picture of yourself for the instructor’s WebCT course site.

Adapted from Parlow, Shelley. “Tips For ITV Instructors and Teaching Assistants.” Department of Psychology, Carleton University.

Exams

Holding informal mid-term exams will be a little different for CUTV courses. All CUTV informal midterm exams are organized by the CUTV Examinations Coordinator, and will be scheduled on Friday evenings and Saturdays only. The coordinator will also help to arrange the PMC accommodations for CUTV students. At the start of the course, ask the course instructor for the details of the exam and what you will be required to do. You will likely not be asked to proctor the exam, but you might have to be present at the exam to answer any questions.

Extras

For further advice on teaching a CUTV course, see the CUTV Instructors’ Manual:
http://cutv.carleton.ca/instructors-handbook.php

CUTV Administration
Location: 4th Floor Dunton Tower
Phone: 520-4055
E-mail: cutv@carleton.ca
Web site: www.carleton.ca/cutv

CUTV Student Centre
Location: D299 Loeb Building
Phone: 520-7609
E-mail: cutv_student_centre@carleton.ca
Web site: http://cutv.carleton.ca/students-studentcentre.php

CUTV Exam Coordinator
Location: 4th Floor Dunton Tower
Phone: 520-4055
Hybrid Courses

What is it?
A growing number of universities, including Carleton, are experimenting with hybrid courses. Hybrid courses combine face-to-face classroom instruction with computer-based on-line learning. These courses move a significant part of course learning on-line and, as a result, reduce the amount of classroom seat time. At Carleton, there are only a handful of courses that are experimenting with some combination of on-line and live course contact.

What it means to you
As a TA, in addition to other typical duties, your primary responsibility in a hybrid course will likely be facilitating discussion when the class meets on-line. Although by having the discussion on-line you will minimize the pressures associated with speaking in front of a class, you must continue to actively lead the class on-line by devising methods that encourage all the members of the class to participate. This will require that you are as prepared to meet with your students on-line as you would be for face-to-face discussion groups.

On-line Discussion Activities

Just like in a classroom, there are different learning activities that can be used in an on-line environment to promote active learning. You may want to try one of the following:

- Help create a sense of community at the beginning of your course by designating a “Welcome” conference where students, the instructor and TA post short biographical information. Keep this conference casual. Encourage participants to get to know each other.
- Have students critique an on-line article or Web site.
- Initiate debates or discussions of controversial topics. One way of promoting this type of discussion while ensuring that your students are respectful of various points of view is to have students take a particular point of view and research information from that perspective.
- Form small learning groups or teams that (a) research a topic and then report back to the entire group by moderating an on-line conference, (b) provide weekly summaries of discussion threads, or (c) give group analyses of case studies.

E-Moderating
The key to teaching and learning on-line is encouraging cooperation among students and promoting communication that respects the diversity of the presented opinions. You can help to create this type of environment by:

- Trying to ensure that messages are less than eight lines long. If students have more to write, suggest that it be broken down in several parts and titled appropriately.
- Messages should be organized around one given point to make it easier to respond.
- Give students encouragement through an occasional on-line pep talk or by letting students know individually how they are doing.
Leading Labs

“I never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work.”
—Thomas Edison, American Inventor, 1847-1931

As a lab TA you are given the opportunity of introducing wide-eyed students to the exciting world of science. Every year, hundreds of students with no background in science are taking introductory first and second year science courses. As a TA, your job is to introduce students to it by making the science in theory come alive in practice while also providing a link between instructors and students.

Due to the nature of science labs, your TAship is somewhat different from other TA assignments, requiring that you are prepared and are equipped to handle a variety of unexpected circumstances that may arise during the lab. Thorough preparation and familiarity with the lab safety procedures will help you to anticipate problems and respond calmly to the situation.

Checklist: Preparing for the Lab

Unlike TAing in other disciplines, if you don’t come prepared, you better buckle up for a bumpy ride. The most important thing you can do as a TA to ensure that labs run smoothly is to prepare thoroughly for the lab. This includes pre-term preparation as well as weekly pre-lab preparations. Before the start of the term you should:

☐ Meet with the instructor as soon as you get your assignment and go over:
  • goals of the labs
  • in-lab responsibilities (demonstrations, instructions, equipment maintenance, cleanup responsibilities, student supervision, providing additional resources such as handouts, safety measures, etc.)
  • when/where the lab meets
  • where you can get keys for the room
  • a complete list of experiments, the instructions for each and the lab schedule

☐ Get acquainted with the storeroom of the lab to learn where necessary equipment and materials are and check the lab where you will be teaching.

☐ Review procedures for getting emergency assistance and become familiar with the location and operation of the first aid kit, eye wash station, fire blanket, extinguishers, spill kit materials, safety data.
sheets, etc.

☐ Prepare a sample report that students can consult so that students will know what is expected of them.

☐ If there are other TAs in the course, prepare a consistent general marking scheme for prelab prep, lab performance, lab reports and lab exams.

Checklist: During the Lab

☐ Arrive early to confirm that all necessary equipment is set up and to write procedure information on the board.

☐ Begin the lab on time to allow for extra time if students have to repeat portions of the experiment.

☐ Learn student names as soon as possible and try to talk to each student at least once during the experiment.

☐ Divide your students into lab groups of two to four students, depending on the size of the class and the availability of lab equipment.

☐ Circulate and sit in on groups while experiments are being performed to ask them questions to assess where they are, to correct minor errors before they turn into disasters and so that they may consult you about the experiment.

☐ Encourage students to ask questions to one another as they go through the lab exercises in order to perfect the steps of the scientific inquiry.

☐ Clearly lay out expectations for the lab write-up. Go through a checklist of key points that should be addressed and key reasons where marks will be lost.

☐ Practise lab safety and courtesy. Make sure that students are aware of the safety guidelines and abide by them.

Checklist: Concluding the Class

☐ Reconvene the class as whole and have the students report on their findings.

☐ If there are varied results discuss possible explanations.

☐ Review key points and connect them to the theory.

☐ If you do not know the answer, be honest with the student. Let them know that you will try to find out the answer from the instructor, lab coordinator or any other resource for the next lab session.

☐ Answer questions about the experiment and the eventual write-up.

☐ Have students clean up lab benches and equipment before leaving.

Safety in the Labs

As a TA you are not only responsible for advancing the learning of
students but you are also responsible for their health and safety. It is your responsibility as a TA to communicate and ensure that your students are aware and follow the protocol and policies for the safe and healthy operation of a laboratory. Safety policies and protocol should be written on a handout and distributed in addition to being discussed before the lab begins.

As a TA, you are an employee of Carleton University and therefore entitled to WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training and a Worker’s Safety Manual. Information on obtaining both is available via the Environmental Health and Safety Web site at www.carleton.ca/ehs.

In the event that a workplace injury takes place, the incident must be reported immediately to your supervisor. The injury reporting program is available on the Environmental Health and Safety Web site at www.carleton.ca/ehs/ehsprograms/injuryreporting.htm.

Six Ways of Encouraging Class Participation in Labs

These activities work best in groups of two or three:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How it works</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recall earlier material</strong></td>
<td>List the three most important things from the last lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine whether the key points in the lecture were retained.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage setting</strong></td>
<td>Here are some questions we’ll be considering today. Work in pairs to guess (estimate) what the answers might be (to plan how you could determine the answers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pose preliminary questions of what will be considered during the lab and have the students come up with estimates of what will happen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responding to questions</strong></td>
<td>Ask questions about procedure like:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When students are asked to generate answers in small groups, most of them will get right to work without feeling worried that they will be called upon.</td>
<td>“What should I do next?” “Is what I wrote correct? Why or why not?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generating questions and summarizing</td>
<td>This exercise provides the instructor with a clear indication of how well the class worked that day and what points should be addressed at the beginning of the next period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>The groups should generally be given enough time to think about the problem and to begin to formulate an answer but not necessarily enough time to work through to a complete solution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Five Tips for Grading Lab Reports**


1. Lay out grading criteria clearly in advance. Develop a scheme clarifying what a grade “A” lab is, what a “B” lab is, and so on so that you can outline your expectations for the students and it can serve as a reference tool for them. In addition, clarify the deductions and consequences for late or missed lab reports.

2. Read through several lab reports before assigning marks. This gives you an impression of how the students did and will allow you to form a checklist of things to look for while marking.

3. Decide how heavily you will weigh content vs. form. Many courses have a standard format that students should follow in doing their write-up. Check with the course instructor to develop appropriate grading criterion.

4. Give useful and prompt feedback for students. Students that receive concrete feedback in a timely manner will improve their analytical skills and allow them to make improvements before their next report is due.

5. Be open to adjusting marks. TAs are human, they make mistakes and it’s not a big deal if, for whatever reason, you made a mistake when marking (adding up wrong, misreading). Students will appreciate the consistency and honesty.
Common Questions

As a TA you may encounter some of the following problems or questions during a lab session. Consider the following suggested responses:

“Why won’t this come out right?”
Don’t be too quick to give outright answers or to give advice right away. Instead, ask them a series of questions that leads them to discover the answer themselves. Of course there will be instances when there are minor procedural errors that occurred, but unless students learn what to anticipate when they forget something they will likely keep making the same mistake.

“Is it important for students to produce the expected results?”
The goal of scientific experiments is the ability to explain the results that just occurred. In real life, hypotheses and assumptions do not always produce the anticipated results. As a TA you should be able to alleviate any frustration by correcting major errors as you circulate through class while pointing students to the appropriate resources to explain mistakes as well.

“How do I manage the class?”
Students will often run out of time when running an experiment if you don’t keep the class on track. Tell them what parts of the lab must be completed during the period and periodically announce what they should be working on at a given time.

“How do I teach students that have different scientific backgrounds?”
Sometimes students will lack the background knowledge that comes with choosing science as their major, therefore, make sure to go over key definitions and illustrate with examples to bring them up to speed whenever necessary.

“How can I get my students to prepare for lab?”
Bring to the student’s attention when labs have a small percentage like five to 10 per cent of marks reserved for pre-lab preparation, laboratory performance, answering pre-lab or post-lab questions, which will usually be incentive enough for attending. If there are no marks associated with the lab, your challenge is greater. It means that you will have to bring that much more creativity to the class.

“What’s the point of the lab?”
Sometimes it can be really difficult for students to see the value of what they are mixing in their beakers when taken outside of the lab setting. Consider bringing relevant scientific journal articles, general science
magazines and newspaper articles to the lab session in order to provide context and to begin to expose students to scientific literature.

"Labs are stressful already to a degree, so make sure that you don’t compound that by overreacting to minor mistakes. Take everything in stride, and don’t treat your lab responsibilities as a chore, or the students will as well." – Chris Ramnan-an, Department of Biology

Extras

For additional resources on leading labs, see:


Conducting successful lab demonstrations

There is nothing worse than a TA that stands up at the front of the class and is leafing through a textbook as they teach. This style of teaching lowers your own self-confidence and diminishes credibility amongst your students. Although there are no sure-fire ways of ensuring a successful lab demonstration, careful planning will help to create a better experience and may even produce results that will impress your students.

- First, prepare a plan sheet that summarizes the concepts or states the techniques that are going to be demonstrated.
- Determine an example of the concept or technique that can be easily demonstrated.
- Go over each of the steps that you are doing during the demonstration and make a note where you should emphasize the key points.
- List all of the materials needed for the demonstration as well as any additional presentation materials that you require.
- Devise an interesting way of introducing the method that highlights the students’ previous knowledge, gives background information and clarifies any new terms.
- Assemble all the necessary equipment needed for the demonstration and prepare the physical setting.
- Practise or rehearse the demonstration.

As you go through the actual demonstration, observe the class and watch for any confused expressions where they might need more clarification. To ensure that students comprehend what is occurring, ask students to summarizing what took place. After the demonstration, review the key points. Repeat the experiment if you see a lot of blank looks on their faces.
TAing for Statistics Courses

Statistics courses offer a unique set of challenges when TAing since they often bring together a wide variety of students from a number of different disciplines into a setting where tutorials are usually not discussion-based but primarily assignment-driven.

Many students in the social sciences are required to take at minimum one statistics course during their degree, therefore, students often come into the course with no prior experience using statistical analysis software (such as SAS or SPSS). Your challenge as a TA will be to transform these blank stares into enlightened statistical geniuses by moving through the concepts and commands slowly, repeating key concepts and steps, while consistently monitoring their progress throughout the course.

In some circumstances (but very few), you may not be utilizing any statistical software, but will be required to teach it all “by hand.” This will carry with it its own challenges and modifications to the recommendations made here. When assisting with the teaching of statistics it is particularly important to maintain a close relationship with the instructor, and a clear understanding of standards and expectations. In this subject, the fine details ALWAYS matter!

The following are a list of things that you should do to conduct an effective lab group:

- **Going to the class**
  As a TA you should be supportive of, and complementary to, the instructor’s instruction and not blazing a new path on how to conduct statistical tests or use SPSS, etc. By attending class you will not only get a good refresher on how to use the program but also become familiar with the instructor’s techniques and expectations.

- **Preparing for labs**
  Take the time every week to review what is being taught during the lecture by familiarizing yourself with the readings and mastering the concepts, formulae, and, if necessary, SPSS or SAS commands and output interpretation. This is also a good time make a list of key concepts that you would like to review, and material and examples that you would like to write on the board. Use old textbooks to locate examples of exercises. Your instructor will likely have dozens (or hundreds) of them available.

- **Structuring labs**
  The first 20 to 30 minutes of lab should be devoted to the following format:
• Briefly reviewing the material covered in class with practical examples.
• Posing general questions to the class to ensure that they understand the key concepts.
• Conducting a statistical analysis step-by-step with the class on SPSS, SAS, or your own software, to ensure that all students understand how to perform the steps.
• Addressing questions that students have about the lecture or tutorial.

After everyone has performed the analysis as a class, the rest of the time should be devoted to completely grasping the skill. Have the students perform the same function several times using different variables, working on their assignment or creating your own mini-assignments to be submitted at the end of class.

**Common Problems**

**Lab attendance**
Getting as much practice as possible on conducting analyses either by hand or using a package such as SPSS will be the key to students’ success in the course and this should be mentioned frequently throughout the labs. If the instructor does not allocate a portion of the grade towards lab attendance, warn the students that if they only attend the odd lab, you may not have time in later classes to help them catch up. Make the labs active and meaningful.

**Balancing your time during labs**
Try to get around to each student during the one-hour period and don’t allow yourself to be monopolized by students that want you to hold their hands as they complete tasks. Ask that students be prepared with questions as they raise their hand, and have their data output ready to show you.

**Keeping everyone on the same page**
It can be a difficult balancing act to manage students that take to statistics at different paces. You can help to keep everyone moving along by conducting short informal quizzes at the end of class or giving deadlines for when certain parts of an assignment should be completed. For students that require extra practice, suggest that they come to your office hours for help or provide them with extra material that they can practice on their own time. Again, the extra material and assignments/examples can be located (often complete with answer keys) in a variety of statistical textbooks. Make sure that symbols and terminology on these are the same as is used in class and in the class text.
Office hours
Keeping office hours is a critical part of your assistance to your statistics students. Try to schedule office hours during a time when one of the computer labs are available so that students can show you their work. Be mindful of the time during office hours. If students think that they can keep you there indefinitely, they will, so stick to your schedule.

Quiet students
Make a point to get to students that are reluctant to ask questions by quizzing them one-on-one on the spot by having them explain SPSS output. This technique will give you a good gauge of where they are at and where they require further explanations.

“Just because someone isn’t constantly asking you questions in class doesn’t necessarily mean they understand the course completely. I think it’s important to monitor the progress of your students and make a note to check in on them. If they leave all their questions until last minute, it will be frustrating and stressful for both you and the student.”

— Ashleigh Ewchuk, Department of English Language and Literature
Evaluation

By its very definition, evaluating means assigning a value or worth to the work in question. Throughout your time as a teaching assistant, you will be learning the skill of evaluating yourself as well as your students. Though you may struggle with it at first, evaluation is a key tool to strengthening your skills as a TA and improving the educational experience of your students.

Grading and Feedback

“Feedback is the breakfast of champions.”
— Kenneth H. Blanchard, American Author & Businessman

Some instructors feel that grading student work is the most burdensome task of the academic profession, hence TAs are left marking most of the time. Whether it's quizzes, essays, lab reports, mid-terms, or final exams, you are likely going to be the one assigning a grade and providing feedback to the students in your section. This is not to say that you will be the only one marking student work. To relieve the burden of grading, the instructor will likely share this load with you.

Grading can be a particularly stressful endeavour because the decisions that you make will have a very real effect on your students’ lives. Scholarships, awards and admissions are all dependent upon the grades that you assign to your students’ work. You will have to make a conscious effort to assign fair and deserving grades to everything you evaluate. Providing effective grades and feedback, like many aspects of being a TA, requires that you walk a tightrope over that dark abyss known simply as “bad teaching.” If you are going to keep from falling in, you will need to find equilibrium.

Allocation and Supervision of Marking Responsibilities

Adapted from TRACE Tips, as adapted from Teaching Assistants Handbook, Department of Psychology, University of Waterloo. Teaching Resource Office, University of Waterloo.

Most of your interaction with the course instructor will concern procedures for evaluating the students’ work. Ask the instructor for detailed guidelines, a marking rubric or an answer key before you begin marking assignments, exams or essays. To ensure that you both have a similar understanding of what is expected of the students, ask the instructor the
For each and every assignment, there will likely be at least one student who will come to you with a request for an extension. Students who have missed a test will, likewise, often ask to write a make-up test. It should be clear to you, the instructor and your students who holds the responsibility for giving or denying extensions. Regardless of who makes the actual decision, both you and the instructor will need to keep each other informed of all decisions made regarding requests. If the instructor has given you the responsibility, you will have to use your judgment to decide whether the request is appropriate or not. Keep records of these requests and whether or not they were met. For larger classes, details can easily be lost and an accurate account, especially when dealing with tests and assignments, needs to be kept.

Grading Strategies and Techniques

When assigning grades, keep in mind that all grades should be fair, accurate, consistent and defensible. Even with this balanced approach in mind, you’ll need to remember that different kinds of tests and assignments require different kinds of marking. Here are some common marking techniques:

Analytic Method
This is most often used for marking short answer questions. The ideal or model answer is broken down into several distinct points, and a specific subtotal of the marks is assigned to each. When marking, you need to decide how much of each maximum subtotal you judge the student’s answer to have earned.

Global (Gestalt) Method
This is most often used for marking an essay. The marker reads the entire essay and marks an overall judgment about how successfully
the student has covered what was expected and assigns the paper to a category mark. Ideally, all essays should be read quickly and sorted into between five and nine piles, then each pile reread to confirm that every essay has been fairly assigned to a given pile, all the essays of which receive a specific score or mark. This is usually an effective marking technique in small classes only.

From “Guide for Teaching Assistants at UTSC (2004).” Teaching and Learning Servicers, University of Toronto at Scarborough.

Grading Rubric
Though the Gestalt method may be helpful for marking a group of 15 essays, what if you have 150 essays to mark? You should develop a grading rubric with the course instructor, and other TAs if there are multiple TAs assigned to the course. If your instructor has not provided you with one, you should consider creating your own. A grading rubric is a chart of criteria used to evaluate students work. It allows for more balanced marking by having an established set of expectations which can be referenced by both students and the TA. Using a grading rubric has many benefits, including:

- If a rubric is presented to your students ahead of time, they know exactly what you will be looking for in their work and what their mark will be based on when they begin writing their essays.
- Structured criteria can form the basis of a dialogue between you and your students, you and your instructor, and you and other TAs in your section.
- Rubrics are especially helpful to ensure uniformity of marking amongst a group of TAs all marking different sections of the same class.
- Students wanting to know where they went wrong or where they can improve can see clearly what the issues are and advice can be tailored to those specific issues.
- Using a rubric is a way of structuring subjectivity so that it is uniformly applied to all of the essays being marked.


Returning Assignments and Tests

Just because you have marked all of the assignments doesn't mean your work is done. You still have to return the assignments to the students. Here are some easy tips to keep in mind when returning work to students:

- Papers should be returned to students as quickly as possible.
If you tell your students you will have the marking done by a certain day, make sure that you stick to it.

It is best to return papers at the end of class. This prevents students from spending the entire class looking over the paper or steaming about a bad mark.

You can invite students who wish to discuss their mark with you to stay after class or to see you during office hours.

If you have noticed common problems among a large number of assignments, discuss them in class.

Go over the key concepts that your students seem to have had trouble with. Marking assignments is a great way of observing what information has been retained and what has been missed.

**Plagiarism**

Unfortunately, some students will try to cheat and as a TA you are the front line for spotting it. While your course instructor will go over the syllabus with the students in the first class, it doesn't hurt to stress key points about plagiarism your first meeting with them. Many students unintentionally commit plagiarism because they have not been properly informed as to what it is.

**Essays**

Explain to your students that copying and pasting a sentence into an essay is called “plagiarism” and can get them expelled, but that copying and pasting that same sentence into an essay, putting quotes around it, and providing the proper citation is called “research” and can get them an A. In this case, you might consider setting up a session with the library to help your students with their research skills. Direct your students to the MacOdrum Library Web site at www.library.carleton.ca. Have them click on “How Do I…” and then “Avoid Plagiarism.”

If you suspect that a portion of an essay has been plagiarized, try typing a sentence or two into a search engine and see what pops up. If you catch any of your students cheating in any way, inform the instructor immediately.

**Exams**

As a TA, you may be asked to proctor informal mid-term exams. Most students will be honest, but just be aware that some students may try to cheat on their exams. Being vigilant while students are writing will probably prevent cheating. Research studies show that students are more likely to cheat on exams if the proctors seem to not be paying attention, for example, by reading a book or knitting! In the same vein, honest students will feel discouraged if dishonest students are given the opportunity to cheat by inattentive proctors.
9 characteristics of effective feedback

Providing helpful and informative feedback is one of the most important and difficult tasks a TA is faced with. Whether marking an essay or having a discussion during office hours, TAs need to be extremely careful about what kind of feedback they give to their students and how it is delivered. Here are some characteristics of effective feedback:

1. Attentive, Caring, and Respectful
It is easy to become callous in the way we deliver feedback. Avoid comments that might belittle, threaten, or otherwise intimidate students.

2. Collaborative
Effective feedback jointly engages sender and receiver in a constructive exchange of information.

3. Well-timed
Feedback should address recent behaviour and be delivered in a private forum.

4. Clear and Direct
Feedback should not be up for interpretation. Your comments need to be straightforward and frank.

5. Specific
Focus the feedback on behaviours, what the person has done, not what you imagine that they intended.

6. Directed at Behaviour the Person Can Change
There is no point in focusing on behaviour that cannot be improved.

7. Focused on a Limited Range of Behaviour
Most students are likely to respond to a barrage of negative feedback by first feeling overwhelmed and then concluding that improvement is hopeless. It is better to focus on a few problems.

8. Rounded and Balanced
Avoid linking positive and negative feedback in ways that make it seem as though the positive feedback is just an attempt to be nice – while the real message is in the negative.

9. Provides Direction for Improvement
Feedback needs to offer some suggestions for improvement.

Here are some tips to discourage cheating:

- If possible, spread the students out so that they are not sitting beside each other.
- If you’re not familiar with all of the students, check their student IDs.
- Walk around the room. Do not sit in one place for the entire exam.
- Stand in the back of the room for some time during the exam. If the students can’t see you but know that you’re there, it will discourage cheating.

Extras

The following books on grading and feedback are available from the EDC Library:


There are several Web sites which you can use to investigate plagiarism, including:

- edc.carleton.ca/files/Repo/file_240/Plagiarism.pdf
- www.turnitin.com/static/home.html
- www.mydropbox.com
- www.plagiarism.org
- www.academicintegrity.org
Grade Challenges

“You are educated when you have the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or self-confidence.”

— Robert Frost, American Poet, 1874-1963

Perhaps you spend hours barreling through stacks of assignments or exams, often left to your own devices, trying to mark so that they are fair to the students and satisfy the instructor. Yet even though at the end of the day you may be satisfied with the marking you’ve done, it is very likely that there is going to be someone in the class who’ll suggest otherwise. There are ways of dealing with grade challenges, from the moment you hand out the assignments or exams, to when the student appears in front of you challenging their grade.

Handing the Exams Back: Timing is Everything

Besides writing an exam, receiving graded materials can be a very stressful time for students. Handing back assignments shouldn’t become doomsday for the student but a positive learning experience where they can assess where they are in the course while getting a sense that they have been treated fairly. One of the first considerations when returning assignments and exams is determining when to hand them back. It is best to choose a time that will leave you ample time for students to ask questions about the exam, to clarify any misconceptions and to give feedback on their overall performance while minimizing complete classroom disruption. Here are a few suggestions to make the process go smoother:

- Hand exams and assignments back at the end of class or during office hours.
- Hand exams and assignments back individually so students cannot access others’ comments or marks.
- Have a copy of the answer key to go over responses.
- Welcome student critiques, but know when to cut off discussion by inviting students to discuss concerns after class.


A second consideration when returning exams and assignments involves informing students of the procedures for having their grades reviewed. Whenever possible, marking disputes should be resolved informally between you and the student or between the instructor and the student. However, in the event that this informal process produces unsatisfactory
results, students should be made aware of the regulations and deadlines regarding review of grades. This information can be found in section 2.7 Review of Grades, Academic Regulations of the University, 2006-2007 Undergraduate Calendar and section 13.6, Review of Grades, General Regulations, 2006-2007 Graduate Calendar.

Dealing with Complaints about Marking

The final consideration when returning assignments and exams is handling complaints and queries about marking. Following the end of class there are bound to be students that linger to question the mark they have received. Questions usually fall within one of two categories:

1. questions about why the substance of their answer was inadequate or incorrect
2. questions about the particular mark assigned to their answer

It’s best for students to drop off a copy of the piece of work in your mailbox with a brief note outlining their concerns. This way you will have time to review the materials before being meeting to discuss it. If it is really a cut-and-dry decision, your explanation should be short and it shouldn’t take you long to make a decision on the students’ case. You should always answer a grade complaint face-to-face with the student. Never respond to a student via e-mail and only respond over the phone if a face-to-face meeting is impossible.

Not everyone will approach you in the same matter. There are some that will hand you a sob story about really needing a certain grade or how they need you to just boost them up a couple of marks to pass. There will be others that will try to bully you into giving a mark. Always stay calm and maintain a professional demeanour. Welcome their comments and try not to appear defensive. Many times students do not know the appropriate way of approaching TAs with questions. Keep in mind that they are not criticizing you personally, but merely trying to get a better grasp as to what was required from them. Often they don’t understand the material, are wondering how the marks were allocated or seeking ways to improve in the future. Of course, there are going to be those who simply want to squeeze a few extra marks out of you. Bear in mind that it is important that you explain to the students that their concerns are important to you and you are willing to speak to them reasonably about their questions.

When assigning marks you may find it difficult to give an appropriate mark to those that made a lot of progress while still falling short of meeting the course goals. The problem is that you don’t want to advance a student into higher level courses where they lack the requisite skills and
knowledge to succeed. A general rule of thumb is to give all but failing grades in terms of achievement of course goals. Failing grades should only be given to those students who not only demonstrate low achievement, but have also made little progress. If you are hesitant about giving a failing grade, or if you feel that a student's work has fallen short of the course goals, schedule a meeting with the instructor and have them personally go over the student's work. They will likely agree with your assessment and give you any needed confidence to award low grades. Should they disagree with your assessment, perhaps a further meeting to go over other students' assignments is warranted.


Common Complaints

The most common complaints in grading have to do with fairness and consistency.

Fairness relates to what the expectations were for the knowledge of class material. Keep in mind that you are TAing undergraduate students, therefore, you shouldn't be grading them with the same expectations as of graduate students.

Consistency has to do with how the grades were assigned to students in comparison to the rest of the class. Consistency can be a major problem in large classes with multiple sections and a slew of TAs. Even with one TA there may be problems with consistency; as TAs become tired they may start grading papers more harshly or with less rigour. For ways to head off consistency complaints where there are multiple TAs grading, refer to the Group TAing section of this handbook.

Here are some common complaints you may encounter and how to deal with them.

“This is what you told us to do. Why did you take off points?”

Many of the questions that you may encounter will have to do with misunderstandings of what was required in the answer to receive full marks. In this case, go over the question with them and state what was required (sometimes it’s good to use an example) and often the student will recognize where they went wrong. You may run into further difficulties with the mark that was assigned. If you consider your marking to be fair, don’t budge. However, if your mark was not correct and either you miscalculated or you missed something while marking, acknowledge your mistake and change the grade. For future exams, go over example questions and answers (that warrant full marks) in review sessions.
“I don’t understand why you took off points here. I got the right answer.”

While the student may understand where they went wrong in the exam or assignment, they may continue to disagree with the number of marks that were deducted especially if they got the right answer. In this situation it is important to stress to the student that all students were marked according to the same standard and that any changes would require re-marking the entire class. Feel free to show the grading rubric as evidence of this standard.

“I was trying to say that but I didn’t know how to say it.”

This is pretty common among students that knew the answer but just weren’t able to express what they were thinking. These explanations should not insinuate that they should then receive the mark. A part of the university educational experience is about learning how to articulate ideas, therefore it is not unreasonable to deduct marks for this. You might consider including mini-quizzes in your discussion groups to help students develop this skill.

**Subjective Marking**

When students do extremely poorly especially when there is subjective marking taking place, i.e., essay format, the instructor should be alerted to the situation, that way you can inform the student that the instructor was in agreement with your marking.

Adapted from Guide for Teaching Assistants at UTSC (2004). Teaching and Learning Services, University of Toronto at Scarborough.

Your best defence against grade complaints is the grading rubric (or marking scheme). Refer to the section on Grading and Feedback for more information.

---

**TA Testimonial**

“One important thing I’ve learned as a TA is to not take it personally. If people don’t show up to tutorial, complain about your marking or challenge your decisions in public, it doesn’t necessarily reflect on you. Anxiety in university is huge and often TAs are (unfortunately) a good sounding board for student’s frustrations.”

— Lisa Marie Freeman, Department of Law
Extras

For more information on grading and handling grade challenges, see:


6.3 Gathering Feedback on Yourself

“He who learns, teaches.”
— African proverb

There is a good chance that the instructor will never once attend your section’s lab or discussion group. The majority of the time, you will be on your own. If you want to know whether or not you are doing a good job, it is up to you to actively seek out feedback. If you are attentive to the behaviour of your students, you will get a sense of what works and what doesn’t fairly quickly, but there are other aspects of your teaching which you simply cannot self-evaluate. As a TA, you will have to rely on a mixture of feedback from a variety of sources, including your students, other TAs and the course’s instructor.

Self-Generated Feedback

When a class is over, you’ll usually have a sense of what went well and what could have been improved. Unfortunately, this information can quickly fade into the background as you move on to other tasks. It is important to capitalize on those initial impressions by putting them down in writing. There are several techniques for recording your personal observations:

**Pro Formas:**
A typical pro forma asks for brief statements about what went well in a particular teaching session, what did not go well, and what should be included or omitted when the session is repeated. You should complete this kind of feedback yourself after every class. For example:

Date:
Topic of Session:
Objectives:
What happened:
What worked and why:
What didn’t work and why:
For the next time:

**Checklists:**
A self-review checklist will draw attention to key dimensions of teaching such as scene-setting, structure, clarity, response to student queries, and student participation. Checklists are a quick and easy way to record observations after class.
Personal Logs:
A personal log can be especially handy. Give it a cute name like “My Secret TA Diary” and record your experiences and observations after each class. For Example:

Dear Diary,

Today was an especially effective class. The students enjoyed the Simpsons’ clips that I brought in and the group activity stimulated much subsequent discussion.


Student Feedback

You can take advantage of student feedback merely by tuning in and paying attention to the various kinds of information that your students send your way through body language, classroom behaviour, and in their work. Some useful student indicators to monitor are:

- Attendance
- Attentiveness
- Readiness to take notes
- Willingness to interact by asking or answering questions
- Quality of work

Students can also be given pro formas, questionnaires and checklists to provide you with feedback. Remember that you are teaching for their benefit and students can thus often provide helpful feedback regarding issues of clarity, pacing, adequacy of learning resources, and rapport. The more your students perceive you as welcoming their opinions and receptive to their concerns, the more forthcoming they are likely to be in providing informed and open comments.

When reacting to student feedback, keep the following things in mind:

1. **Be open.**
   TAs must be open to all means of improvement for our students, but also for ourselves.

2. **Be objective.**
   Get outside the situation. Imagine that the comment is directed at a third person. Consider the evidence on this “other” teacher: Is the comment accurate? How would you react if you were a student in class with this “other”? What would you say to help this teacher?
3. **Keep things in perspective.**
   How many students expressed this criticism? Each student expresses a single opinion: avoid assuming any individual is speaking for the whole class.

4. **React to substance alone, not speculation.**
   Don’t fret over what the student might have meant by this word or that, or if she or he might be suggesting something else. It’s amazing: Some TAs read evaluations more closely than scientific formulas, literary masterpieces or historical documents. This is a great way to lose perspective.

5. **Weigh the testimonies.**
   Sometimes this is simply a numbers game, especially with a larger class or a wide range of abilities and learning styles. Some say “disorganized,” while others say “flexible.” You can only count the votes.

6. **Check out the witnesses.**
   If you receive input from students personally or you can otherwise know the source of the comments, consider the perspective. Some students are exceptionally perceptive and offer excellent insights, while others are very sensitive and easily annoyed or offended.

7. **Concentrate on your goals.**
   It is always important to keep your goals in mind. Why did you solicit this feedback in the first place? How can this feedback help you achieve that aim?


**Feedback From Other TAs**

Others TAs can be a fabulous resource. They are in the exact same situation as you and are likely sharing many of the same experiences, especially if the TA is from a different section of the same course that you are teaching. Other TAs can:

- pinpoint issues which students have overlooked or are less well equipped to comment on
- comment from the vantage point of the disinterested outsider
- help you explore possible courses of action in light of feedback already received

Feedback from other TAs is both different from and complementary to
feedback from your students and from your own observations. Arrange a peer observation session where you and another TA attend one another’s classes or simply share experiences and feedback with one another.


Feedback from the Instructor

Though instructors are extremely busy, many will take the time to visit your class and provide you with feedback if you ask. They know the material extremely well and have years of teaching experience which many are willing to share. Ask your instructor to sit in on one of your sessions and observe. Make the students aware that the instructor is only there to observe you and not them. Also, note to yourself that you may be particularly nervous with the instructor there, so be prepared for your reaction and try to mediate against it. When an instructor does attend class, they normally sit quietly near the back of the room and will rarely interfere with your lesson. One of the advantages of having the instructor visit your class is that you can expect your students to be especially well behaved on such an occasion!

6 Fast Feedback Tips

1. Notes! Ask to review the notes taken by one of your students; they may be a good indicator of how well the material is being communicated.

2. Carded! Several times over the course of the term, hand out index cards to your students and have them answer feedback questions written on the cards.

3. All Year! Don’t wait until the end of the term to solicit feedback from your students. Consistently seek it out so that you can progress as the year does.

4. Nothing to Fear! You may be tentative to ask for feedback for fear of negative responses. Don’t be. You may be surprised by the positive responses you receive and negative ones can only help you to further improve.

5. Copy and Keep! Keep copies of all written feedback that you receive.

6. The KDA Method! For quick feedback, have your student write down what about the course they would like to keep (K), what they would like to drop (D), and what they would like to see added (A).
Extras


“Gathering Feedback on Teaching and Learning,” Center for Teaching Effectiveness, University of Texas at Austin. Available on-line at www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/getfeedback.


Lawall, Mark L. Students Rating Teaching: How student feedback can inform your teaching. Available at the EDC Library.

University Grading Guidelines

Carleton University employs the twelve-point system of letter grades to represent standing in undergraduate lecture courses. The letter grades used and the grade point equivalents are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following percentage equivalents apply to all final grades at Carleton University:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>85-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>57-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>53-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>50-52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your own department, or the department you are TAing in, may have other specific grading guidelines. Take the time to ask the course instructor if departmental grading guidelines exist.
University Policies and Procedures

Selected university and senate policies relevant to teaching and learning at Carleton University

Senate Policies on Academic Regulations of the University:
- Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
- Academic Accommodation for Students with Religious Obligations
- Deferred Final Examinations
- Deferred Term Work
- Electronic Communication
- Examination Regulations
- Instructional Offences
- Offences of Conduct: Discrimination and Harassment
- Standing in Courses/Grading System
- Unacceptable Conduct

For a full listing of Senate policies on Academic Regulations, see: www.carleton.ca/cuuc/regulations

University Policies:
- Access to Information and Privacy
- AIDS Policy
- Building Evacuation
- Carleton University Health and Safety Policy
- Discrimination and Harassment Policies
- Early Closing Due to Temperature Extremes
- Educational Equity Policy
- Emergency Evacuation of Buildings and Assistance to Persons with Disabilities
- Employees with Disabilities who Require Elevators
- Employment Equity Policy
- Equity Policies
- Fire Drills
- Fire Prevention
- Human Resources Policies
- Personal Harassment
- Pets on Campus
- Policies on Accommodation
- Smoking in the Workplace

For the full listing of Carleton University policies, see: www.carleton.ca/secretariat/policies
Signs of Student Distress
Adapted from Carleton College.

As a TA, students may look to you for help during times of distress. The following may help you 1) recognize signs of distress 2) determine which signs require immediate action, and 3) decide on an appropriate course of action.

Recognizing the Signs of Distress
1. Marked changes in academic performance or behaviour such as:
   • Dramatic decreases in quality of performance
   • Academic carelessness
   • Avoiding or dominating class participation
   • Social isolation
   • Disruptive behaviours
   • Irritability, restlessness, angry or tearful outbursts, excessive anxiety
   • Strange or bizarre behaviour, possibly indicating a loss of contact with reality
   • Frequent absences, tardiness, or missed assignments

2. Marked changes in appearance such as:
   • Diminished personal grooming
   • Swollen or red eyes
   • Dramatic weight loss or gain

3. References to suicide, homicide, or death in conversations, class discussions, or papers

Is this an Emergency?
Not every instance of distress requires an immediate response of emergency proportions.

Emergency situations include those in which a person’s life or health is significantly endangered (i.e., a suicide threat or a threat of harm to someone else). Other urgent concerns include sexual or physical assault, recent death of a loved one, significant impairment due to alcohol or drug use, mental disorientation, or hallucinations. These situations require immediate action. If the student is unwilling or unable to seek help, faculty or staff members may call 911.

How You Can Help
Many distressed students are not aware of the resources available to them. Your role can be a positive and crucial one in identifying students who may benefit from counselling and assisting them in finding help.

If you have noticed changes in a student’s appearance or behaviour that
may signal some distress, you are in an excellent position to use those observations to express concern for the student. You do not need to work with the student to fix the problem. You can assist, however, by helping the student focus attention on the problem and referring the student to an appropriate resource.

Another way of helping is to normalize the student’s distress and the process of seeking help. Some students are reluctant to or ambivalent about seeking help. Your reassurance that help is available can be particularly soothing. In addition, you can reassure the student that problems do not have to be of crisis proportions to benefit from exploration with a counselor. Students need not make a commitment to ongoing therapy and may benefit from seeing a counselor once or twice.

### What To Do...

1. Stay calm.
2. Attempt to talk with the student in private.
3. Express care, concern, and a willingness to assist the student in getting help. Give concrete examples of specific behaviors or changes that concern you.
4. Listen without judging.
5. Don’t try to fix the problem for the student; instead, listen to the student’s concerns.
6. Help the student put the distress in context and perspective.
7. Encourage the student to talk with other caring resources, perhaps the student’s parents, siblings, advisor, RA, SWA or close friends.
8. Encourage the student to seek professional help if he or she feels friends or family are unwilling or unable to assist, or if the student would benefit from a professional, objective listener.
9. Offer to escort the student to Health and Counselling Services.

### Important Numbers
- In Residence Counselling: 613-520-2600 ext. 1767 or ext. 2295
- In Clinic Counselling: 613-520-6674
- International Student Counsellor: 613-520-2600 ext. 4205
- Emergency: 613-725-5676
- After Hours: 1-800-668-9920
List of Support Services

Departmental Support for Teaching Assistants 117
Academic Support and Resources for Students 117
Administrative Services 119
Instructional Support and Resources 120
Non-Academic Support and Resources 124

Departmental Support for Teaching Assistants

The TA Mentorship Program was designed by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) to provide department specific information for incoming TAs. The program employs experienced TAs from participating departments who act as mentors passing on their knowledge, skills and sense of professionalism to new TAs.

These experienced TAs act as mentors by passing on their knowledge, skills and sense of professionalism to new TAs through one on one meetings, informal coffee house gatherings and workshops.

Phone: 520-4049  
Web site: www.carleton.ca/graduate-studies

Academic Support and Resources For Students

Learning Support Services (LSS)

LSS is the first place that students should be referred to when seeking ways to improve their academic performance. As a one-stop shop for student support, LSS offers one-on-one drop-in sessions, skills development workshops, information sessions, learning resources, group study rooms, and tutor referrals that can assist students in achieving their academic goals.

4th Floor MacOdrum Library  
Phone: 520-2600, ext. 1125  
Web site: www.carleton.ca/learningsupport

Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (PASS)

PASS is a series of weekly study sessions for students taking select undergraduate courses. PASS is provided to all students who want to improve their grades and their understanding of course material. Attendance is voluntary and anonymous. This service is offered through the Student Academic Success Centre.
Student Academic Success Centre

The Student Academic Success Centre, or SASC, assists students in developing effective study skills, understanding academic rules and regulations, choosing or changing degree programs, academic improvement planning, and identifying strategies to enhance their academic portfolio. TAs can refer their students to SASC for one-on-one academic advising sessions at any time during the calendar year.

Writing Tutorial Service

TA Consultation Services and Resources
A number of resources on the teaching and grading of academic writing are available on the Writing Tutorial Service Web site. In addition to these resources, they offer consultations to TAs to discuss developing material to scaffold written assignments within their tutorials.

Thesis Support Groups
The WTS initiated the thesis support group in an effort to create a space for graduate students to meet and support each other while facing the challenges involved in completing a thesis. The service is free to all Carleton University graduate or fourth year students.

Writing Tutorials
One-on-one writing consultations are free of charge for all Carleton students. Tutors are trained to assist writers with any stage of the process, from discovering what they want to write about to helping them express their ideas in clear, academic prose.
Administrative Services

Awards and Financial Aid

The Awards Office is responsible for providing financial aid and advice to students in need. Their job is to help you understand the costs associated with university and provide you with information on various sources of financial assistance.

202 Robertson Hall
Phone: 520-3600
Web site: www.carleton.ca/awards
E-mail: awards@carleton.ca

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research works in conjunction with the regional Faculties to provide strategic direction through academic and administrative guidance and service to its graduate students, to the faculty who teach and supervise them, and to the academic units that deliver graduate programs. The Faculty also promotes and manages external and internal funding opportunities for graduate students including teaching assistantships, research assistantships, grants, awards and bursaries.

512 Tory Building
Phone: 520-2525
Web site: www.carleton.ca/graduate-studies

Human Resources

Human Resources is responsible for ensuring that you receive your direct deposite payments on time. Be sure to provide HR with the proper information (ie: Void Cheque and SIN card) to ensure you are given an employee number. In order to receive your pay, you will need to have completed this documentation process.

507 Robertson Hall
Phone: 520-3634
Web site: www.carleton.ca/hr

Registrar’s Office

The Registrar’s Office manages the academic activities of all undergraduate and special students. It also manages the academic records of all Carleton students, past and present, undergraduate, and special.
Scheduling and Examination Services

Scheduling and Examinations schedule formal mid-term, final and deferred examinations.

For EXAM related inquiries:
Phone: 520-4454
E-mail: examiner@carleton.ca

For SCHEDULING related inquiries or to book a room:
Phone: 520-2600, ext.36
E-mail: scheduler@carleton.ca
Web site: www.carleton.ca/exams

Instructional Support and Resources

Carleton University Television

Carleton University offers a unique form of distance education in which lectures are recorded live and made available through four alternative modes of delivery to CUTV registered students. Students registered in a CUTV course who live within the broadcast area can watch their classes on TV with a Rogers digital cable subscription (available at a discounted rate for Carleton students). Students can also watch their courses on-line via videostreaming during the regular scheduled timeslot. CUTV students can also sign up for the Tapes-To-You service, which delivers the weekly lectures on DVD to their doorstep for a fee. Also for a fee, students can register to access course lectures at their convenience over the Internet with the Video On Demand service. Lectures are also available in the CUTV Student Loan Centre in D299 Loeb. This service is intended as a backup source for missed lectures.

4th Floor Dunton Tower
Phone: 520-4055
Web site: www.carleton.ca/cutv
E-mail: cutv@carleton.ca

Computing and Communications Services

The CCS Service Desk provides IT assistance to students, staff and
faculty. Services include the following: assistance with accounts, help with remote access connections, conversion of files, remote desktop consulting, assistance with use of applications software in the student labs, printing to laser print stations, residence student computing support, and virus issues.

Walk-in help is available on the Fifth Floor of MacOdrum Library.

401 Robertson Hall
Phone: 520-3700
Web site: www.carleton.ca/ccs
E-mail: ccs_service_desk@carleton.ca

Educational Development Centre

Along with producing this handbook, the EDC also runs an orientation session for all TAs and ITAs in early September. Throughout the year, the EDC offers workshops specifically targeted at helping TAs develop their teaching skills. The EDC provides technical support for TAs dealing with WebCT and Scantron tests and holds technology-focused workshops. The EDC also produces the TA Talk newsletter, which features tips, articles and advice for TAs.

In addition, the EDC awards two certificates to Teaching Assistants. The first is the Certificate in Teaching Skills which can be obtained at the completion of 15 training hours, which can be accumulated through workshop participation, conference participation, and other teaching and learning activities.

The second certificate is the Graduate Teaching Certificate is intended for TAs who are interested in pursuing a career in academia and will examine the theoretical and practical application of teaching skills through modules, and peer observation. Participants will also be required to complete a Learning Portfolio, a mock syllabus and reflective papers about their experiences.

4th Floor Dunton Tower
Phone: 520-4433
Web site: www.carleton.ca/edc
E-mail: edc@carleton.ca

Instructional Media Services

IMS provides audio-visual and multimedia equipment for classroom instruction and offers training on electronic classrooms. IMS can also provide video and film programs in nearly all disciplines from a library
of 8,000 titles available for loan. They also have access to an additional 50,000 videotapes and films from Ontario universities.

Video and Film Services
Location: D299 Loeb Building
Phone: 520-3813

Media Technology Distribution
Location: D283 Loeb Building
Phone: 520-3815

Web site: www.carleton.ca/ims

MacOdrum Library

With a collection of over three million items on site and access to over 12,000 electronic journals and other digital materials, the library is an excellent resource for learning, teaching and research. Services range from traditional to the innovative – reference, classroom instruction and on-line “chat” help using instant messaging.

The library also includes Learning Commons, a space where students can do group work and interact while still close to the resources they require. Research assistance, as well as computing and learning support services will be available in the newly renovated spaces. Students will also be able to borrow a laptop and take advantage of wireless access throughout the building.

Circulation Phone: 520-2734
Information Desk Phone: 520-2735
Web site: www.library.carleton.ca
Non-academic Support and Resources

Bill Ellis Centre for Mature and Part-time Students (BECAMPS)

BECAMPS strives to assist non-traditional students and students who are returning to school after having been away for a period of time with services that include an Emergency Hotline service, March Break Day Care, childcare referrals, information exchanges, family events, and social gatherings. The Centre maintains a reference library, two computers with Internet access, a public telephone, and a space to relax. BECAMPS also offers various workshops and seminars.

314 University Centre
Phone: 520-2600 ext. 2754
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/becamps
E-mail: becamp@cusaonline.com

Career Services

The Career Development and Co-operative Education office is the on-campus centre for career development, employment preparation, and co-op opportunities for all Carleton students.

Our professionally trained staff members provide a comprehensive collection of career and employment services to equip you with the tools to make successful career choices, including:

- Career counselling through one-on-one and/or group sessions;
- Career decision-making and employment preparation workshops;
- Special CV writing and academic portfolio writing workshops exclusively for graduate students;
- A resource centre with a broad selection of educational and career planning material;
- Career fairs, employer panels, and special events;
- Résumé and cover letter reviews and mock interviews;
- Career mentoring with Carleton University alumni;
- Employer information sessions;
- Online job postings on myCareer.

Co-operative education options are available in more than 80 programs, streams, and concentrations at the undergraduate level, and in four programs at the graduate level. Co-op allows students to gain practical job experience and develop valuable skills on paid work terms related to their field of study. Graduate level co-op options are currently available in computer science, public administration, international affairs, and
political science.

Career and Resource Centre
401 Tory Building
Phone: 520-6611
Web site: www.carleton.ca/cdce
E-mail: career@carleton.ca

Co-op and Employer Centre
1400 Carleton Technology and Training Centre
Phone: 520-4331
Website: www.carleton.ca/cdce
E-mail: co-opprogram@carleton.ca

Carleton Disability Awareness Centre

This Centre represents students with both visible and non-visible disabilities, and promotes disability pride and greater integration for people with disabilities by hosting able sports and cultural activities. At the centre, students have a place that provides access to a computer with an Internet connection, a well-equipped resource library, and a comfortable lounge to relax in. The CDAC also has a tunnel cart program to help students with mobile disabilities get to and from class.

426 University Centre
Phone: 520-6618
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/cdac
E-mail: cdac@cusaonline.com

Colonel By Child Care Centre

The Colonel By Child Care Centre accepts children between the ages of six months and five years from the City of Ottawa’s waiting list (contact 613-248-3605 or www.afchildcare.on.ca). Priority is given to children of students, staff, and faculty. The centre is opened 12 months a year, Monday to Friday from eight a.m. to 5:45 p.m. except on statutory holidays and for two weeks at Christmas.

1125 Colonel By Drive
Phone: 520-2715
Web site: www.cbcc.ca
E-mail: cbccc@bellnet.ca
CUPE 4600

As a TA at Carleton University, you are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 4600. CUPE is strongly committed to improving the quality of life for the workers of Canada. CUPE 4600 offers training for department stewards and helps to mobilize members around issues that affect them as both students and TAs.

511A University Centre
Phone: 520-7482
Web site: 4600.cupe.ca
E-mail: sryan@ccs.carleton.ca

CUSA

The Carleton University Students’ Association, or CUSA, is a democratically elected student association, made up of the CUSA Council and the Executive. CUSA provides students with many essential services that are often not made available by the university or by private corporations. Services offered by CUSA include service centres, student benefits and programs such as Health and Dental Insurance plans, businesses such as a convenience store (University Centre Store), two bars (Oliver’s and Mike’s Place), a coffee shop (Rooster’s) and on-line services.

401 University Centre
Phone: 520-6688
Web site: www.cusaonline.com
E-mail: cusa@carleton.ca

Dental Clinic (Student Dental Services)

The Student Insurance Dental Plan is accepted at this on-campus dental clinic and is electronically submitted for fast returns and less cash outlay.

2100 Technology and Training Centre
Phone: 521-3368

Equity Services

Equity Services promotes equity and the accommodation of diversity through pro-active education, outreach and services. They also offer confidential, neutral, and impartial assistance and advice in the resolution of human rights complaints regarding harassment and discrimination. TAs can visit the Web site for a current listing of religious holidays, and are invited to attend education and training workshops that promote awareness, celebrate diversity, and address issues of discrimination and
harassment. Equity Services support and host events like guest speakers, Black History Month, Diversity Awareness Days, and International Women’s Day.

503 Robertson Hall
Phone: 520-5622
Web site: www.carleton.ca/equity

Food Centre

The Food Centre operates as an emergency food bank program for Carleton students in need of temporary assistance meeting their basic food requirements.

426I University Centre
Phone: 520-2265
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/foodcentre
E-mail: foodcentre@cusaonline.com

Foot Patrol

Foot Patrol strives to make Carleton’s campus a safer place by providing safe walks, walk-bys and patrols across campus and into the surrounding communities. Foot Patrol also educates and promotes awareness of safety issues and concerns in the Carleton community. You may stop a patrol team on campus (a male and a female wearing blue foot patrol jackets) and ask them to walk with you, or call 520-4066 to set up a safe walk or pre-arrange a pick-up.

128 D University Centre
Phone: 520-4066
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/footpatrol
E-mail: footpatrol@cusaonline.com

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Centre

The GLBTQ Centre is dedicated to raising awareness and visibility of queer issues within and beyond the University’s borders. The GLBTQ Centre hosts workshops addressing queer-phobias, class-talks, speaking engagements, special events, Web links, safer sex information, and active participation in community meetings. The GLBTQ Centre is also home to Canada’s largest university queer resource library which is open to all students, staff, and faculty. The Centre is a Safe Space to share opinions and meet new friends, regardless of sexual or gender identity. The GLBTQ also offers discussion groups, hate-crime reporting and follow-up service, confidential Peer Support in person or by phone,
referral services, queer-friendly housing listings for the Ottawa Valley, and listings of off-campus queer events. The GLBTQ also provides free safer sex kits, condoms and lubricants, and serves as a pick-up location for Ottawa’s queer newspaper Capital Xtra, and other leading national queer magazines free of charge.

427 University Centre  
Phone: 520-3723  
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/glb  
Facebook: Carleton GLBTQ on the Carleton Network  
E-mail: glbt@cusaonline.com

Graduate Students’ Association

The Graduate Students' Association (GSA), Local 78 of the Canadian Federation of Students, represents over 3,300 full and part-time graduate students at Carleton University. The GSA provides an array of services to graduate students at Carleton including: a health, dental and accident insurance plan; emergency and travel grants; academic advocacy; Mike’s Place (the grad pub); a monthly newsletter; email bulletins on grad events; binding, photocopy and fax services; a boardroom, and; the Grad Lounge (located outside the GSA offices). The GSA also ensures graduate students are represented within the university’s decision making structures and advocates for a financially accessible, high quality post-secondary education system.

600 University Centre  
Phone: 520-6616  
Web site: www.carleton.ca/gsa  
E-mail: gsa@carleton.ca

Health and Counselling Services

Health and Counselling Services provides medical and counselling services for students, staff and faculty by appointment. Walk-ins will be seen for emergencies. Health and Counselling can provide students with doctor’s notes and counselling documentation when academic work cannot be performed due to serious illness and incapacity, however, all academic decisions remain final within the academic department concerned.

2600 Technology and Training Centre  
Phone: 520-6674  
Web site: www.carleton.ca/health  
E-mail: hcs@carleton.ca
International Student Centre

The ISC is a student-based, volunteer organization that provides international students with a place of their own on campus. Students can go to the ISC to socialize, to study, to eat lunch or to read the many international publications available to them. In addition, the ISC publishes its own newsletter. The ISC organizes a variety of social activities, and administers the Student Guide program, which pair international students with another Carleton student for peer support.

302 University Centre
Phone: 520-2753
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/isc
E-mail: isc@cusaonline.com

Ombuds Services

An Ombudsperson is essentially a problem solver. Ombuds Services is a confidential and independent service that looks into matters when members of the university community do not believe they have been treated fairly. They help students find the best solutions to a wide variety of problems, both academic and non-academic in nature. Ombuds Services also produces “The Carleton Survival Guide,” which is available at Information Carleton, the Ombuds office and various locations across campus. It is also available on-line at the Ombuds Web site. If any of your students are experiencing difficulties, direct them to Ombuds Services, who will know the best way to deal with their problem.

511 University Centre
Phone: 520-6617
Web site: www.carleton.ca/ombuds
E-mail: ombuds@carleton.ca

OPIRG

OPIRG Carleton is the Ontario Public Interest Research Group on our campus. Their resource library includes a selection of periodicals, books and documents that are not readily available in the campus library. OPIRG-Carleton also engages in educational programming around social justice and environmental issues. Their resource centre is gradually being put on-line and may be accessed through CUSA’s database.

326 University Centre
Phone: 520-2757
Web site: www.opirg-carleton.org
E-mail: karen@opirg-carleton.org
Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities

The Paul Menton Centre is responsible for the coordination of academic accommodations and support services for students with documented disabilities including acquired brain injury, attention deficit/hyperactive disorder, blind/visual impairment, chronic medical condition, deaf/hard of hearing, learning disability, physical/mobility impairment and psychological/psychiatric disorders. They provide a variety of support services including test and exam accommodation assessment and approval, one-on-one learning support, note taking, adaptive equipment loans, sign language interpretation, and screening and referral for LD/ADHD assessment.

500 University Centre
Phone: 520-6608
TTY: 520-3937
Web site: www.carleton.ca/pmc
E-mail: pmc@carleton.ca

Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Hall (REC Hall)

This student-run hall provides peer support, advice and referrals for mediation on racial and cultural issues. Through the facilitation of constructive dialogue, the development of an extensive resource centre and programming of cultural events, REC Hall addresses the needs of Carleton’s multicultural student body.

316 University Centre
Phone: 613-520-2600 ext. 1621
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/rechall
E-mail: rechall@cusaonline.com

University Health Insurance Plan

If you are an international student attending Carleton University, you are not covered by the provincial health insurance plan, Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). As a result, most Ontario universities belong to a health insurance plan called the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP). This plan covers basic medical expenses such as doctor’s visits, hospital stays, X-rays. This plan does not cover dental costs and medication. Students are required to complete a UHIP application at the International Student Services Office (ISSO) in 501 University Centre in order for coverage to be activated, premiums to be adjusted or exemptions to be processed.

International Student Services Office
University Safety

The University Safety department is comprised of three service sections: Environmental Health and Safety, Parking Services and Patrol Services. Together these sections provide health and safety services to the university community.

203 Robertson Hall
Phone: 520-2600, ext. 3612
Fax: 520-2122
Web site: www.carleton.ca/safety
E-mail: university_safety@carleton.ca

Womyn's Centre

The Womyn's Centre strives to achieve a completely womyn-friendly environment and promotes the empowerment of womyn on campus and in the community. The Centre maintains a safe space where womyn and transgender individuals can go. It has an extensive resource centre open to all students. Throughout the year the Centre organizes events, brings in guest speakers, and provides outreach services for on and off-campus groups seeking workshops on a variety of issues.

308 University Centre
Phone: 520-2600, ext. 2712
Web site: www.cusaonline.com/womynscentre
E-mail: womyns_centre@cusaonline.com
Reference List


*Diversity Pedagogy*, on-line document available through Delta College, University Center, MI, USA. www.delta.edu/diversity/diversity-pedagogy-01.doc.


*Ideas to Encourage Student Retention*, from a faculty seminar at Jefferson Community College, Kentucky. Also available on-line at honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/studretn.htm


Maryellen Weimer, ed. *Four Types of Unethical Behavior to Avoid.* Teaching Professor, Volume 18, Number 4, April 2004.


Robert Lagueux, ed. *Becoming Teachers* (2004). New Haven, CT, USA: The McDougal Graduate Teaching Center, Yale University. Also available on-line at www.yale.edu/graduateschool/teaching/forms/Becoming_Teachers.pdf.


*Teaching at The Ohio State University – A Handbook* (2001). Columbus, OH, USA: Office of Faculty and TA Development, The Ohio State University. Also available on-line at ucat.osu.edu/Publications/TeachingHandbook.

*Teaching for Inclusion - Chapter 1: Your Diversity, the Academic Culture, and Teaching and Learning Styles* (2001). Chapel Hill, NC, USA: Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Also available on-line at ctl.unc.edu/tfi1.html.

*Teaching Strategies and Ideas for Activities*, on-line resources. Baltimore, MD, USA: Center for Talented Youth, Johns Hopkins University. Also available on-line at cty.jhu.edu/summerwork/teaching/teaching-strategies/teaching_strategies.html.
Teresa Dawson, ed. *Guide for Teaching Assistants at UTSC* (2004); as adapted from Martin Wall's *Guide for Teaching Assistants in Psychology*. Toronto, ON: Teaching and Learning Services, University of Toronto at Scarborough.


*The TA Guide*. Montreal, QC: Centre for Teaching and Learning Services, Concordia University. Also available on-line at teaching.concordia.ca/resources/TA.

*The Tomlinson Graduate Teaching Resources - Getting Started: the First Day of Class*. The Tomlinson University Science Teaching Project, McGill University. Also available on-line at www.tomlinsonproject.mcgill.ca/gsi.htm


TRACE Tips, as adapted from an article in the UW Chemistry Department's 1997 TA Handbook *Expectations; Tools for Teaching* by Barbara Gross Davis; and “Essays—Well Worth the Effort” by Craig Steele in *College Teaching*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 150-152. Waterloo, ON: Teaching Resource Office (TRACE), University of Waterloo. Also available on-line at cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching_resources/teaching_tips/Other/fast_and_equitable_grading.pdf.pdf.

