

# Western Guide to Working with Teaching Assistants



Erin E. Fraser

Kevin Morse

Natasha Patrito Hannon

Karyn C. Olsen

Joan Forder

Nanda Dimitrov

**2017**

Teaching Support Centre  
Western University

**Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Fraser, Erin, 1980 -, author

Western Guide to working with teaching assistants / Erin E. Fraser, Kevin Morse, Natasha Patrito Hannon, Karyn C. Olsen, Joan Forder, Nanda Dimitrov.

(Teaching Support Centre purple guides, ISSN 1916-6885)

Includes bibliographical references.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-0-7714-3137-1 (softcover).

ISBN 978-0-7714-3134-0 (PDF)

1. Teacher's assistants--Training of.
2. Mentoring in education.

I. Morse, Kevin, 1980-, author

II. Hannon, Natasha Patrito, 1980-, author

III. Olsen, Karyn, 1978-, author

IV. Forder, Joan, 1957-, author

V. Dimitrov, Nanda, 1973-, author

VI. University of Western Ontario. Teaching Support Centre, issuing body

VII. Title.

VIII. Series: Teaching Support Centre purple guides

LB1734.5F73 2017

371.14'124

C2017-90375905

C2017-903760-9

# Contributors

The authors would like express their appreciation for the colleagues at Western University and the Affiliated Colleges who shared their expertise and experience on working with graduate student instructors and contributed creative ways in which their departments help to mentor Teaching Assistants. Thank you to Michael Bartlett, Joyce Bruhn de Garavito, Robert N. Bryan, Aija Downing, Tricia Gray, Linda Howie, Andrew Johnson, Beth Locke, Francine MacKenzie, Jan Mathers, James Miller, Nig Narain, Wendy Pearson, John Siambanopoulos, Kim Solga, Sandy Zakaria-Holtslag and the Teaching Assistant Training Program (TATP) team.

Thank you to Aleksandra Zecevic and David Rodenhiser for their thoughtful comments on the draft version of this guide.

Available online at <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tsc-purple-guides/>

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	<a href="#">1</a>
Your Role as a TA Supervisor .....	<a href="#">1</a>
Teaching Assistantships as Preparation for Academic Careers.....	<a href="#">1</a>
Teaching as a Transferable Skill for Nonacademic Careers .....	<a href="#">2</a>
Essential TA Competencies .....	<a href="#">2</a>
Getting Started .....	<a href="#">3</a>
Initial Meeting with New TAs .....	<a href="#">3</a>
Assigning TA Duties .....	<a href="#">3</a>
Communicating with Your TAs .....	<a href="#">4</a>
Tips for Departments .....	<a href="#">6</a>
Working with TAs .....	<a href="#">9</a>
Laboratory TAs .....	<a href="#">9</a>
Tutorial TAs .....	<a href="#">10</a>
TA Office Hours .....	<a href="#">11</a>
Supporting International TAs .....	<a href="#">13</a>
Preparing TAs for Marking and Proctoring .....	<a href="#">15</a>
Marking Prep .....	<a href="#">15</a>
Proctoring Tips .....	<a href="#">18</a>
Supporting and Assessing TA Performance .....	<a href="#">21</a>
Your Role as a TA Mentor .....	<a href="#">21</a>
Helping Your TAs Grow as Teachers .....	<a href="#">22</a>
Feedback Strategies .....	<a href="#">23</a>
Summary .....	<a href="#">28</a>
Appendices .....	<a href="#">31</a>
A - Getting to Know Your TA .....	<a href="#">31</a>
B - Example TA Duties Specification Agreement .....	<a href="#">32</a>
C - Classroom Participation Strategies .....	<a href="#">35</a>
D - Classroom Observation Checklist .....	<a href="#">36</a>
E - Example Classroom Observation Form .....	<a href="#">37</a>
F - Example TA Evaluation .....	<a href="#">39</a>



# INTRODUCTION

Teaching Assistants are an important part of your teaching team. Well-prepared TAs can save you (the faculty member) time on marking, handle student questions, lecture when you are away at a conference, write great exam questions, and contribute to the development of a course with creative ideas and fresh perspectives. Great TAs can feel the “pulse of the class” and tell you whether students are following your lectures or feeling confused about new material. Inadequately-prepared TAs may give students inconsistent feedback while marking, slow the submission of final grades, or inadvertently communicate with students in ways that lead to increased grade appeals, greater student confusion, and lower course evaluations.

The goal of this guide is to provide you with strategies to support and mentor your TAs in order to save time, enhance the quality of teaching, and facilitate the development of the next generation of faculty. The examples and strategies in this guide are based on (1) best practices used by instructors here at Western, (2) research literature on teaching assistant development, and (3) mentoring and supervision practices used at universities across Canada and around the world.

## YOUR ROLE AS A TA SUPERVISOR

As a supervisor of one or more Teaching Assistants, you have the opportunity to explain what the TA role involves, set clear expectations, provide feedback, help them to work collaboratively with you and other TAs, and support them as they take on their teaching responsibilities. Your TAs are instructors-in-training who will rely on your mentorship and continue to use the skills they develop after graduation.

## TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS AS PREPARATION FOR ACADEMIC CAREERS

Teaching Assistantships help to prepare graduate students for academic careers. Many of your graduate students are likely to consider a career as a faculty member in academia (Nerad, Aanerud, & Cerny, 2004). For these students, a Teaching Assistantship is a way of preparing for life in academia. By supporting your TAs, you are helping prepare the next generation of faculty members and your own potential colleagues. While working with you, these future scholars learn how to balance teaching and research, provide fair evaluation of student assignments, and design effective courses. Through these interactions, they also learn how to supervise their own TAs and graduate students when they become faculty members (Nyquist & Spague, 1998).

## TEACHING AS A TRANSFERABLE SKILL FOR NONACADEMIC CAREERS

Teaching skills are also highly valued in positions outside of academia. Some TAs do not realize that a Teaching Assistantship is not just a job that pays the bills but also an important CV-building opportunity that develops facilitation skills (tutorials), provides experience in assessing performance (marking), and fosters leadership and interpersonal communication skills (while handling office hours or student complaints). These skills are highly valued in any career in which they supervise a team or lead meetings. Through teaching, TAs also enhance their ability to communicate ideas, issues and conclusions clearly, which constitutes one of the graduate degree-level outcomes graduate students are expected to achieve in Ontario (Council of Ontario Universities, 2010).

## ESSENTIAL TA COMPETENCIES

TA responsibilities vary greatly. Some TAs mark laboratory reports, others answer questions in help centres, run laboratory demonstrations, lead discussions, or teach a course independently. Even though the degree of engagement with undergraduates varies across these roles, there are several common TA competencies essential for graduate students who teach. Teaching Assistants should be able to:

- Exhibit respect for and understanding of students
- Present information clearly
- Use effective discussion and questioning techniques
- Engage students with the material through active learning
- Facilitate student learning by conveying feedback effectively
- Construct valid and reliable assessments of student learning
- Provide fair evaluations
- Communicate and manage appropriate expectations for achievement in the course
- Conduct themselves according to high standards of professionalism and ethics

Compiled from Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (2008), Prieto & Meyers (2001), and Schönwetter & Ellis (2009)

# GETTING STARTED

The scope of TA duties varies greatly from discipline to discipline so you might consider discussing with new TAs what you see as their role(s) within your course. Prior to the start of a course, you could meet with new TAs to go over course goals, outline how they can help you to achieve those goals, and lay out your expectations of their responsibilities. A carefully-planned initial meeting also provides you with an opportunity to get to know more about a TA's previous teaching experience (see [Appendix A](#) for a discussion guide) or area of research, which can help you to identify ways in which the TA may optimally contribute to the course.

## INITIAL MEETING WITH NEW TAs

**Get started!** When you meet your new TA or TAs for the first time, outline the course, describe how it fits into the undergraduate curriculum, and introduce the course learning outcomes. Discuss where you see them fitting into this scheme. Even if you do not expect your TAs to attend all of your lectures over the term, think about inviting them to the first class so that they can meet the undergraduate students.

**Addressing questions.** Consider asking your TAs if they have any concerns about teaching. Common questions from new TAs include:

- How do I establish credibility with my students?
- How do I deal with students who do not pay attention?
- How do I respond if I do not know the answer to a student question?
- How should I ask students to address me?

## ASSIGNING TA DUTIES

**The contract.** TAs at Western are members of PSAC Local 610, the TA Union, and are required to sign a contract. At the beginning of the term, your department will ask you and your TA to complete a Duties Specification Agreement which outlines the TA's basic duties (e.g., office hours, marking, proctoring, etc.) An example TA Duties Specification Agreement is available in [Appendix B](#). As the professor, you will have to decide how the hours for the semester should be allotted. Teaching Assistantships are normally 140 (full TA-ship) or 70 (half TA-ship) hours per term. Consider giving your TAs the chance to provide input on how many hours they think they will need in order to complete different tasks (e.g., grading papers). This will be helpful in determining how many hours to dedicate to each task in the contract.



- Encourage your TAs to document their hours. They may need coaching on how much time should be devoted to different tasks. For example, new TAs often spend much more time marking than experienced TAs. Suggest that your TAs get in touch with you promptly if they think a part of their assigned work (e.g., marking) will not be completed on time.
- Let your TAs know if they will be expected to work fewer hours earlier in the semester and devote greater amounts of time to marking final papers and/or exams at the end of term.
- Consider inviting your TAs to your first class so that they can introduce themselves to the students. You can also invite them to the last class of the semester to jointly acknowledge the students' successes over the term.
- If you plan to provide specific course material to your TAs (e.g., tutorial outlines, laboratory descriptions, marking schemes), let them know that they will not be expected to spend time revising or developing new materials.
- Share your policy for cell phone/device use in the classroom, and encourage your TAs to adopt a similar policy for their labs and tutorials.
- Share with TAs how they should respond to students in distress (e.g., medical emergency) during class, lab, or tutorial. Dialling 911 from any campus phone will connect the caller with on-campus Police and Emergency Response teams who are familiar with the campus layout and its buildings. Dialling 9-911 from a campus phone or 911 from a cell phone will connect the caller with City of London Police Services.
- Set a policy for personal emergencies and illness. May a TA cancel a tutorial or lab if they are sick or do they need to find a substitute TA? Can they reschedule?

## COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TAs

**What's your routine?** Meeting with your TA regularly (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly) can help to ensure that your course runs smoothly. These meetings allow you to discuss upcoming course content, assignments, marking issues, and student questions.

- Let your TA know the best way to contact you (e.g., office or cell phone or by e-mail) but be clear about your availability. For example, let them know that you will generally respond to e-mails within 48 hours, but that you do not regularly check e-mail on weekends.
- Describe the issues that a TA should bring to your attention. For example, TAs may encounter students in crisis, interpersonal conflicts between undergraduate students, and cases of plagiarism.

**TA Teams.** In some large classes, instructors are assigned two or more TAs. To maximize your efficiency as their supervisor, consider scheduling team (rather than individual) meetings and think about ways that you can have them work collaboratively in order to support one another and the undergraduate students.

- At the start of term, try to have all of your TAs meet each other. You might recommend that everyone exchange e-mail addresses, cell numbers, and/or office hour times and locations so that they can reach out to one another if they need help or have questions.
- If you plan to hold group TA meetings, consider asking one TA to take notes and share them with the rest of the group electronically so that everyone has a reference for what was discussed. If your course has a large number of TAs, you may wish to meet regularly with one TA selected from the group as a representative. This TA would then be responsible for communicating with the rest of the group.
- Consider establishing an OWL project site (through Western's Online Learning Management System) in order to connect TAs in your course(s) and start a resource archive. Resources you could share on the site include sample lesson plans, lab protocols, handouts, class activities, rubrics, templates, discipline-specific referencing guidelines, and policies (e.g., university policy on plagiarism). TAs will be able to review the material and implement resources effectively in their labs or tutorials, and develop their own materials to add to the archive over time.



## TIPS FOR DEPARTMENTS

**Orientation.** Welcome sessions at the beginning of the year can be very helpful for new TAs. At this point, departments can provide information on TA contracts, departmental and course policies, and university-wide training offered through Human Resources. Consider inviting representatives from on-campus organizations (e.g., Teaching Support Centre, Society of Graduate Studies, the TA Union (PSAC Local 610), Western Libraries, etc.) to introduce their services. Distributing material on discipline-specific teaching strategies and professional conduct can also be beneficial for TAs.

**Draw on past experience.** Orientation sessions also provide an opportunity for senior graduate students to offer advice to new TAs. Some departments have included case studies or role-plays in their orientation sessions to help TAs learn how to respond appropriately to grade complaints or to address requests for accommodation appropriately.

**Training.** Some departments schedule regular TA meetings over the year (either formal or informal) to address teaching-related issues within a larger group setting and share creative strategies for teaching a first year course. For example, TAs may be asked to attend department-run workshops on grading practices or laboratory safety. Several departments across campus now have Lead TAs who facilitate discipline-specific workshops on teaching for their peers.

**Assessment.** Some departments collect TA evaluations from course instructors and/or undergraduate students at the end of a semester/year. These performance reviews can help the department to decide the level of challenge a TA is able to manage in their role when the time comes to assign new Teaching Assistantships.





## Getting Started: Quick Checklist

### DOES YOUR TA HAVE...


- The course syllabus
- A completed and signed Duties Specification Agreement
- A copy of the course readings, textbook, or lab manual (and any other course-related materials and resources)
- Access to the OWL site for the course
- Keys to the classroom, laboratory and/or the classroom's audio-visual equipment
- Necessary safety equipment (e.g., lab coat, safety glasses)
- A list of key contact numbers (campus emergencies, student services, department office)

### DOES YOUR TA KNOW ABOUT...

**Required training** for all Western employees offered through the university's [Human Resources](#) website, including:

- Worker Health and Safety Awareness Training
- WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System)
- Safe Campus Community - Preventing Harassment, Violence, and Domestic Violence at Western
- Accessibility in Teaching
- Additional Required Training: Based on work/study area (e.g., Laboratory Safety)
- Recommended Training: Mental Health Interactive Learning Module
- OPTIONAL** training programs for graduate student offered through the [Teaching Support Centre](#) designed to enhance teaching skills.

## INSIDE LOOK: HOW IT'S DONE IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS



“In our department, graduate students often have their own course-heavy schedules. To help them better plan their time, I create a detailed schedule at the beginning of the term that highlights the weeks in which they will work more or less than the average ten hours. At a glance, TAs can see which weeks will be teaching intensive and then plan their time accordingly.” - *Anthropology*


“I provide my TAs with a digital course package that includes PowerPoint slides with notes for the lectures and labs. All TAs are encouraged to update and improve these teaching materials. This ensures that the hard work of past TAs is not lost and that future TAs will have resources from which to work and build.”  
- *Health Sciences*

“I distribute a handout electronically that describes typical TA duties and my expectations regarding TA-student and TA-supervisor interactions. Before the first tutorial, the team meets to discuss the handout and to assign specific TA roles. I then revise the handout, complete the Duties Agreements and re-distribute these documents.”  
- *Civil and Environmental Engineering*

“I send out a questionnaire every year that asks graduate students about their teaching experiences and course preferences. This information is used in combination with faculty requests to assign TAs to their courses. New and experienced TAs are usually assigned together so that the new TAs can learn from those who are already familiar with the class.” - *Biology*

“In September, the department distributes a handbook that focuses on TA-related responsibilities, information about marking, professional conduct, and teaching strategies. The department also holds several seminars during the year to address particular duties of TAs, including running small group discussions and marking papers.” - *History*

“I ask my TAs about their previous teaching experiences and what they want to get out of their current TA assignment. I reinforce the idea that their own graduate work is a priority and that establishing a balance between their work and their TA duties is important. My department tends to think of TAs as potential future faculty members and, therefore, mentor them as such.” - *Health Sciences*



# WORKING WITH TAs

As novice teachers, TAs experience concerns similar to those encountered by new faculty. They worry about their knowledge level, gaining respect from students, and balancing teaching duties with their graduate work (Svinicki, 1994). As an experienced instructor, you can support your TAs by modeling the approaches and techniques that have been successful in your classes. Their anxieties are reduced as they learn from you and develop their own concrete teaching methods and strategies.

## LABORATORY TAs

The hands-on nature of the laboratory makes these TA assignments unique. Great lab TAs are effective lecturers and demonstrators, and they serve as expert role models for the undergraduate students who are new to laboratory settings.

**Safety first!** To prepare TAs for unexpected situations involving laboratory safety, consider discussing common mishaps or case examples during one of your first meetings. For instance, ask TAs how they would respond if there was a chemical spill in the laboratory or if they noticed a natural gas leak.

**The grand tour.** A laboratory tour will help to familiarize TAs with the available equipment and the safety features of the room (e.g., exits, eyewash stations, and spill kits). This is also a good opportunity to clarify your expectations about laboratory cleanliness and organization which they can pass on to the undergraduate students.

**Practice makes perfect.** Ideally, your TAs will have the opportunity to complete the assigned class experiments themselves before instructing students. This gives them the opportunity to ask questions, develop a deeper understanding of the lesson's principles, and gain a better understanding of the logistics and timing.

- Consider sharing with your TAs the common mistakes that occur with particular experiments and the outcomes of these mistakes. TAs will be better able to help undergraduate students avoid such mistakes and, if something does go wrong, they are better equipped to deal with the problem.

**Great TAs take initiative and promote inquiry.** Encourage your TAs to circulate through the laboratory and assess student progress by initiating dialogue and asking questions. Ask your TAs to think about the types of questions they could use to promote independent problem solving rather than simply providing the students with the correct answers to questions.



## TUTORIAL TAs

Tutorials are interactive settings in which students ask questions, apply concepts, work through problems, and contribute to discussions. Effective tutorial TAs facilitate discussions, pose thoughtful questions, clarify concepts, and motivate students to engage with the course material.

**Make tutorials matter.** Discuss your expectations regarding tutorials with both your TAs and your undergraduate students, emphasizing attendance, participation, and assessment policies. TAs will be more informed as they carry out their duties and undergraduates will be more likely to attend when they see the link between lecture and tutorial.

- Consider checking in with your TAs to ensure that they understand how the theories presented in the lecture connect to the topics covered in the tutorial. Encourage your TAs to share learning outcomes at the outset and present clear summaries at appropriate times during class. Ask TAs to practice by articulating the key outcomes and ideas of that week's tutorial in your regular meetings.

**The name game.** Encourage your TAs to learn their students' names. Consider printing off a class list with student photos for the TA through the online Faculty/Staff Extranet. By learning names, the TAs can build rapport with their students and create a sense of community during class time.

**Ground rules.** Ask your TAs to implement a set of rules and expectations in their first tutorial in order to create a culture of open discussion (e.g., respect for one another's opinions and ideas, and appropriate actions/comments). With these ground rules in place, TAs will have the ability to better manage tutorials throughout the semester.

**Put fears to rest.** TAs worry that they will have to deal with unresponsive students in their tutorials. Ask your TAs to research strategies that can be used to encourage participation. Have them consider "what if" scenarios (e.g., what if no one has done the readings?) and determine what they could do address the situation and prevent it from happening again in the future (e.g., assigned homework questions, student-prepared questions, group discussion activities, and/or informal presentations).





## TA OFFICE HOURS

Office hours will likely be busier for TAs in some parts of the semester more than others. Let your TAs know that they may have to allocate extra time to office hours before major assignment due dates, midterms and final exams. You may also want to suggest alternative plans for making office hours productive in the event that students do not stop by (e.g., marking, reading course materials, answering course-related e-mails, updating the course OWL site, or responding to student posts in the course's online discussion forums).

**Getting organized.** Let TAs know that their office should be a safe and inviting space for students. Students are less likely to seek help if they feel intimidated.

- If there are a large number of students in your course and relatively few TAs, students may need to schedule visits to office hours in advance – TAs can manage these schedules using an online scheduling tool like Doodle.
- Ask your TAs to have helpful resource information available for students such as contact information for the [Writing Centre](#), [Learning Skills Services](#), or Academic Counselling (differs by faculty). Most TAs receive a comprehensive list of Campus Resources for TAs when they participate in the Teaching Assistant Training Program offered by the Teaching Support Centre.

**Talk it over.** If you schedule regular TA meetings, consider reviewing questions or concerns raised by students during office hours. Think about posting the answers to frequently asked, non-confidential questions on the course webpage.

- Ask your TAs to save all e-mail correspondence with undergraduate students for one year following the completion of the course. Handling any student grievances that may occur will be easier with a record of communication.
- Consider asking your TAs to share any communications or documentation about student grades with you for your own records.



## INSIDE LOOK: HOW IT'S DONE IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS

“I give my TAs a handout for every lab session that lists my expectations and the common mistakes that students will most likely make. I also require my TAs to attend lectures so that they know what was discussed in class and are familiar with the topic.”  
- *Faculty of Science*


“I give my TAs a copy of the course outline and a detailed week-by-week breakdown of the scheduled topics (complete with references to key pages in the textbook and discussion questions). My TAs also receive a written document detailing my expectations as well as providing practical advice on everything from dealing with difficult students to cleaning a whiteboard on which someone has written with permanent marker.”  
- *Women's Studies & Feminist Research*

“Throughout the term, the TA team meets once every two weeks to receive sample data, review the marking rubric, and discuss how to recognize common student mistakes in the lab. New TAs are required to do an abbreviated version of the lab and to complete sample calculations.”  
- *Chemistry Laboratory*

“Each term, I organize several off-campus meetings in order to develop a sense of community among my TAs. I find that when TAs feel like they are part of a social network, they communicate more with each other about their teaching strategies, and they are also more willing to help each other out.”  
- *Political Science*

“Some of the readings in my class are provocative and occasionally undergraduates have emotional reactions to them. Before my TAs lead sessions on certain topics, I meet with them to identify the feelings that students may experience and to strategize ways to respond and to support those students. My TAs can consult with me at any time and are welcome to refer students to me if they feel unable to resolve a situation.”  
- *Modern Languages and Literatures*

“Before the lab, the TA Coordinator prepares a set of objectives for that particular week and presents it to the team at a pre-lab meeting. Everyone's ideas about how to tackle these objectives are discussed, but ultimately, TAs are permitted to teach the objectives however they want.”  
- *Health Sciences*



## SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL TAs

International teaching assistants (ITAs) often bring a unique perspective to their roles as teaching assistants in Canada. This perspective can greatly enrich the learning experience of undergraduates. At the same time, teaching in a second language is a challenging task that is made more difficult when the expectations regarding the teacher's role are different from previous experience. ITAs may benefit from mentoring and additional preparation at the beginning of their TA assignment as they adapt to Canadian academic culture.

**Learning the ropes.** International graduate students may come from institutions where there is no equivalent of the teaching assistant role. These students may therefore benefit from an overview of what TAs do and how they can support undergraduate learning.

- Encourage new TAs to sit in on the classes of experienced TAs in the department. Departments may choose to assign new ITAs in teams where they can be mentored by senior TAs.
- If possible, ask new ITAs to sit in on an undergraduate course before they are assigned to teach it. This will allow them to become familiar with the material and the language of asking questions, giving feedback, and describing assignments in the course.

**A new approach.** Many ITAs come from "teacher-centered" educational systems where the master teacher passes on core content to the students through lecture (Biggs & Watkins, 2001). International students may need extra encouragement to try out learner-centered approaches in their tutorials and incorporate active learning activities in their teaching. Without this encouragement, they may not think to invite students to ask questions or include discussions in class. ITAs have a chance to practice these learner-centered approaches to teaching in a number of programs offered by the Teaching Support Centre.

**Building great working relationships with ITAs.** Many cultural differences will impact the way you communicate with your international TAs about teaching. For an overview of strategies to bridge cultural differences in your daily interactions and to collaborate successfully with ITAs, please refer to the [Western Guide to Mentoring Graduate Students Across Cultures](#).



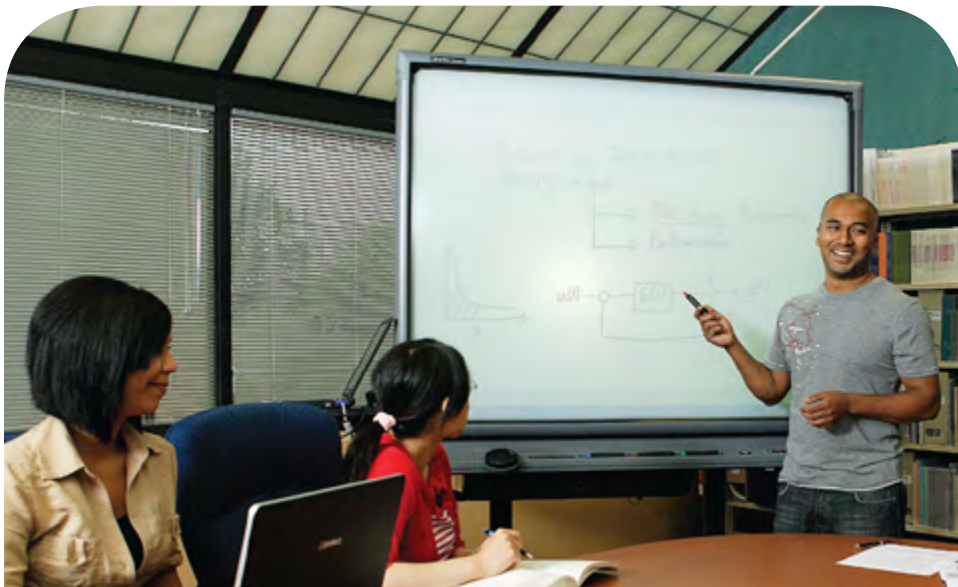
## RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL TAs

Western offers one of the most comprehensive set of programs in Canada to help International TAs transition to teaching and learning at a Canadian university.

The [Western Certificate in Academic and Professional Communication](#) is designed to enhance the academic and professional communication skills of International graduate students and to help them make a successful transition to Canadian academia. International students will learn about cultural differences in patterns of communication and acquire strategies to maintain positive interactions with supervisors, peers, and students. Programs that contribute towards the certificate include most of the Teaching Support Centre's [International TA workshops](#):

- Communication in the Canadian Classroom
- Teaching in the Canadian Classroom
- The Language of Teaching in STEM Disciplines
- The Language of Advanced Discussions
- The Language of Conference Presentations
- The Language of Research Presentations
- The Language of Difficult Conversations
- The Language of Job Interviews
- Academic and Professional Communication Series

ITAs can begin preparing for their teaching roles even before they arrive on campus by using the Teaching Support Centre's e-manual: [Communication Strategies for International Graduate Students: Surviving and Thriving in Canadian Academia](#). New students can access the manual online from anywhere in the world using their Western username and password. Contact [tsc@uwo.ca](mailto:tsc@uwo.ca) to arrange access.



# PREPARING TAs FOR MARKING AND PROCTORING

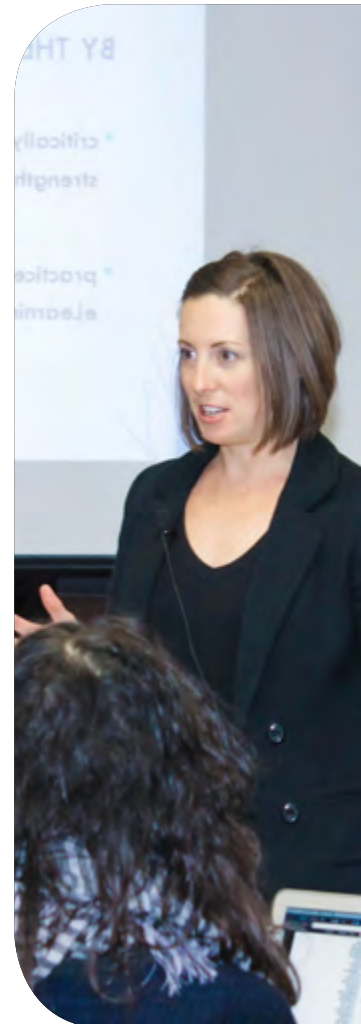
Assessing student work and assigning marks can be a daunting responsibility for new graduate students. Clearly articulated expectations can dramatically increase your TA's accuracy and efficiency at marking.

## MARKING PREP

To ensure that grades are awarded fairly and consistently, consider how you can prepare your TAs ahead of time, particularly if you will be working with more than one TA.

**Logistics.** Even experienced TAs appreciate guidance on marking assignments and exams. Let your TA know the kinds of feedback you expect to see on student papers and exams (e.g., checkmarks, constructive comments, correct answers, and/or spelling and grammar edits).

- Do you have marking style preferences? For example, let your TAs know if you would like them to grade in specific ways (e.g., marking the first question on all the exams before moving on to the second question, writing with pencil rather than pen, or avoiding red pens).
- Consider asking your TAs to mark a sample assignment or exam and then review the process with them. You could share the level of detail you expect in written feedback, ideas for grading fairly and consistently, and where you anticipate students will struggle.
- If possible, share with your TAs an estimate of how long each assignment or exam will take to mark and how many they will be expected to grade. Let them know how quickly you would like to have the marking completed (e.g., one week).
- What format do you prefer for documenting student grades? (e.g., a printed form that TAs fill in, or an Excel spreadsheet). If you grant your TAs access to the course site (OWL), they can enter the marks there as well. Consider whether or not you will ask TAs to keep back-up copies of student grades in case the originals are lost or damaged.
- Let your TAs know what to do if they suspect that an assignment has been plagiarized.



**Rubrics.** Consider how a rubric, answer key, or a written breakdown of how marks should be assigned and deducted could improve your TAs' marking consistency. You could go over the goals of the assignment with your TA before they begin marking, or mark the first few papers with your TA in order to communicate your expectations for that assignment. You could also share previous papers that you considered excellent, average, or failing so that your TAs have typical examples to reference. You can also find helpful resources for designing rubrics and some great examples by searching online.

- o [Grading and Performance Rubrics](#), Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation (2015), Carnegie Mellon University;
  - o [Rubrics: Useful Assessment Tools](#), Centre for Teaching Excellence (n.d.), University of Waterloo;
  - o [Rubrics for Assessment](#), School of Education (2016), University of Wisconsin-Stout;
  - o [Assessment](#), Centre for Teaching, Learning and Academic Excellence (2016), Georgian College; and
  - o [Creating and Using Rubrics](#), Assessment Office (2013), University of Hawaii, Manoa.
- Ask your TAs to share with you the assignments or exams that received the highest and lowest grades. This will give you an idea of how they have allotted marks and the fairness of the marking scheme.
  - Consider describing expectations and detailed criteria of what will be graded in the course syllabus. You could also distribute a version of the marking scheme to the undergraduate students in your course so that the expectations for a particular assignment are clear. TAs will then be able to rely on the syllabus/ scheme when speaking to students during office hours, during the grading process itself, and when taking up the assignment after it is returned to students.

**Making the grade.** Providing guidance on grading expectations can be very useful as some TAs will have stricter grading standards than others. In many educational systems, an A is only awarded above 90%, while at Western, an A is awarded at 80%.

- Some International TAs have worked in educational systems where grades are distributed on a 1-6 or 1-10 scale, so it will take them time and practice to get used to marking on a 100-point scale.
- Graduate students from many parts of the world come from educational systems where the Canadian first or second year university curriculum in math, calculus, or physics is covered in high school. Reviewing first year expectations and grading standards will help students create appropriate expectations for student performance.

**Many hands.** Marking assignments and exams as a group promotes efficiency and consistency. If you have more than one TA, you may wish to schedule team marking meetings which would allow your TAs to consult with one another during the marking process. Some instructors join their TAs when marking in order to answer any questions that arise and to ensure fair grades.

**Participation marks.** Assigning marks for participation can feel subjective to TAs. Consider discussing with your TAs the aspects of student engagement that they should be assessing (e.g., contributing to discussions, completing homework assignments or other tasks). When and how often should TAs assign participation marks? See [Appendix C](#) for strategies for promoting student participation.

**Communicating marks.** Let your TAs know that there are university policies in place that regulate returning assignments and communication of grades to students. Guidelines for protecting student personal information can be found in the Information and Privacy section of the [University Secretariat](#) website.

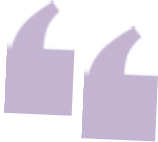
- OWL is the most secure route for communicating grades to students. TAs should not post grades in public or e-mail grades to students. Assignments can be left with a departmental administrator (if this is a typical practice in your department) but should not be left unattended for students to pick up.

**Adjusting grades.** Decide if your TAs will have the latitude to make minor grade adjustments on assignments or exams, and decide when they should direct student concerns about grades to you.

- Consider asking your TAs to discuss an assignment or exam in a subsequent class. Sharing high-quality example answers with the students illustrates how their individual responses could have been better and may help to reduce the number of grade adjustment requests.
- Supporting your TAs' marking decisions helps to cement their authority in the eyes of the students. However, in situations where you decide to adjust a student's mark, consider discussing your decision with the TA in order to explain your rationale, and have your TA modify his/her marking practices in the future. A guide to handling final grade appeals can be found in the Appeals and Discipline section of the [University Secretariat](#) website. Formal appeals involve the course instructor, Department Chair, and Faculty Dean.



## INSIDE LOOK: HOW IT'S DONE IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS




“At the beginning of the term, each of my TAs receive a course binder that includes forms for tracking marks, participation, and attendance. TAs fill in the forms over the semester and then return the binders to me at the end of their contract, giving me the information I need to deal with any future student grievances.” - *Political Science*

“When the first group of assignments are collected, I go over a few of them with my TA using a marking rubric. I also check the quality of the TAs' marking before the assignments are returned to the students, and ask the TA to make changes if necessary.” - *Biology*

“Before we start marking class assignments, the TAs each mark a few assignments from the previous year's class and then get together and compare marks. This helps to clear up any misunderstandings TAs might have about the grading scheme and ensures consistency.” - *Health Sciences*

“When I give my TA marking responsibilities, I try to provide guidance and feedback. When 800 to 1300 copies of the same exam are turned in, I discuss the marking scheme with my fellow instructors and we work as a group with our multiple TAs in order to finish the job together.” - *Mathematics*



## PROCTORING TIPS

To help prepare your TAs for their duties as proctors, consider setting a meeting prior to an exam to provide information, discuss logistics, and share advice on handling common situations. You can ask your proctors to read over the Administration of Examinations policy found in the Academic Policies section of the University Secretariat website. Many of the key points are summarized here:

**Before the exam.** If you are not able to act as Chief Proctor, consider designating an experienced TA who can take on this leadership role. If the group of students taking the exam is large (or in multiple rooms), you may wish to assign several lead proctors to manage any issues that arise. They can also serve as models and resources for the less-experienced proctors.

- Final exams are scheduled by the Office of the Registrar in various buildings across campus, and may take place in the evening or on weekends. Remember

to let your proctors know where the exam will take place and the time that you would like them to arrive at the room.

- It is sometimes difficult for TAs to judge the kinds of questions from students that are okay to answer during an exam. Consider discussing with your proctors the types of questions that you anticipate students may ask in advance. If possible, provide examples of appropriate questions (e.g., wording clarifications) and inappropriate questions (e.g., content-related queries).

**During the exam.** Describe to your proctors how you expect exam booklets to be laid out in the classroom, especially if there are multiple versions of the same exam to be distributed. Let them know if you would prefer that they wait until students are seated before booklets are handed out, or if you would like them to collect any unused booklets before the exam finishes.

- Let the proctors know about any materials students are permitted to have at their desks such as calculators or study sheets. Typically, students store their personal belongings at the front or side of the room. To minimize disruptions during the exam, ask your proctors to remind students to turn off their cell phones.
- Ensure that your proctors know the start and finish times for the exam. Once the exam starts, an assigned proctor could provide time cues to the students visually and/or verbally as the exam progresses.
- A proctor asks each student to sign a nominal roll form (attendance sheet) and checks students' names against university student ID cards as each student signs.
- If a group of TAs are working as proctors for one exam, consider asking one of them to circulate with this form through the room.
- University policy suggests that students remain in the exam room during the first thirty or last fifteen minutes of an exam. Students arriving more than thirty minutes after the start of an exam are typically not permitted to complete the exam. It is the student's responsibility to identify themselves to the Chief Proctor and get in touch with the Associate Dean (Academic) as soon as possible.
- Proctors who suspect cheating during an exam should notify you or the Chief Proctor, who will document the incident in writing (e.g., the behaviours observed, student(s) involved, seating location, and timing of the incident). The name and seating location of students in the immediate vicinity should also be noted. At the conclusion of the exam, the incident should be reported to the Associate Dean (Academic).



- Students are permitted to use the washroom during an exam as long as they are accompanied by a proctor. University policy requires the presence of a female and male proctor at every exam in case students need to use the washroom.

**Emergencies.** How will members of your proctoring team reach one another in the event of an emergency during the exam? Consider exchanging cell numbers with your proctors prior to the exam in case an unexpected situation arises.

- If a student becomes ill during an exam, proctors should take whatever action necessary to ensure that the student receives proper medical attention. If necessary, call 911. The Chief Proctor is responsible for recording the details of the incident on the student's exam booklet and reporting it to the Associate Dean (Academic).
- If there is a fire alarm, loss of power, or other emergency before the exam, the Chief Proctor makes the decision to delay or cancel the exam. In the event that a delay exceeds one hour, the exam may be cancelled and a make-up exam scheduled.



# SUPPORTING AND ASSESSING TA PERFORMANCE

Encourage your TAs to regard every course they assist with as a course that they may teach someday as a future faculty member. When you provide teaching tools and opportunities, TAs improve their skill set and are better at their jobs. In addition, good teaching experiences help TAs to build curriculum vitae that set them apart from their peers.

## YOUR ROLE AS A TA MENTOR

Consider expanding the focus of your meetings with TAs to include strategies for teaching effectively. Topics you may wish to cover include dealing with sensitive subjects or conflict situations, active learning strategies, effective questioning techniques, technology in the classroom, providing constructive feedback, motivating students, and supporting ESL learners.

- Consider giving your TAs a glimpse of what goes on “behind the curtain” before you walk into a lecture. Talk to them about why and how you chose particular learning activities, why you included or left out certain topics from a course, and how you designed assessments.
  - Encourage your TAs to take notes on how material is presented in class (e.g., what questions are posed, and how discussions are managed). They might find it useful to record reflections on what content is important to include in a lesson and strategies on how to teach particular concepts or units.
- If you are working with a team of TAs, consider having each TA facilitate a discussion about a relevant teaching topic as a component of your regular meeting agenda. Experienced TAs can share successful teaching activities that they have used in the past and provide suggestions for resolving any course-related challenges or issues (e.g., running close reading tutorials in English, leading labs effectively in Engineering, supporting writing skill development in History courses, etc.)



## HELPING YOUR TAs GROW AS TEACHERS

Think about ways in which you can help TAs develop their teaching abilities.

Can you encourage your TAs to develop exam questions? Are there opportunities to design (or redesign) a laboratory experiment or assignment, or create an instructional module for online learning? Consider inviting your TA to give a short guest lecture in class. For example, TAs who facilitate small-sized tutorials may appreciate the opportunity to give one 20- to 30-minute lecture to the larger class as a whole. This can provide a valuable presentation and public speaking experience for the TA. Remember to work the preparation and lecture time into the TA's duties specification letter, and provide advice for successfully working with students in your class.

**The [Western Certificate in University Teaching and Learning](#).** The goal of this comprehensive professional development opportunity offered by the Teaching Support Centre is to enhance the quality of graduate student teaching at Western across disciplines. The skills gained while completing the Certificate benefit graduate students seeking future faculty positions and are also valued by employers in non-academic fields. In order to receive the Certificate, program participants complete ~40 hours of training on effective teaching, including practice-teaching sessions with feedback. They also prepare 1) a teaching dossier and 2) a course syllabus or a research proposal for a project on the scholarship of teaching and learning.

- In the fall and winter semesters, graduate students can observe highly-rated and innovative instructors engaging with their students, course material, and discipline in the classroom through the Teaching Support Centre's [Teaching Master Classes Program](#). Graduate students join an undergraduate class for one session and then meet with the instructor to discuss the teaching strategies employed in the classroom.

**[Teaching Portfolio guidelines](#).** Encourage your TAs to document their teaching and start a teaching portfolio. This record will be helpful to them if they choose to apply for teaching positions later on in their careers. The Teaching Support Centre offers also face-to-face portfolio design workshops at least once a year. Guidelines are available on the Teaching Support Centre's website.

**[GradPath website](#).** This website lists a wide-ranging suite of programs offered by the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Teaching Support Centre, Writing Support Centre, and Student Success Centre that provide graduate students with the knowledge, skills, and mentoring they need to succeed at each stage of the graduate journey, from teaching and career development to thesis writing and networking at academic conferences.

## WHAT DOES OUR RESEARCH SAY?

You may be concerned that your TAs are busy enough and you are not sure that participation in workshops will make a significant difference. Research conducted at Western on the outcomes of TA development programs shows that participation in short, intensive courses (like the Teaching Assistant Training Program and Teaching in the Canadian Classroom) has many positive outcomes including:

- Increased use of effective teaching behaviours (e.g., organization of teaching materials, and interactions with learners)
- Reduced anxiety about speaking in front of a class
- Increased confidence in personal ability to succeed at teaching (self-efficacy)

In addition, program graduates tend to use more student-focused and inquiry-based approaches to teaching and become more reflective teachers who continue to seek student feedback and continually work to improve the classroom experience.

To learn more about these research initiatives, see Dawson, Dimitrov, Meadows, & Olsen (2013); Dimitrov, Meadows, Kustra, Ackerson, Prada, Baker, Boulos, McIntyre, & Potter (2013); Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, & Meadows (2014); Meadows, Olsen, Dimitrov, & Dawson (2015).

## FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

Providing TAs with feedback on their teaching enhances their skill set and fosters a greater understanding of student learning. TAs can benefit from your feedback both during and at the end of term. Peer TAs and undergraduate students can also provide valuable additional feedback. Ideally, such evaluations are helpful, anonymous, confidential, and non-threatening, and they can be conducted formally or informally.

**Checking-in.** Regular check-ins with your TAs provide opportunities for you to talk about course-related concerns or issues, discuss time-management strategies, and give feedback on TA performance.

- Consider sharing a list of open-ended questions with your TAs in person or electronically. Ask the TAs to provide responses in a return e-mail or bring their reflections to one of your regularly scheduled meetings. Some questions might be tailored to the beginning, middle or end of the semester. For example:
  - What support do you need to do your job well?
  - What has been the most challenging aspect of your TAship so far?

- Ask your TAs to develop teaching goals for each semester. Goals can be as simple as clearly articulating the outcomes of the lesson before class begins, or they can be more complex, such as developing a guest lecture or creating marking rubrics for assignments and exams.
- TAs can also provide you with useful feedback on the course. If you are interested in hearing your TAs' opinions, establish opportunities to elicit that feedback from them in your regularly scheduled meetings.

**Observe and guide.** If your TAs are responsible for giving lectures, laboratory sessions, or tutorials, you could consider sitting in on a class to assess your TAs' strengths and weaknesses. Be sure to share the positive aspects of what you observed with a TA following an observation. In addition, supplying one or two concrete suggestions for improvement will be easier for a TA to absorb and implement than a lengthy list of criticisms.

- Consider planning an observation session early in the semester (i.e., around weeks 3-5, or earlier if you feel that the TA needs a lot of support). By scheduling the observation early on, the TA will have more time to respond to your feedback and implement new strategies in the classroom before the semester finishes. You may wish to revisit the classroom later in the semester to assess the impact of those changes. Be sure to give TAs advance notice before sitting in on their classes, as evaluations without warning can be stressful.
- During an observation session, prepare feedback that is descriptive, specific, and focused on behaviours, rather than evaluative, general, and centered on personal traits (Black & Kaplan, 1998). You may prefer to take notes and/or use some combination of a checklist or rating scale to compile observations.

See [Appendix D](#) for a Three-step Checklist on Classroom Observations, and [Appendix E](#) for an example Classroom Observation Feedback Form.





**Peer Review.** Feedback from peers can also be a valuable source of information for TAs. If you supervise a large team of TAs, you may not be able to observe all of your TAs in the classroom in order to provide feedback. Instead, consider asking your TAs to exchange classroom visits with one another, giving them the opportunity to see how different people approach teaching duties and interact with students. Consider sharing the example Classroom Observation Feedback Form in [Appendix E](#) with your TA team.

- You may wish to facilitate a meeting with your TA team in order to schedule an exchange of classroom visits. It is important to establish goals and provide the TAs with guidelines for providing effective feedback.
- If you only have one TA, you can encourage the TA to participate in the Teaching Support Centre's [Teaching Mentor Program](#) and exchange classroom visits with TAs from other disciplines. Group members then participate in a feedback session to exchange insights and suggestions with one another.

## EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK EXAMPLES

**TUTORIAL TA:** "I thought the way you incorporated a debate into the class was very useful in helping the students see both sides of the issue. You may want to consider expanding your introduction and the description of what you expect students to do during the debate. Commenting throughout the debate will help to keep students focused and on time."

**MARKING TA:** "I am pleased with the effort you put into providing written feedback on students' assignments. I know that written feedback can be time consuming and it is important to me that you use your time as efficiently as possible. Rather than editing an entire assignment, it is okay to indicate on just one page that spelling corrections are needed throughout the paper."

**LABORATORY TA:** "I noticed that you have a great rapport with your students and that they seem comfortable working with you in the lab. If you take a few more minutes at the start of the lab to go over the procedures in greater detail, there will be fewer follow-up clarification questions and you will be able to move more freely around the lab to help students' progress."

**Formative Student Feedback.** Evaluations from undergraduate students are also useful because they come from a different viewpoint than that of the supervising instructor or peer TA. Angelo and Cross (1993) outline a number of in-class strategies that TAs can use to elicit feedback from their students during the semester. For example, TAs can ask their students to write a Minute Paper at the end of a class during which they answer one or more short questions (e.g., What was the purpose of the lesson? or Was there anything that you did not understand from today's lecture?). Through these exercises, TAs get immediate feedback on the success of their lessons.

- "Stop, Start, Continue" is another activity that encourages student feedback. Ask the TA to invite the students to anonymously answer the following questions: What is the TA currently doing that is not working (what should he/she STOP doing)? What beneficial things could the TA be doing (what should he/she START doing)? What is the TA currently doing well (what should he/she CONTINUE doing)?
- **An example TA Evaluation Survey is provided in [Appendix F](#).** Consider gathering TA evaluations in the middle of the term, rather than just at the end of the course. Mid-semester evaluations can be helpful guides for TAs, who can use the feedback to modify their teaching strategies. If you also plan to collect TA evaluations at the end of a term, think about choosing a time in the second- or third-last class when attendance will be high in order to get the best sense of the TAs' interactions with the students.


**Summative Feedback.** Teaching evaluations are an important component of a TA's teaching dossier because they serve as evidence of teaching effectiveness. In addition, teaching evaluations may help the department decide the level of challenge a TA is able to manage in their role when the time comes to assign new Teaching Assistantships.

- Consider the following questions as a guide for providing your TA with an effective review:
  - What were your TA's greatest strengths?
  - How did you see your TA grow over the term/year?
  - What areas do you think your TA could improve in?
  - What actions would you suggest that your TA take to develop his/her teaching abilities?

**Prize-winning TAs.** Awarding excellence in teaching will encourage quality efforts from TAs. Graduate Student Teaching Awards are given out annually by the Society of Graduate Studies and Graduate TA Union. TA awards have also been offered in some Science, Social Science, and Engineering departments. You can check to see if internal teaching awards are offered in your department or at the Faculty level.

- Consider mentioning relevant TA awards to your undergraduate students in class so that they are aware of the nomination procedures. Share how nominations and awards can have a positive impact on a TA's career.
- Post a link to the Society of Graduate Studies [awards page](#) in your OWL site for the course. Undergraduate students will then have an easier time finding the information and submitting nominations.


## INSIDE LOOK: HOW IT'S DONE IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS



“Midway through the term, I send out a TA evaluation form to all my TAs and encourage them to distribute it to their students. The purpose of this midterm feedback is to provide the TAs with suggestions for improving their teaching during the remainder of the course. The TAs are not required to submit the results of this feedback to me or the department. I also visit each class at the end of the term and write a report on the TAs' teaching style. These reports are submitted to the department but their primary purpose is to provide TAs with feedback on their teaching.” - *Modern Languages and Literatures*

“I give my TAs the option of lecturing for one class, requiring that they teach a subject from the course syllabus and textbook... I also encourage them to include examples relevant to their graduate research. After the lecture, we informally discuss what aspects of the class were particularly effective and the ways in which the lesson could be improved in the future.” - *Anthropology*

“I meet with my TA team to discuss an assignment prior to distributing it to the undergraduate students in my first year course. The TAs often have excellent suggestions for how the assignment can be “tweaked,” and sometimes I revise the assignment based on these suggestions before I give it to the students.” - *Computer Science*



# SUMMARY

Our hope is that this Purple Guide has saved you time as an instructor! When you communicate and work effectively with your TAs, your courses are likely to run more smoothly, and you will be confident in their abilities to teach and interact professionally with students. The intention has been to provide strategies that will support you from that initial meeting with your TA, to guiding them through their teaching responsibilities, to assessing and enhancing their performance as junior instructors. By bringing together supervision approaches used at other universities, research on training teaching assistants, and reliable practices used by faculty members here at Western, we hope that this guide remains a helpful resource to you every time you teach.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

We want to finish this guide with some parting thoughts from Western TAs themselves. We surveyed graduate students from across disciplines to learn how they believe their course instructors successfully prepared them for their teaching duties. The results align well with the suggestions offered throughout the guide for effectively communicating with and supporting TAs. Here is what they had to say:

- Western TAs appreciate having their responsibilities made explicit at the beginning of the semester.
- They value regular meetings with course supervisors and with peer TAs.
- They find specific instructions on how to mark assignments and exams very useful.

In addition, the TAs saw their role as collaborative, and shared ways that they contributed to courses:

- They enjoy opportunities to develop their own lessons for tutorials and labs, and they welcome the option to take on new and different teaching responsibilities.
- Western TAs also indicated that recognition from course supervisors for their efforts as TAs was both motivating and meaningful.

We hope that this guide has inspired you to think about the ways you can collaborate with your TAs and rely on their contributions to your courses. Your TAs may be planning on careers in academia or beyond, but either way, the communication, facilitation, and interpersonal skills they develop while working with you and your students will be invaluable to their future successes.

# References

- Assessment Office (2013, December 18). Creating and using rubrics. Retrieved from: <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment/howto/rubrics.htm>.
- Angelo, T.A., & Cross, K.P. (1993). Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Watkins, D. A., & Biggs, J. B. (Eds.). (2001). Teaching the Chinese learner: Psychological and pedagogical perspectives. Hong Kong University Press.
- Black, B., & Kaplan, M. (1998). Evaluating TAs' teaching. In M. Marincovich, J. Prostko, & F. Stout (Eds.), The professional development of graduate teaching assistants (pp. 213-234). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.
- Canadian Association of Graduate Studies. (2008). Professional skills development for graduate students. Retrieved from <http://www.cags.ca/publications.php>.
- Centre for Teaching, Learning and Academic Excellence (2016). Assessment. Retrieved from: <http://www.georgiancollege.ca/academics/centre-for-teaching-learning/assessment/>.
- Centre for Teaching Excellence (n.d.). Rubrics: Useful assessment tools. Retrieved from: <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/assessing-student-work/grading-and-feedback/rubrics-useful-assessment-tools>.
- Council of Ontario Universities (2010). A guide to learning outcomes, degree level expectations and the quality assurance process in Ontario: Ensuring the value of university degrees in Ontario [pdf]. Retrieved from: <http://cou.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/COU-Ensuring-the-Value-of-University-Degrees-in-Ontario-November-2011.pdf>.
- Dawson, D. L., Dimitrov, N., Meadows, K. N., & Olsen, K. (2013). Bridging the Gap: The impact of the 'Teaching in the Canadian Classroom' program on the teaching effectiveness of international teaching assistants. Retrieved from: [http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/iTas\\_eng.pdf](http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/iTas_eng.pdf).
- Dimitrov, N., Meadows, K., Kustra, E., Ackerson, T., Prada, L., Baker, N., Boulos, P., McIntyre, G., Potter M.K. (2013). Assessing graduate teaching development programs for impact on future faculty. Retrieved from: <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Formatted%20Windsor-Western.pdf>.
- Dimitrov, N., Dawson, D.L., Olsen, K.C., & Meadows, K.N. (2014). Developing the intercultural competence of graduate students. Canadian Journal of Higher Education 44(3), 86-103.
- Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation (2015). Grading and performance rubrics. Retrieved from: <http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/rubrics.html>.
- Graduate Teaching Assistants Collective Agreement [pdf]. (2016, April 19). Retrieved from: <http://www.pfac610.ca/index.php/documents-forms>.

- Meadows, K.N., Olsen, K.C., Dimitrov, N., & Dawson, D.L. (2015). Evaluating the differential impact of teaching assistant training programs on international graduate student teaching. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 45(3), 34-55.
- Murray, H. G. (1983). Low-inference classroom teaching behaviors and student ratings of college teaching effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75(1), 138-149.
- Nerad, M., R. Aanerud, & Cerny, J. (2004). So you want to become a professor! In D.H. Wulff and A.E. Austin (Eds.), *Paths to the professoriate: strategies for enriching the preparation of future faculty* (pp. 137-158). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Nyquist, J. D., & Sprague, J. (1998). Thinking developmentally about TAs. In M. Marincovich, J. Prostco, & F. Stout (Eds.), *The professional development of graduate teaching assistants* (pp. 61-88). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.
- Nyquist, J. D., & Wulff, D. H. (1996). Recognizing and adapting to stages of graduate teaching assistants' and graduate research assistants' development. In *Working effectively with graduate assistants* (pp. 18-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Prieto, L.R., & Meyers, S.A. (Eds.). (2001). *The teaching assistant training handbook: How to prepare TAs for their responsibilities*. Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.
- Schönwetter, D.J., & Ellis, D. (2009, October). Taking stock: Contemplating North American GSPD programs and developers. Paper presented at the 34th annual meeting of the Professional Organizational Development (POD) Conference, Houston, TX.
- School of Education (2016). Rubrics for assessment. Retrieved from: <http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/rubrics.cfm>.
- Svinicki, M. (1994). *The teaching assistant: A preparation for multiple roles* (9th ed). In W. J. McKeachie (Ed.), *Teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers* (pp. 239-249). Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.

# Appendix A

## GETTING TO KNOW YOUR TA: DISCUSSING PREVIOUS TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Modified from Nyquist & Wulff (1996), the following questions can be used as a starting point for discussing teaching with new TAs. Given that TAs come from a variety of backgrounds with different sets of skills, the answers they provide may help you decide how to assign teaching duties in the upcoming term.

- Describe your previous experience teaching at university.
  - What teaching positions have you held? (e.g., TA, course instructor, etc.)
- At what institutions?
- For how many semesters/years?
  - Describe the kinds of teaching duties you typically carried out in the past (e.g., marking, office hours, lecturing, leading tutorials/laboratory sessions, writing exam questions, etc.)
  - What courses have you been involved with in a teaching role?
- Describe any other relevant teaching experience you may have (e.g., college level).
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and challenges as a teacher?
- What, if any, professional development or workplace training have you completed?
- Describe any particular skills, qualifications, or experiences that you think will be helpful in teaching the course that you have been assigned in the upcoming term.
- What is your comfort level with the material covered in the assigned course?
- What concerns do you have with any aspect of your TA assignment?
- Are there any teaching roles that you would like the opportunity to try out during the term? (E.g., lecturing, designing an assignment, writing exam questions).

# Appendix B

## EXAMPLE TA DUTIES SPECIFICATION AGREEMENT

Available on pages 40-41 of the Western Graduate Teaching Assistants Collective Agreement (2016)

The current version of the Collective Agreement is found on the PSAC Local 610 website:

<http://www.psa610.ca/index.php/documents-forms>

Graduate Teaching Assistant's Name:

Campus Address:

Course Title:

Course Number:

Course Term:       Fall               Winter               Summer

Course Supervisor:

The Duties Specification Agreement provides the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) with the expectations of the Course Supervisor and the hiring department. This agreement specifies the types of duties to be performed by the GTA, and estimated number of hours attributable to each of those duties. Performance of these duties is required in order to honour the contract between GTA and employer. By signing below, the GTA confirms that she is able to perform these duties in full.

According to Article 17 of the GTA Collective Agreement, a full GTAship should average 10 hours of work per week and a half GTAship should average 5 hours of work per week for the period of employment, adjusted accordingly to encompass the entire term (see the academic calendar for appropriate dates). It must however be recognized, by both the GTA and the Course Supervisor, that the 10-hour per week limit is only a guideline.

Estimation of the time to fulfill the duties indicated below should give consideration to factors such as the number of students, the format and number of assignments, essays, reports, tests and/or exams, and the amount of marking required for assignments, essays, reports, tests, and/or exams. Attach a course outline to this Duties Specification Agreement.

Hours per term:     140     70     Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## A. WEEKLY DUTIES (hours/week)

### Preparation

\_\_\_\_\_ Reviewing course material and relevant related material

\_\_\_\_\_ Set-up for class (e.g., preparing materials for a lab session, making copies of assignments, inputting information in e-learning platform)

\_\_\_\_\_ Employer-required meeting (e.g., meetings with the course supervisor and department-wide GTA meetings)

### Teaching Duties

\_\_\_\_\_ In-class Instruction (e.g., instructing a course, supervising a lab, or leading a tutorial)

\_\_\_\_\_ Office hours

\_\_\_\_\_ Reading electronic communication for students and corresponding with students relevant to the assigned course (e.g., email and e-learning)

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL WEEKLY HOURS X \_\_\_\_\_ WEEKS = \_\_\_\_\_ HOURS/TERM**

## B. NON-WEEKLY DUTIES

### University Required Training (<http://www.uwo.ca/hr/learning/required/>)

\_\_\_\_\_ WHMIS training, Employer Health and Safety Orientation, Safe Campus Community, Accessibility at Western

### Other Training

\_\_\_\_\_ Required department-specific training (e.g., through the Teaching Support Centre)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other - Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

### Teaching Duties

(For marking, consider the number of students, and the estimated time to grade each essay, report, assignment, exam, and/or quiz/test)

\_\_\_\_\_ Marking Essays/Reports/Assignments

\_\_\_\_\_ Marking Exams

\_\_\_\_\_ Marking Quizzes/Tests

\_\_\_\_\_ Proctoring

\_\_\_\_\_ Conducting/Supervising Field Trips - Indicated the number of field trips and the hours per field trip:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other - Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

### Department Duties

\_\_\_\_\_ Proctoring for exam(s) other than the exam for the GTA's assigned course. Indicate the number of exams and the hours per exam: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Marking for course(s) other than the GTA's assigned course. Indicate the number of tests, exams, assignments, or reports and the number of hours for each: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Administrative Tasks

\_\_\_\_\_ Other - Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL NON-WEEKLY DUTIES FOR THE TERM:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL HOURS PER TERM:** \_\_\_\_\_

The Course Supervisor, Department Coordinator, and the GTA should be aware that a review of assigned duties and appropriate hours of work is required through Article 17.05(b) of the GTA Collective Agreement. A copy of this signed Agreement should be provided to the GTA and the Course Supervisor for their records.

Both the Course Supervisor and the GTA shall review Article 17.06 which requires any hours worked beyond those described above to be discussed at the Joint Labour Management Committee and approved in writing by the Director of Administration for the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies prior to undertaking any additional hours of work.

\_\_\_\_\_

Course Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

GTA

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Graduate Chair

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

# Appendix C

## CLASS PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES

Consider sharing the following set of strategies for increasing student in-class participation with your TAs. In turn, the TAs, can encourage undergraduate students to implement these strategies and improve participation in their tutorials or other class interactions.

1. Attend class.
2. Present a reading to the class; moderate class discussion; bring in a resource (a reading, web link, video) not covered in syllabus that adds to the class learning.
3. Make a thought-provoking or idea-merging comment (beyond summary of reading).
4. Make multiple in-depth comments that at least partly paraphrase a point someone has already made.
5. Participate in discussion; build on examples and comments of others; synthesize multiple views; be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better; start a debate.
6. Show appreciation for contributions of others; invite others to say more about what they are thinking.
7. Share a resource for the upcoming class on OWL to facilitate success of all classmates.
8. Post an article on a current issue which benefits all student learning; or post a comment on the OWL course forum that summarizes class conversations so far and/or suggests new directions and questions to be explored in the future.
9. Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person is saying; ask a question or make a comment that encourages another student to elaborate on something that they have already said.
10. Use body language to show interest in what different speakers are saying.

List shared by:

- » *Dr. Aleksandra Zecevic, Faculty member in the Faculty of Health Sciences*
- » *Co-created with Dylan Brennan, Teaching Assistant in the Faculty of Health Sciences*

# Appendix D

## CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

### Step One: Planning

Prior to the observation session, meet with your TA to discuss:

- The desired outcome of the evaluation process
- Class-specific goals (e.g., learning outcomes, learning activities)
- Teaching methods and possible challenges
- The TA's perceived strengths and weaknesses
- Anything specific the TA would like feedback on

### Step Two: Observation\*

Consider taking notes on the following classroom interactions:

- How does the TA use the physical space of the classroom?
- How does the TA use active learning to engage students with the material?
- How else does the TA engage students or interact with the class (e.g., ask questions)?
- What is the level of the TA's presentation skills? (e.g., clarity, eye contact, effective use of instructional aids, etc.)
- What is the classroom climate? (e.g., positive responses to students, accommodation of different learning styles, encouraging participation)

### Step Three: Feedback

Meet with the student 1-2 days after the observation session:

- Consider providing the TA a written summary of observations
- Ask the TA to reiterate the goals for the class and reflect on the lesson
- Frame feedback in terms of achieved goals and areas for improvement
- Develop a plan with the TA to address any challenge areas
- If necessary, introduce strategies that may help to improve teaching abilities

\*See Appendix E for an example classroom observation feedback form. Or, e-mail the Teaching Support Centre ([tsc@uwo.ca](mailto:tsc@uwo.ca)) for a copy of the Teacher Behaviours Inventory (Murray, 1983), a fifty-item scale of effective teacher behaviours.

# Appendix E

## EXAMPLE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FEEDBACK FORM

Teaching Assistant: \_\_\_\_\_ Feedback Provided By: \_\_\_\_\_

Course: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Scale: (1) Unsatisfactory (2) Acceptable (3) Good (4) Very good (5) Outstanding

<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents clear agenda; learning outcomes</li> <li>• Builds on student prior knowledge</li> <li>• Excites interest</li> </ul>	<table> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5															
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
<p>Comments:</p>																															
<p>Presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of preparation</li> <li>• Well-organized</li> <li>• Good timing/pacing</li> <li>• Adds examples</li> <li>• Provides an effective summary or close</li> <li>• Professional appearance/conduct</li> </ul>	<table> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
<p>Comments:</p>																															
<p>Student Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages interactions (e.g., asks questions)</li> <li>• Incorporates active learning activities</li> <li>• Provides clear instructions for activities</li> <li>• Activities are effective learning tools</li> </ul>	<table> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5										
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											
1	2	3	4	5																											

Comments:						
Teaching Behaviours						
• Speaks clearly		1	2	3	4	5
• Makes eye contact		1	2	3	4	5
• Uses classroom space		1	2	3	4	5
• Appears enthusiastic		1	2	3	4	5
• Appears confident		1	2	3	4	5
Comments:						
Visuals and Resource Materials						
• Incorporates relevant and useful visuals (e.g., PowerPoint slides, demonstrations, etc.)		1	2	3	4	5
• Provides resources (e.g., handouts, further reading, online resources, etc.)		1	2	3	4	5
Comments:						

Overall, what would you say is this TA's greatest strength?

What is one concrete action that this TA could take to improve their teaching?

# Appendix F

## EXAMPLE TA EVALUATION

The following survey provides example questions that could be used as part of a TA evaluation survey. Instructors and TAs are welcome to add to or modify this survey as they see fit.

Teaching Assistant: \_\_\_\_\_ Course: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Scale:      1 (strongly disagree)    2 (disagree)    3 (neither agree or disagree)    4 (agree)    5 (strongly agree)

The TA is prepared for lab/tutorial.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA is knowledgeable about the subject material.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA is enthusiastic about the subject matter.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA presents material clearly.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA explains how to prepare for the lab/tutorial.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA explains expectations for participation in the lab/tutorial.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA provides helpful comments on my work.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA encourages participation.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA is willing to help me.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel comfortable asking my TA questions.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA answers questions effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA effectively guides class discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA treats students with respect.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA grades fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA gives direction for improvement by explaining my mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA provides prompt feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, my TA is an effective instructor.	1	2	3	4	5

### Lab TA Questions:

The TA connects each lab/experiment to material covered in lecture.	1	2	3	4	5
I find the pre-lab lecture helpful in understanding the purpose of the experiment.	1	2	3	4	5
I find the instructor's comments during the lab help me to understand the key steps of the experiment.	1	2	3	4	5
I find the comments on my laboratory reports helpful in understanding the experiment.	1	2	3	4	5

### Tutorial TA Questions:

The TA connects the tutorial to material covered in lecture and the readings.	1	2	3	4	5
I find the tutorial lecture helpful in better understanding the course material.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA demonstrates helpful problem-solving techniques during the tutorial.	1	2	3	4	5
The TA facilitates engaging discussions during tutorial.	1	2	3	4	5

### Open-ended Questions:

What does your TA do well to support you as a learner?
What is one thing your TA could do to improve as an instructor?
What else could your TA do to assist your learning?
What do you like best about the lab/tutorial?
What would you like to change about the lab/tutorial?



