# TEACHING ASSISTANT HANDBOOK

UM | The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning

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# Table of Contents

It is a very exciting opportunity to work at the University of Manitoba (U of M) as a Teaching Assistant (TA). You may play one or more of the following roles: laboratory demonstrator, tutor, seminar leader, and/or lecturer. In addition, you are very likely to act as a liaison, providing a bridge between the course instructor and the students.

This section intends to help you get started in your position. It provides information about your general responsibilities as a TA, the Human Resources (HR) office contacts, important U of M policies, and your union representation.

> **Please note:** Some of the information provided below may vary from department to department at the U of M.

## General TA Responsibilities[1]

The HR department at the U of M states that TAs are responsible for assisting the employment supervisor (i.e., your course instructor) for a course(s) in terms of the instructional activities. In carrying out your responsibilities, you shall conduct yourself in a responsible and ethical manner in the performance of your duties and in your relations with students and staff.

With respect to the duties assigned, you will be informed by the employment supervisor(s) of the guidelines and limitations placed on you in completing the assigned duties. Some of these duties may include:

- Attend orientation, plan and coordinate meetings as may be scheduled for staff in the course.

- May be required to attend lectures and other sessions of instruction in the course.

- Consult with the employment supervisor responsible for the course(s) for direction on assigned responsibilities.

- Prepare instructional material such as handouts, assignments, problem sets, tests, exams and presents to students in a variety of settings such as tutorials, laboratories, or seminars.

- Mark student work including the work submitted by students in the tutorial, lab or seminar for which she/he is responsible and the assigned portion of the work submitted by students in the course generally, e.g. the midterm exam, final exam or major project, the marking of which may be shared among the staff in a course under the employment supervisor responsible.

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[1] Adapted from Human Resources. University of Manitoba. (1995). CUPE 3909 - Teaching Assistant/Demonstrator/Tutor/Seminar Leader.

- Consult with students by maintaining regularly scheduled and posted times for such consultation and provides a reasonable amount of informally scheduled consultation if necessary.

- Such other related duties as may be assigned, e.g. development or adaptation of audio-visual material, preparation of experiments, participation in field trips, etc.

- Occasional approved substitution for other members of the teaching or teaching support staff including the necessary related tasks.

- May initiate or be required to initiate information to students identifying assignment problems or misinterpretations.

# HR at the U of M

As a TA, you can contact the Human Resources for the following supports. Visit Human Resources' intranet site for up-to-date contact information.

| HR Department | Topic |
|---|---|
| Client Services | Responsible for HR consulting services, employee wellness support, and immigration assistance. |
| Staff Relations | Responsible for the negotiation and administration of the university's three academic and three support staff collective agreements, as well as relations with non-unionized university staff. |
| Learning and Organizational Development (LOD) | Through the Learning & Organizational Development (LOD) unit within Human Resources, you can participate in individual workshops and learning events on specific topics of interest, certificate programs for a more comprehensive portfolio of learning, and sessions on special topics of interest to groups and teams. |

# U of M Policies

In your role as a TA, you need to familiarize yourself with the various policies for U of M employees:

1. **Accessibility Policy**
   At UM we strive for an inclusive, welcoming environment that supports all abilities. We aim to create a community that embraces accessibility, diversity and inclusion, provides equal opportunity and recognizes the dignity of all people. We fully support the Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA).

2. **Conflict of Interest Between Evaluators and Students Due to Close Personal Relationships**
   This policy ensures that the relationship between an evaluator and the person being evaluated is and is seen to be impartial.

3. **Performance Evaluation Form for TAs (HR129)**
   The TA performance evaluation is used by the course instructor to assess your performance, assist you in developing and improving your skills, and ensure a standard of acceptable performance.

4. **Respectful Work and Learning Environment (RWLE) Policy**
   The University wishes to promote and support a community which embraces diversity and inclusion, provides equality of opportunity, and recognizes the dignity of all people.

5. **Responsibilities of Academic Staff with Regard to Students Policy (ROASS)**
   This policy identifies the responsibilities academic staff have towards students, including requirements that must be in a course outline or syllabus, protocol for changing assignments and evaluation methods, and appropriate interaction with students.

# CUPE 3909

CUPE 3909 is the union at U of M that represents students working as TAs, grader/markers, lab demonstrators, seminar leaders, tutors, and lecturer/instructors. Click here for additional information and contacts for CUPE 3909.

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## Collective Agreement

A collective agreement is a legally binding document outlining terms and conditions of employment, such as hours of work, vacations, wages, discipline, grievance process, etc. It is negotiated between the employer and representative of employees (union). The collective agreement for TAs is here.

> Click here for the TA collective agreement.

# Supporting Units at U of M

There are a variety of supporting units on the U o M campus that you can refer yourself or students to whenever needed to help fulfill your TA role.

| Service Office | Topic |
|---|---|
| Academic Learning Centre | Serves graduate and undergraduate in terms of resources available on the ALC web page, writing or study skills tutors, and/or workshops that help develop academic strengths and skills in writing, learning and research. |
| The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (The Centre) | A faculty development unit that works in collaboration with faculty and graduate students to provide leadership, expertise, and support in fulfilling the teaching and learning mission of the U of M. <br><br> The Centre offers workshops and a certificate program (Graduate Teaching Program) for graduate students on teaching practices in higher education. Refer to The Centre website for further details. |
| International Centre | Helps students plan ahead and/or work through challenges, regarding personal matters, academics, university regulations and policies, and life in a new culture. <br><br> Provides guidance on immigration regulations related to studies in Canada such as study permit extensions and changes, Temporary Resident Visas, the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program and more. |
| Libraries | Graduate student can make appointments with Librarians or visit desk staff and get in person help. <br><br> Graduate student can use the library scheduler to get some one-on-one time with a Librarian in your subject area. |
| Indigenous Supports for Students | Academic, cultural, personal and financial supports are available to all students. |
| Student Accessibility | Provides support and advocacy for students with disabilities, such as: hearing, injury-related, learning, mental health, medical, physical, visual or temporary disabilities. <br><br> Acts as a liaison between students, faculty, staff and service agencies. |
| Student Advocacy | Serves as a general information source for students regarding their rights and responsibilities. <br><br> Assists students in the resolution of any problems or concerns resulting from academic and/or discipline decisions. <br><br> Advises students of policies and procedures to follow, both informally and formally via appeals. |
| Student Counselling Centre | Offers a wide variety of services to help students with stress, challenges and difficulties and to support their academic and career success. <br><br> Provides services to University of Manitoba staff, and students seeking professional counselling training opportunities. <br><br> All services are strictly confidential. |

In the first chapter, you have learned how to begin your TA-ship at the U of M. This chapter aims to help you develop some expertise required by "good" TAs, such as understanding how courses are constructed, incorporating good teaching practices, connecting with the course instructor, and engaging in critical reflection.

# Understand How Courses are Constructed

As a TA, you may not need to develop a constructive alignment plan in daily practice because it is more of your course instructor's responsibility to do so. Nevertheless, it is important to have a basic understanding of how courses are constructed.

> **?**   If you are required to design a course, approach your department or The Centre (TheCentre@umanitoba.ca) for more guidance and support.

## Constructive Alignment[2]

Constructive alignment is an approach to course design, which begins with the end in mind, i.e. what should students know and be able to demonstrate at the end of the course (Biggs, 1996). It assumes that when course goals, intended learning objectives, assessment methods, and teaching strategies are intentionally aligned, the objectives of learning are improved substantially (Blumberg, 2009).

Here is an example of why courses need to be aligned. When students are told what they should be able to achieve (learning objectives), but are not taught or assessed according to these objectives, they inevitably will feel confused and cheated (Centre for the Advancement of Teaching & Learning, n.d.). On the contrary, instructors who clearly state the learning objectives, teach to and assess based on those objectives are more likely to engage students in learning activities and optimize their chances of achieving those objectives (Biggs, 1996).

Here is a snapshot of the components of constructive alignment:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Course Goals** | *What are the "big picture" goals of your course?* |
| **Learning Objectives** | *What do you want your students to know and/or demonstrate?* |
| **Assessment Methods** | *How will you assess if students achieved the goal and objective?* |
| **Teaching Strategies** | *What teaching strategies will guide students to achieve the goal and objective?* |

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[2] Adapted from the Centre for Research on Teaching and Learning, University of Michigan. (2016). Seven principles for good practice: Enhancing student learning.

# Incorporate Good Teaching Practices

After you develop an understanding of course alignment, the next step as a TA is to identify what teaching practices should be incorporated into your sessions to help optimize your students' learning.

## Seven Principles for Good Practice

The Seven Principles for Good Practice developed by Chickering & Gamson (1987) acts as a guideline for good teaching practices. Despite the fact that the principles may seem like good common sense, they are well supported by first-hand teaching experiences and academic research. Teaching strategies are provided based on each principle to offer you examples of how to apply these principles in your own teaching practice.

| Principle | Teaching Strategies |
|---|---|
| 1. **Encourages student-teacher contact**<br><br>Frequent contact between students and teaching staff is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement.<br><br>ⓘ For more information on student-teacher contact, refer to Chapter Four. | • Learn the names of your students.<br><br>• Share your experiences in the field.<br><br>• Set policies on email and phone response times. |
| 2. **Develops cooperation among students**<br><br>Learning is enhanced when it is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated.<br><br>Working with others often increases involvement in learning.<br><br>ⓘ For more information on developing cooperation among students, refer to Chapter Four. | • Use active learning strategies that involve group work (think-pair-share, problem solving, etc.).<br><br>• Encourage students to form study groups outside of the class. |
| 3. **Uses active learning techniques**<br><br>Students learn best when they are engaged in the learning process instead of absorbing information sitting passively in the classroom.<br><br>ⓘ For more information on active learning techniques, refer to Chapter Five. | • Include active learning strategies such as brainstorming, case studies, or debates to engage students.<br><br>• Use appropriate and relevant technology tools.<br><br>• Incorporate real-life and application-based examples. |

| Principle | Teaching Strategies |
|---|---|
| **4. Gives prompt feedback**<br><br>Students need appropriate feedback on their performance to benefit from courses and to know what they need to improve upon to focus their learning.<br><br>ⓘ For more information on feedback strategies, refer to Chapter Six. | • Give students feedback in each class during active learning strategies.<br><br>• Provide marking rubrics for assignments that outline the marking criteria.<br><br>• When marking assignments, focus your feedback comments on marking criteria.<br><br>• Set a turnaround time for marking. |
| **5. Emphasizes time on task**<br><br>Time on task means having a balance between teacher talking and students doing (e.g. practice exercises, active learning).<br><br>ⓘ For more information on active learning strategies, refer to Chapter Five. | • Inform students of expectations from the first day of your session.<br><br>• Also state what students can expect of you as the TA. "You can expect me to…", "I expect you to…"<br><br>• Refer to your expectations throughout term. |
| **6. Communicates high expectations**<br><br>High expectations are important for everyone – expect more and you will get more. | • Include active learning strategies such as brainstorming, case studies, or debates to engage students.<br><br>• Use appropriate and relevant technology tools.<br><br>• Incorporate real-life and application-based examples. |
| **7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning**<br><br>Students need the opportunity to learn in ways that work for them.<br><br>ⓘ For more information on strategies to support diverse learners, refer to Chapter Eight. | • Ask questions about the students' backgrounds and previous experiences.<br><br>• Use different active learning strategies in class (e.g. videos, lecture, groups, demonstrations). |

# Connect with the Course Instructor

Understanding constructive alignment and incorporating good teaching practices is the starting point to perform your TA role. However, your responsibilities as a TA will vary from one department to another, from course to course, and from one course instructor to another. Therefore, it is essential that you recognize the need to connect with your course instructor and take time at the outset to get a clear idea of what will be expected of you throughout the semester (Teaching Commons, 2014).

## Build Professional Boundaries with the Course Instructor[3]

Professional boundaries are essential in any relationship with a power differential, as they provide structure and guidance regarding appropriate actions and interactions (Barnett, 2008). Good TAs understand that a respectful relationship with course instructors are the building blocks of teaching effectiveness (Dunn-Haley & Zanzucchi, 2012).

Below is a list of guidelines to consider as regards to professional boundaries between you and the course instructor:

1. **Building respectful rapport**

   Consider if you would like the interaction to be more formal or casual. Clarify with the instructor regarding how they prefer to interact with you.

2. **Sharing appropriate information**

   This means to not over share or probe personal information. For example, cell phone number, social media accounts, and stories from your private life (etc.).

3. **Maintaining a professional relationship**

   This means to always base the relationship on collegiality, mutual respect, professionalism and a commitment to student learning.

> **Please note:** At the University of Manitoba, we have the *Conflict of Interest between Evaluators and Students due to Close Personal Relationships* policy. You are encouraged to read the policy and use it as a guideline in developing professional relationship with your course instructor.

> Click here for more information about the *Conflict of Interest between Evaluators and Students due to Close Personal Relationships* policy.

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[3] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, p. 22-25.

# Understand the Course Instructor's Expectations[4]

Here are some questions you might want to discuss with your course instructor before the semester begins. If the course and the materials are new to you, mentioning this will enable the course instructor to adjust your TA role appropriately (Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, 2017).

## 1. Course Management and Expectation

- What can you tell me about the course? (e.g., syllabus, learning objectives, demographics, learning activities)
- What is my role? Will I be leading tutorials, conducting labs, creating homework assignments, doing guest lectures, marking?
- How often will I be performing any of the above roles?
- How do you define my role? (e.g., what is involved in leading a teaching session?)
- Are there other TAs involved with this course? How will we ensure consistency for our students?
- Should I attend lectures?
- What should I do, whom should I contact, if I am unable to attend a class/teaching session?
- What types of questions or requests from students should be handled by me and which should be forwarded to you?

## 2. Communication during the Semester

- Is there an expectation that we communicate regularly and in what way, i.e., by email, via phone calls or meet in person, etc.?
- How often will we meet to discuss my work?

## 3. Office Hours

- How many office hours should I hold and when?
- If I am to give individual assistance, how much help is too much?
- What kind of assistance should I not give?

## 4. Policies and Protocols

- What is the protocol for cases involving breaches of academic integrity?
- What are the protocols for late assignments, missed classes, and appeals?

## 5. Assessment of Student Work

- Will I have any input on exam or assignment construction?
- What criteria and expectations have been outlined to the students?
- Are there rubrics prepared to grade exams and assignments?
- Will I be entering grades in UM Learn?
- What strategies can I use to be consistent in my grading?
- How quickly do you expect feedback to be returned to the students?
- Who reviews disputed grades?

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[4] Adapted with permission from the University of Waterloo. (2018). Teaching at the University of Waterloo: a Manual for Teaching Assistants, p. 4-5.

## 6.    Evaluation of TA Performance

- How will my performance as a TA be evaluated? Does our department have end-of-semester TA Evaluation Forms?
- Will you be willing to provide informal mid-semester evaluation of my teaching?
- Do students fill out evaluations of TAs? If so, will I have an opportunity to review them in order to learn about my strengths as a TA and areas for development? If not, may I have permission to conduct my own informal evaluations?

# Engage in Critical Reflection[5]

You now have a basic understanding of course alignment, identified good teaching practices, and developed strategies to connect with your course instructor. The final component to be a good TA is critically reflecting on what supports or hinders your teaching practices.

In this section, two of the most-frequently used critical reflection models will be introduced as tools for your own reflection. What you are encouraged to do is to identify one model that may work the best for you and adapt it in your teaching practice.

## Personal

Personal forms of critical reflection revolve around one's thoughts and actions in relation to a specific event, or a broad teaching practice.

A teaching log can help you focus on acknowledging and realizing significant personal thoughts and actions, and interpret them in a meaningful way. As often as you like, take ten minutes to jot down answers to one or more of the following questions. If you wish, create your own questions, or simply record what happened in your practice (Brookfield, 1995).

- When did I feel the most engaged or affirmed – the moment(s) that I said to myself "this is what teaching and learning in my discipline is all about"?

- When did I feel the most disconnected, frustrated, or bored– the moments that I said to myself "I'm just going through the motions here", or "I'm in over my head"?

- Which situation caused me the greatest anxiety or self-doubt – the kind of situation that I kept replaying in my mind or criticizing myself for? How did I respond?

- Which event took me by surprise – caught me off guard, or made me unexpectedly happy?

- Of everything that happened, what would I do differently if I had the chance to do it again OR what do I feel the proudest of? Why?

# Interpersonal

Interpersonal forms of critical reflection focus on your interactions with others, and ask questions about how group dynamics, disciplinary norms, and professionalism influence a given context.

Rolfe's framework for reflective practice is one possible means to reflect on variables within a specific interaction. For each level of the framework, jot down points, themes, or considerations in answer to each question listed. Next, step back from your notes and look for common themes, issues, or unanswered questions (Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001).

1. **Level 1: "What?"**

   What happened? What was my response? What was I trying to achieve? What did I expect?

2. **Level 2: "So What?"**

   Why does it matter? What are the consequences? How does this experience link to my academic, teaching, professional, and/or personal development?

3. **Level 3: "Now What?"**

   What am I going to do from now on? What has worked in the past? How will I apply what I have learned? How will I know that any changes are successful?

## References:

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Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. (2017). Graduate Student Guide. University of Calgary.

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# Chapter Three
## Preparing to Teach the First Day

This chapter intends to prepare you for teaching the first day by developing the syllabus and lesson plans. You will also be introduced to general principles to consider while preparing for the first class.

## Develop the Syllabus

A syllabus is both a document about the course goals and content and a guide for students to the kind of teaching and learning they can expect in your class (Teaching Commons, n.d.). In addition, it contains essential information regarding policies and procedures students need to abide by in the course. A syllabus should be derived from the constructive alignment plan, as discussed in Chapter Two.

As a TA, you may not get involved in developing a syllabus. However, you are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the syllabus. You may also be responsible for reviewing the syllabus with the students on the first day of class and throughout the term. You will learn more about reviewing the syllabus with the students in Chapter Four.

> **?** If you are required to develop a syllabus, approach your course instructor or The Centre (TheCentre@umanitoba.ca) for more guidance and support.

> Click here for the recommended U of M syllabus template.

## Develop Lesson Plans

A lesson plan is a detailed step-by-step guide that outlines what students need to learn and how it will be accomplished during each class. Lesson plans are derived from the weekly topics outlined in the syllabus.

In some cases as a TA, your course instructor will provide you with lesson plans to follow. In other cases, you may be required to develop your own lesson plans. Either way, having a lesson plan prepared for each class you teach is important as it ensures your teaching has a clear purpose and helps you to effectively organize your time with the students.

> **?** If you are required to develop lesson plans, approach your course instructor or The Centre (TheCentre@umanitoba.ca) for more guidance and support.

# BOPPPS Lesson Plan Framework

There are numerous frameworks for creating lesson plans; there is no one "right" framework to use. Some teachers may find one particular lesson plan framework that works for them while others may take bits and pieces from different frameworks to come up with one of their own. You are encouraged to test out different frameworks to figure out what works the best for you.

The BOPPPS lesson plan framework is a simple model that outlines six steps to a lesson[6]:

| BOPPPS Steps | Strategies |
|---|---|
| **1. Bridge-In**<br><br>The bridge-in is used to "hook" in your students by gaining their attention and establishing relevance for the lesson. | • Tell a story<br>• Pose a provocative question<br>• Offer a startling statement or unusual fact<br>• Link to previous topic or to future learning<br>• Provide reasons for the lesson |
| **2. Learning Objectives**<br><br>Learning objectives determine what you want students to know and/or be able to do by the end of class. | • Refer to the Learning Objectives section in this chapter. |
| **3. Pre-Assessment**<br><br>The pre-assessment answers the question: "What does the learner already know about the subject of the lesson?" | • Open-ended questions<br>• Brainstorming<br>• Surveys |
| **4. Participatory Learning (Active Learning)**<br><br>Participatory learning allows for a balance between an instructor providing foundational knowledge and opportunities for the learners to engage in and practice the subject material through active learning. | • Refer to the Chapter Five |
| **5. Post-Assessment**<br><br>The post-assessment answers the questions: "What did the students learn?" and "Did the students achieve the learning objectives?" | • Refer to the Chapter Six |
| **6. Summary**<br><br>The summary brings closure to the class. | • Review the learning objectives<br>• Review key content from the lesson<br>• Discuss connections to the next class<br>• Provide opportunities for questions<br>• Ask for feedback from the students |

> Click here for more information about the BOPPPS model and access to other lesson plan templates.

[6] ISW International Advisory Committee. (2018). *ISW Manual*. Retrieved from: https://www.iswnetwork.ca

# Learning Objectives

As previously mentioned, learning objectives determine what you want students to know and/or be able to do by the end of class. In writing a learning objective, you should answer the question:

***Who (the student) + Does What (an active measurable verb)?***

> ## ex.
> Examples of Learning Objectives:[7]
>
> By the end of this class, students will be able to:
>
> 1. Identify the political, religious, economic, and uses of art in Italy during the Renaissance.
> 2. Analyze the role of art and of the artist in Italy at this time.
> 3. Evaluate their response to a range of art historical issues.

Each learning objective includes one measurable action verb of what the students must be able to do by the end of the class. To help you write measurable learning objective, you can refer to the Bloom's Taxonomy.

## Bloom's Taxonomy[8]

Bloom's Taxonomy categorizes learning behaviours from basic to the most complex. In general, it is reasonable to expect students in first and second year courses to meet learning objectives drawn from the lower levels of the taxonomy, since many courses during this time are comprised of foundational content. Second and third year courses should be more advanced, as the content extends beyond foundational knowledge, and should therefore challenge students with objectives stemming from the mid-range of the taxonomy. Fourth-year and graduate students should be learning using a high cognitive level, with objectives primarily based on the advanced levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

*See diagram on next page for more information about Bloom's Taxonomy.*

[7] Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, University of Toronto (2008). Developing Learning Outcomes: a guide for University of Toronto Faculty, p. 5.

[8] Bloom, B. S. (1994). Reflections on the development and use of the taxonomy. In Bloom's taxonomy: A forty-year retrospective. Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education.

**Creating**
combining or
grouping knowledge to
come to new conclusions

**Evaluating**
coming to a judgement
on the value of information
or the validity of arguments

**Analyzing**
supporting assertions through
the use of evidence and arguments;
identifying causes and patterns

**Applying**
applying knowledge in a new context

**Understanding**
demonstration of comprehension

**Remembering**
recall of information

**HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS**

**LOWER ORDER THINKING SKILLS**

# Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs[9]

Bloom's Taxonomy includes measurable action verbs for each level of learning that will assist you in writing your learning objectives. Examples of measurable action verbs are provided below:

| Level of Learning | Measurable Action Verbs |
|---|---|
| 1.  **Remembering** | • define, identify, list, name, recall, state, outline |
| 2.  **Understanding** | • classify, describe, locate, report, restate, summarize , explain |
| 3.  **Applying** | • employ, illustrate, solve, use, demonstrate, apply |
| 4.  **Analyzing** | • compare, contrast, criticize, examine, question, test, analyze |
| 5.  **Evaluating** | • appraise, argue, assess, defend, predict, support , evaluate, judge |
| 6.  **Creating** | • construct, develop, formulate, propose, create, plan, design |

**Please note:** When writing learning objectives, avoid using verbs like learn, know, understand and appreciate because they cannot be measured.

[9] Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, University of Toronto (2008). Developing Learning Outcomes: a guide for University of Toronto Faculty, p. 3; 5.

# General Principles for Preparing for the First Day[10, 11]

Other than developing the syllabus and lesson plans, there are supplementary preparations and logistics that need to be done before your first day of class. These general principles are listed below:

## 1.    Be Familiar with the Course Materials

- Take time before the start of the term to become familiar with the course material, and seek out resources that can inform your teaching and support student learning. For example, textbooks, lab manuals and safety training, department writing guides, campus resources, experienced TAs, or supplementary readings.

- Whenever possible, practice an experiment, lecture, or exercise ahead of time. This will help you identify areas of potential difficulty or misunderstanding for students, and increase your ability to successfully "troubleshoot" (Teaching Support Centre, 2014, p. 8).

## 2.    Organize the Necessary Classroom Supplies

- Make sure that you have all of the necessary materials, which could include but are not limited to:

    - ► A printed copy of the syllabus

    - ► A printed copy of your lesson plan

    - ► Pens, pencils, extra white-board markers

    - ► USB stick and/or laptop

    - ► Lab manuals or other handouts

    - ► Course textbooks

## 3.    Visit the Classroom and/or Lab Beforehand

- Use this time to inspect that all relevant equipment is available (or booked) and working (Davis, 2001). If applicable, tour the space and equipment with the course instructor and review all safety policies, how to work the equipment, any potential hazards, and other important information.

- When you make the initial visit to classroom, take some time to think about how you want to set up the room for your first class. If applicable, do you want the tables/chairs to be put in a lecture style, a horseshoe, a boardroom or in work groups?

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[10] Adapted with permission from Teaching Commons, York University (2015). International TA (ITA) Handbook, p. 26-27.
[11] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, P. 34-35.

**References:**

Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation. (2008). Developing Learning Outcomes: a guide for University of Toronto Faculty. University of Toronto.

Davis, B. G. (2001). Tools for teaching. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

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Teaching Support Centre. (2014). The graduate student teaching development program survival guide: The essential guide for teaching assistants at the University of Guelph (13th ed.).

You have learned how to prepare yourself for the first day of class in the last chapter. It is time that you move forward and teach. This chapter will provide you with strategies to introduce yourself, create student icebreakers, create a positive classroom environment, and review the syllabus.

## Arrive at the Classroom Early

It is important to arrive early before the class begins, especially on the first day, to mentally prepare for your session and set up the space and any technology requirements. Arriving early also ensures you will start the class on time.

## Introduce Yourself[12]

The first class is the best time to establish the rapport you wish to have with students using self-introduction activities. Consider the following information when introducing yourself:

1. **Academic background**

    What are your research interests? What excites you about the field? What your plans are for the future? How long you have been studying at the U of M?

2. **Teaching background**

    What is your previous TA and teaching experience? What do you enjoy the most about being a TA? Why are you excited about the course or subject?

3. **Personal background**

    Where are you coming from? What are your personal interests or hobbies? Avoid oversharing as you want to maintain a professional boundary between you and your students. Refer to Chapter Seven for more information.

4. **Availability**

    How can students contact you? What are your office hours?

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[12] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, p. 35-36.

# Create Student Icebreakers[13, 14]

Icebreakers are helpful tools you can adapt to learn students' names, connect students with each other, and establish an environment of class participation. As a rule, icebreakers should be kept light. Avoid icebreakers that will make students feel compelled to reveal aspects about themselves that they are uncomfortable sharing in front of others. Here are some examples of icebreaker activities:

**1.    Interview your neighbour**

- Have students work in pairs and interview each other. They can have a prompting question related to the course material, their major/minor, reasons for taking the course, etc.
- After a few minutes, go around the class and have each interviewer present what they learned about their interviewee.

**2.    Pack a suitcase**

- Ask students to make a list of five things they would take to a desert island, or to a faraway place to live for a year.
- The "things" packed do not literally need to fit into the suitcase, but students cannot bring other humans with them.
- This provides students with a lighthearted topic of discussion before starting formal group work.

**3.    Name tents**

- Ask students to write their names on a folded index card and have it sit on their desks for the first week.

**4.    Items in common**

- Randomly place students in groups of three to five with people they do not know.
- Each group has five to ten minutes to discover the most unique thing(s) that they all have in common. Each group then shares with the rest of the class.

**5.    Two truths and a lie**

- Each student writes down two truths and a lie about themselves in random order.
- Then form groups of four to seven students and have each person share the three 'facts' and the group must decide which one is the lie.

**6.    Bingo**

- Draw a 5 x 5 square grid on a sheet of paper. In each of the spaces write an experience that some students in your class are likely to have had (e.g., drink coffee, have a birthday in January, been to another country, speak a language other than English at home, etc.).
- Give students copies of the bingo cards and instruct them to find another student who has had one of the experiences listed on the card. When they find a student with a matching experience, they should write that person's name down. The first student with five different names signed across, down, or diagonally wins.

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[13] Adapted from Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, University of Toronto, n.d.
[14] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, p. 36.

# Create a Positive Classroom Environment

Creating a positive classroom environment is conducive to learning as students are more likely to attend, listen, and participate. This environment is built upon the relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves (Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, 2017). Besides introducing yourself and creating icebreaker activities, here are some ideas of what you could do to set the tone for a positive learning environment:[15]

- Try to remember and use students' names.
- Be personable, approachable, and smile.
- Offer encouraging words to validate student-learning experiences.

# Review the Syllabus

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the course syllabus contains essential information students need to know about the course and policies and procedures they have to abide by. However, students do not always read the syllabus and miss a lot of important information about the course. Therefore, the best way to introduce the course is to guide students in a review of the syllabus.

The following are some strategies for you to consider:[16, 17]

1. Ask students, either in groups or individually, to develop questions they have about the course. Then, distribute the syllabus and have them review it individually or in groups to locate the answers to their questions. After this activity, address any questions not answered by the syllabus.

2. Assign a discussion question, which students should be prepared to address after reading the syllabus. For example, "compared to other courses you have taken, do you expect this one to be more or less difficult (or require more or less time), and why?"

3. Make a list of questions students should never ask you because the answers are in the syllabus.

4. Create a scavenger hunt and have students use the syllabus to find the answers to your questions. Award a prize to whomever answers the questions the fastest and most thoroughly.

5. Assign a review of the syllabus as homework and have students sign a statement such as the following: "I have read the assigned syllabus and understand its contents, as well as the grading and attendance policies". If there are disputes regarding your policies, refer them to their signed statement.

6. Assign a review of the syllabus as homework and give a graded or ungraded quiz on it in an upcoming class session.

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[15] Adapted with permission from Teaching Commons, York University (2014). TA Start Up Guide for Teaching & Learning at York University, p. 10.
[16] Adopted from the Centre for Teaching Excellence, Lansing Community College. (n. d.). Strategies for getting your students to read the syllabus
[17] Nilson, L. (2010). Teaching At Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

> **Please note:** Besides the first day of class, it is important to refer to the syllabus throughout the term.

# Introduce Course Content

It is recommended that the first day of class be spent on introductions, creating a positive classroom environment, and reviewing the course syllabus in order to lay the foundation of the course for the term. If possible, avoid introducing course content until subsequent classes. If you must introduce course content due to time constraints, ensure you are following a lesson plan, as outlined in Chapter Three.

# End Class on Time

You should end the class on time without keeping students "for just a few more minutes" as many of them may need to travel to get to their next class. In addition, it is likely another class will need to use the classroom and it is best to not have them wait outside for you to finish.

**References:**

Centre for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.). Teaching the First Day of Class. University of Washington. Retrieved from http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/preparing-to-teach/teaching-the-first-day-of-class/

Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation. (n.d.). First class strategies. University of Toronto. Retrieved from https://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/strategies/first-class/

Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. (2017). Graduate Student Guide. University of Calgary.

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*Active learning* refers to the "process whereby students engage in activities, such as writing, reading, discussing, or problem solving, that promote analysis and synthesis of course content as it relates to what you want your students to learn and be able to do" (UC Davis Centre for Educational Effectiveness, 2017, p. 54). In other words, the active learning strategies selected for each class must align back to the learning objectives outlined in your constructive alignment and lesson plans.

In spite of its importance, active learning rarely happens organically in class. As a TA, you need to make it occur by promoting participation and engagement among students. This is important since an active learning environment, compared with passive learning, increases students' understanding, retention, and overall enjoyment of the class (UC Davis Centre for Educational Effectiveness, 2017).

This chapter will introduce some general principles of teaching in a lecture, seminar, and lab setting and provide active learning strategies for each context.

## Review of Lesson Planning

Chapter Three outlines lesson planning, in particular the BOPPPS framework. It is important to have a lesson plan prepared for each class you teach to ensure the learning objectives, assessments, and active learning strategies align.

As you are reading about the variety of active learning strategies available to TAs, keep in mind your overall lesson plan, especially the learning objectives of what you want your students to be able to do by the end of your classes.

## Lectures[18]

Over the past few decades, student-centered methods of teaching at the post-secondary level have been shown to be more effective than the lecture for students to retain knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. Despite the convincing evidence, the lecture is still the most commonly used technique in higher education, especially in large classes. It is important then to explore how to prepare an effective lecture to promote student learning.

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[18] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, p. 44-45.

# General Teaching Principles for Lectures

**1.      Design your lecture in 10-15 minute blocks**

Adult attention spans average at approximately 10-15 minutes. Break your lectures into small chunks by shifting from lecturing to viewing audio-visual material or planning an activity or problem-solving question at the end of each major concept or idea (Centre for Teaching Excellence, n.d.).

**2.      Prepare lecture notes, but not an entire script**

A script is too time consuming to prepare. Also, reading from the page or word by word from your slides will likely bore you students, hinder making eye contact, and prevent you from having opportunities to vary your voice or be spontaneous (Centre for Teaching Excellence, n. d.).

**3.      Move away from the podium**

While you lecture, move away from the podium by walking in the front of the classroom and up and down the aisles. As students are engaging in active learning activities, interact with them to provide feedback.

**4.      PowerPoint design dos and don'ts**

While there are a variety of presentation tools to choose from, PowerPoint is most commonly used for presenting information during lectures. Consider the following PowerPoint design dos and don'ts:

**A.  Content**

* Limit each slide to only one topic and give it a relevant heading.
* Don't use full sentences on slides: keep points concise, but meaningful.
* Avoid abbreviations and unfamiliar jargon.
* Check for spelling and grammatical errors.
* Cite your sources.

**B.  Font**

* Keep type sizes and fonts consistent for headings and text.
* Use standard fonts such as Times New Roman or Ariel.
* Use a large enough font that can be easily read in the back of the class.
* Don't use uppercase letters.

**C.  Colour/Contrast**

* Use contrasting colours (e.g. dark background with light letters).
* Don't overuse colours: stick to two to four colours per slide.

**D.  Animations**

* Use subtle transitions and animations.

**E.  Images and audio/video clips**

* Use high quality photos and images that reinforce your written message.
* Make sure that you have copyright permission to use specific images.
* Leave some white space on each slide.
* Highlight key information in charts, tables, and graphs to focus attention.
* Keep audio/video clips short (e.g. 1-5 minutes). Test the clips beforehand and have a back-up plan in case they do not work.

# Active Learning Strategies for Lectures[19, 20]

The following active learning strategies are suitable for lectures regardless of the class size and room layout.

| Name of Strategy | Description |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Brainstorming | • Students (working alone, in a small group, or as a class) are presented with a question or issue and are given a few minutes to come up with their responses. <br> • Then, the instructor writes down students' responses on the board and may group them into categories. <br> • It is important to acknowledge all responses and save any critiques until after all ideas are generated. |
| 2. Case Studies | • Students receive written descriptions of a problem situation with background and context, and work together in pairs or groups to analyze the situation and propose solutions. |
| 3. Note Check | • Students pair up with a partner or small group to share notes (2-5 minutes). <br> • They can clarify key points, generate and resolve questions, or solve a problem posed by the instructor. <br> • This activity can be used at the beginning, middle, or end of a lecture. |
| 4. Pause Procedure | • This activity involves using 2-3 minute pauses during a lecture (you can decide when and how often to use it) to give students the chance to catch up, clarify, compare notes, and reflect upon the material that has been presented so far. <br> • This ensures students are actively engaged rather than passively taking notes during a lecture. |
| 5. Problem-Solving | • Students solve a problem or question based on your lecture topic, working individually, in pairs, or groups to find the answer. <br> • Students are given 1-5 minutes to find the answer (more or less time depending on the complexity of the problem). <br> • Responses are then solicited from students or reviewed by the instructor as a class. |

[19] Adopted from Davis, B. G. (2009). Tools for teaching. John Wiley & Sons.
[20] Nilson, L. B. (2010). Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors. John Wiley & Sons.

# Seminars

The term "seminar" is used interchangeably with "tutorial", which often involves the discussion of the topics from assigned readings and/or the lectures in more detail. It requires higher order thinking skills and students are expected to take an active role in terms of participating actively and consistently.

## General Teaching Principles for Seminars

Due to the nature of seminars, TAs who are leading seminars need to have higher-end skills in facilitating questions and discussions. Strategies to improve your use of questions and discussions include:[21]

- Distribute questions one or two classes before and assign individuals or a group to prepare answers to each question.

- Set up ground-rules for discussions before you begin. What does a respectful discussion involve? What will happen if someone makes an inappropriate comment? How do students indicate they have a comment? Can you call on your students individually?

- Ask only one question at a time. A series of questions tends to confuse students as they are not able to determine just what the questioner is requesting from them.

- Ask a question, wait, and thereby express your expectation to receive a response and your willingness to listen to it. Be patient.

- When student questions are desired, request them explicitly, wait, and then acknowledge student contributions. Indicate to students that questions are not a sign of stupidity but rather the manifestation of concern and thought about the topic.

- If a student gives an incorrect answer to a question, try to avoid telling them they are "wrong." Instead, advise them the answer they have given is incorrect, but that you are interested in finding out how they arrived at that answer. This encourages students to participate even if they are not sure whether their answer is "right" or not, because they know that you are interested in finding out their thought process, not just the result.

- For discussions, assign students roles such as a "recorder" who will write down the key points of their discussion, a "speaker" who will report findings (if necessary) to the class, and a "time keeper" to be in charge of making sure the group completes its task in the given time. If you want the same group to work together multiple times, make sure to ask the students to rotate the roles to balance the workload.

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[21] Adapted with permission from the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University (2007). A Handbook for Teaching Assistants, p. 14–16.

# Examples of Questions[22]

In order to achieve higher order thinking skills in seminars, it is recommended that as a TA you have questions prepared in advance of your class. There are different types of questions that can be posed to students as outlined below:

| Question Type | Description | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Comparative Questions | • Compare and contrast different theories, studies, and literary works.<br><br>• Identify important items for comparison. | ► What are the differences between realism and liberalism?<br><br>► How are the deaths of Juliet and Ophelia similar, yet different? |
| Evaluative | • Extend comparisons to judgments of the relative validity, effectiveness, or strength of what is being compared. | ► Which of the two theories better accounts for the data?<br><br>► Which of the two essays better contributes to an understanding of the issue? |
| Open-Ended | • Represent the best kind of questions for discussion as they encourage creativity.<br><br>• Do not seek a preferred response and have multiple respectable answers. | ► What are some indications that racism in America is as bad as ever?<br><br>► Can you think of an example that is consistent with this theory? |
| Connective and Causal Effect | • Link facts, concepts, relationships, authors, theories, etc. that are not explicitly integrated in assigned materials and might not appear to be related.<br><br>• Draw and reflect on students' personal experiences, connecting these to theories and research findings. | ► What are the causes of this phenomenon?<br><br>► How might halving our class size affect our discussion? |

[22] Nilson, L. (2010). Teaching At Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

| Question Type | Description | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Requesting More Evidence | • Defend students' position, especially when it comes out of nowhere or another student challenges it as unsupported.<br><br>• Should be posed in a matter-of-fact way as a simple request for more information (data, facts, references). | ► What does the author say that supports your argument?<br><br>► What data is that claim based on? |
| Clarification | • Re-phrase or elaborate on students' ideas to make them more understandable to the rest of the class.<br><br>• You may ask for an example, application, or fuller explanation. | ► What do you mean by that?<br>► Could you provide an example of what you are talking about? |
| Hypothetical | • "What-if" inquiries that require:<br>　• think creatively<br>　• make up plausible scenarios<br>　• explore how changing the circumstances or parameters of a situation might alter the results | ► How might World War II have turned out if Hitler had not decided to attack the Soviet Union in 1941? |
| Linking or Extension | • Listen actively to each other's contributions.<br><br>• Think about the relationships between their responses and those of their classmates. | ► How does that contribution add to what has already been said?<br><br>► Does your idea challenge or support what we seem to be saying? |
| Summary and Synthesis | • Summarize or synthesize the important ideas shared during their exchange.<br><br>• You can ask for some of the most important ideas, key concepts, or issues that remain unsolved or things that need to be clarified. | ► What are one or two of the most important ideas that emerged from this discussion?<br><br>► What remains unresolved or contentious about this topic? |

# Active Learning Strategies for Seminars[23, 24, 25]

| Name of Strategy | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. **Debates** | • You choose a topic (can be controversial or not) and divide students into groups based on their points of view (e.g. "for" or "against" a topic).<br>• Students debate and discuss their positions with you acting as a moderator between the two sides.<br>• Time is provided after the activity to reflect upon both sides of the topic. |
| 2. **Jigsaw Puzzle** | • You divide a topic into smaller pieces (like a puzzle) and put students into groups.<br>• Assign each member of a team to read and become an expert on a different topic.<br>• After each student learns their topic, they teach the other group members about it.<br>• This ensures that every student has a completed puzzle of information about the main topic. |
| 3. **Large Group Discussions** | • Show a video clip, read a passage from the assigned text, present a problem, share a newspaper clipping, or do a demonstration and then have your students discuss the significance of what you showed or read.<br>• You could also ask (and write down on the board) a question that you came up or you could have students generate questions to share with the whole group. |
| 4. **Role Play** | • Students are given specific roles to play in a scenario, debate or conversation.<br>• Students act out the scenario and time is given for discussion and reflection on the topic. |
| 5. **Small Group Discussions** | There are a variety of things you can do with a small group discussion:<br>• Have each small group working on a different problem/question with a chance for each small group to report their findings;<br>• Have all of the small groups working on the same problem/question with no chance to report back, but the opportunity to talk about the ideas with one another;<br>• Have each small group generate a list of questions/problems for the large group to solve together. |
| 6. **Think-Pair-Share** | • Present students with a question or problem and let them think independently about the question/problem for a set period of time (say 2 minutes).<br>• Have the student pair up by turning to the person beside them and discuss with their partner their ideas about the question/problem for a set period of time (say 3 minutes).<br>• Return to the large group to share responses – this can be an informal discussion where students volunteer ideas or you can ask each partnership to give their response. |

[23] Adapted with permission from the Centre for Leadership in Learning, McMaster University (2011). Teaching Assistant Guide, p. 22-23.
[24] Adopted from Davis, B. G. (2009). Tools for teaching. John Wiley & Sons.
[25] Nilson, L. B. (2010). Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors. John Wiley & Sons

# Labs[26, 27]

Laboratories are a common component of courses in order for students to work through practical exercises and experiments that relate to the lecture material.

## General Teaching Principles for Labs

**Before** students begin working on the lab, you will likely need to:

- Remind students of the steps of the lab and/or procedures they need to follow that are specific to the laboratory of the day (e.g., where to dispose of waste; if ethanol and Bunsen burners are being used at the same time, emphasize that ethanol is extremely flammable).

- Explain about what kinds of results you want recorded in their lab reports and how to record them so that your marking expectations are clear.

**During** the time when students are completing the lab, you will supervise their activities and answer any questions that may arise. Circulate through the whole lab, speaking to each student and small groups. This will help build a collegial environment and may invite questions that a student was hesitant to raise with the whole class.

**After** the lab, students will usually complete a report or an assignment in order to demonstrate the knowledge they have gained by completing the lab. You may be responsible for collecting these reports. If you are involved in marking the lab reports, be sure to find out the procedures for marking before the lab so that you can clearly communicate to the students the expectations for the lab report/assignment.



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[26] Adapted with permission from the Centre for Leadership in Learning, McMaster University (2011). Teaching Assistant Guide, p. 6.
[27] L.B. Nilson (2010). Teaching at its best: A research-based resources for college instructors. John Wiley & Sons.

# Active Learning Strategies for Labs[28, 29]

| Name of Strategy | Description |
|---|---|
| **1. Board Work** | • Write information on the board for important ideas or key formulas and number procedural items to make them easy for reference throughout the laboratory. These points can also aid you when answering student questions later in the lab. |
| **2. Demonstrations** | • During the demonstration, ensure that everyone can see and hear. Keep it brief and concentrate on the key terms and functions that are in the procedures. Use the demonstration to generate excitement about the laboratory.<br><br>• Don't attempt to demonstrate equipment you have not practiced on. It is best to familiarize yourself with the equipment operation prior to the demonstration. |
| **3. Instructions** | • Maintain an active role and consistent pace of interaction throughout the lab so that students learn what to expect from you as their TA.<br><br>• You should include several moments of whole class instruction at key points in the laboratory. For example, when you are asked the same question three times, or three groups have the same problem, it is likely that other groups will have the same question or problem as well. Gain everyone's attention and use this moment to provide targeted "just in time" instruction or feedback for everyone.<br><br>• Be aware of the progress of all student teams, and listen to what is being said in groups to help you anticipate and diagnose instructional problems. Don't assume that since a group is quiet, they know what they are doing.<br><br>• You can diagnose a laboratory problem early on by observing what is being done or said in seemingly on-track groups. It is always useful, and never unappreciated, to approach a group and prompt them with "Tell me what you are doing…" to find out if they are on the right track. |

[28] Allen, D., O'Connell, R., Percha, B., Erickson, B., Nord, B., Harper, D., & Nam, E. (2009). University of Michigan Physics Department: GSI training course. (A. Arbor, Ed.). MI: University of Michigan Physics Department.
[29] Centre for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, (n.d.), Strategies for Effective Teaching in the Laboratory Class.

# Lab Safety Issues[30]

Safety takes on special importance when you are directly responsible for the health and well-being of the students in the lab. As the TA, you will need to describe to students the proper technique of handling materials, organizing a work area, and using equipment.

The following tips will help ensure laboratory and classroom safety:

1. Know where the emergency exits and best evacuation routes are.

2. Know where the closest first aid kit is and be prepared with simple first aid procedures. Don't forget to wear rubber gloves when working with flesh injuries.

3. Know where the nearest telephone is and in an emergency who to contact. (Please check with your department for specific safety code/procedures).

4. Report malfunctioning equipment even if it is only a leaking tap. Report problems to the administrative staff.

5. Observe no smoking rules and regulations.

6. In the laboratory, be sure that both you and the students do the following:
   A. Wear safety glasses if required. It is a general rule any labs using chemicals require safety glasses.
   B. Do not consume food and drink; wash your hands before leaving the lab.
   C. Do not have bare or stockinged feet, even if it is tempting to take off shoes when standing for long periods.
   D. Do not engage in any horseplay and pranks, they are potentially dangerous.
   E. Confine long hair and clothing when working with lab equipment and chemicals.
   F. Know the location of fire extinguishers, safety showers, and eyewash stations, and know how to use them. Point them out to students and explain how to use them.
   G. Develop a healthy respect for machinery, animals, and chemicals. Be alert for unsafe practices and techniques.

7. In the event of a fire, pull the fire alarm and call 911.

8. In the event of a fire alarm:
   A. Direct your students to leave the building by the shortest, safest route.
   B. Give assistance to handicapped persons.
   C. Close the door after everyone has left, but do not lock it.
   D. Do not return to the building until authorized to do so.

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[30] Adapted with permission from the Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University (2007). A Handbook for Teaching Assistants, p.23-24

**References:**

Centre for Teaching Excellence. (n.d.). Lecturing effectively. University of Waterloo. Retrieved from https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/lecturing-and-presenting/delivery/lecturing-effectively-university

Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence. (2017). Collected Wisdom: strategies & resources from TAs for TAs. Carnegie Mellon University.

UC Davis Centre for Educational Effectiveness. (2017). The TAs Guide to Effective Teaching at UC Davis. UC Davis.

# Chapter Six
## Assessment, Grading, and Feedback[31]

One of your main responsibilities as a TA will be to assess the students' learning by grading assignments and providing feedback. This chapter focuses on the differences between summative and formative assessments, strategies to take before, during, and after grading sessions, and strategies to give effective written and verbal feedback to students on their assessments.

## Assessing Students' Learning[32]

*Assessment* is the process of collecting and using evidence of student learning to provide teachers with information about some aspects of teaching and learning. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the assessment strategies in a course must align with the learning objectives so that a teacher can answer the questions: "What did the students learn?" and "Did the students achieve the learning objectives?"

### Summative Assessments

*Summative assessments* are for students to demonstrate mastery on a topic. They usually are given at the mid and end points of a course and are worth a high percentage of grades. Common examples of summative assessments are exams, papers, projects, and presentations.

The course instructor usually designs and develops the summative assessments in a course. As TAs, your obligation is more about grading them.

### Formative Assessments

*Formative assessments* monitor student learning, provide ongoing feedback, and ensure student success on the summative assessments. They are given throughout a course and are typically ungraded and anonymous, though some instructors do assign a small percentage (1-5%) to encourage student uptake.

As a TA, you have more opportunities to develop and deliver formative assessments. You can use the information obtained from formative assessments to help your students learn better and to focus your teaching.

> **Please note:** You can use the formative assessment strategies listed below as part of the post-assessment element of the BOPPPS lesson plan model outlined in Chapter Three.

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[31] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, p. 58-69.
[32] UC Davis Centre for Educational Effectiveness, UC Davis (2017). The TAs Guide to Effective Teaching at UC Davis, p.42- 43.

# Formative Assessment Strategies[33]

| Name of Strategy | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. **Practice Questions and Exercises** | • Provide students with practice questions and exercises that will be similar to the summative assessments they will be asked to do. |
| 2. **iClicker** | • iClicker is a student response system used at the U of M.<br><br>• Students can use iClicker by downloading the iClicker Cloud/REEF app to their mobile device or laptop to access the response system.<br><br>• Instructors use iClicker software to display a question on a screen and students provide their answers via the app.<br><br>• Responses are captured in real-time and the software aggregates the results and creates charts of the student responses. |
| 3. **Muddiest Point** | • At the end of class, ask students to write down what they perceived as the muddiest or unclear point of the lecture, an assigned reading, or class activity.<br><br>• Reserve some time at the end of class to ask and answer questions, then collect the student responses.<br><br>• You can clarify the muddiest point(s) during the next class.<br><br>• You may also want to consider revising your lesson to reduce confusion. |
| 4. **Exit Slip** | • At the end of class, write a question or pose a problem related to the learning activities or content from the lesson.<br><br>• Before students leave class, they leave you a slip of paper containing their anonymous response to a question.<br><br>• Some questions you might ask:<br>  ► What did you think was accomplished by the small group activity we did today?<br>  ► Read this problem, and tell me what your first step would be in solving it.<br>  ► We did a concept map activity [or other relevant activity] in class today.<br>  ► Was this a useful learning activity for you? Why or why not? |
| 5. **One-minute Paper** | • At the end of class, students close their books and summarize the lesson content they found most important or most useful.<br><br>• Before students leave class, they leave you a slip of paper containing their anonymous response to a question.<br><br>• Some questions you might ask:<br>  ► What was the most important concept of this class?<br>  ► Summarize the main point of today's lecture in one sentence.<br>  ► What questions remained unanswered? |

[33] Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University. (n.d.). Classroom assessment techniques (CATs). Retrieved from http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/cats/

# Grading

When you are grading assignments, it is helpful to remind yourself that the goal is to give students the best help you can with learning, not merely assigning a mark. Try to assign a fair grade and communicate to the student how that grade was assigned. Use constructive feedback comments to help struggling students identify steps they can take to improve on future assessments (Centre for Leadership in Learning, 2011).

## Before Grading[34, 35, 36]

At the beginning of the term, review the course syllabus and confirm with the instructor regarding:

**1. The department's grading distribution**

- Are there specific requirements about how grades should be distributed in specific courses?
- Familiarize yourself with your department's grading distribution if applicable.

**2. Late assignments, plagiarism, and grade appeal policies**

- Learn about policies related to late assignments, plagiarism, and grade appeals.
- Be clear on what to do in the above-mentioned situations.

**3. Marking rubrics**

- A rubric is a descriptive scoring grid used for assessing student performance. The grid contains the required criterion for the assessment and usually uses a rating scale with 3-5 levels.
- Determine if the course instructor has established marking rubrics or if you need to prepare your own.

> **?** If you need to prepare marking rubrics yourself, approach your course instructor or The Centre (TheCentre@umanitoba.ca) for more guidance and support.

> Click here for additional grading resources.

**4. Student clarity with assignments**

- Review assignment instructions, rubrics, and policies with students well in advance of due date.
- Ensure students understand the assignment instructions and marking rubrics.
- Go over academic dishonesty and late submission policies with students.

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[34] Centre for Leadership in Learning, McMaster University. (2011). Graduate Student Day: Workshop Handout Material.
   Retrieved from: http://cll.mcmaster.ca/resources/pdf/GradStudentDayHandouts.pdf
[35] Learning and Teaching Office, Ryerson University. (n.d.). Marking essays and short answer questions.
[36] Teaching Support Centre, Western University. (n.d.). Marking practices.
   Retrieved from: https://www.uwo.ca/tsc/resources/resources_graduate_students/ta_handbook/marking_practices/index.html

## 5.    Marking consistency

- If you are not the sole grader for the course, it is important that you all follow the same criteria for grading.
- Set up a meeting with the other TAs and/or the instructor to ensure marking consistency.

## 6.    UM Learn training

- Some of you may be required to enter grades and use rubrics in UM Learn if the course instructor has set this up.
- Attend UM Learning training if you have never used UM Learn before or require further assistance.

> Click here if you require training sessions on using this function on UM Learn.

# During Grading[37, 38]

While you are grading, consider the strategies below to help you grade fast yet equitably.

## Fast Grading

1. Prepare an answer key and/or the marking rubric.
2. Work through the questions yourself before grading them, even if you have done it before.
3. Grade one question at a time.
4. Annotate your grading criteria as you progress through the marking – taking note of how you handled similar errors.
5. Find excellent, good, adequate, and poor examples to serve as anchors or standards.
6. Avoid over-marking by writing brief comments that are focused on the marking criteria.
7. Avoid re-writing students' assignments by focusing on major problems only.
8. Set limits on how long you will spend grading each essay, assignment, or exam.

## Equitable Grading

1. Avoiding marking entire assignments in one sitting.
2. Cover students' names to avoid preconceived notions or biases from previous performance on other assignments or exams.
3. Shuffle students' assignments after each question is graded to remove expectations based on order.
4. Review and perhaps re-mark the first few graded assignments before assigning final grades to compare your grading standard across all assignments.

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[37] Adapted with permission from Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. (2017). Teaching at the University of Waterloo: a manual for teaching assistants, p. 23-24.
[38] Teaching Support Centre, Western University. (n.d.). Marking practices.
   Retrieved from: https://www.uwo.ca/tsc/resources/resources_graduate_students/ta_handbook/marking_practices/index.html

# After Grading[39, 40]

After a grading session, consider the following:

**1.    Keep assignments and grades in a safe place**

- Keep records and assignments in a safe location, such as a drawer that can be locked, until assignments can be returned or submitted to department.
- Make sure that you have back-ups of all records.

**2.    De-brief with the course instructor and other TAs about grades**

- Before returning assignments, talk to the course instructor and other TAs to compare notes or discuss difficult/borderline cases.

**3.    Handle academic dishonesty cases**

- Talk to the course instructor or your department about the process.

**4.    Confidentiality in returning grades**

- Do not post grades in public places.
- Write students' grades on the back page of assignments to protect privacy.

**5.    Reviewing assignments and grades with students**

- Leave time in class to review common mistakes or problem areas.
- Wait until the end of class to hand back assignments to avoid distracting students.

**6.    Implement a 24-hour wait period before student appeals or meetings about assignments**

- See Chapter Seven for strategies regarding handling student complaints about their grades.

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[39] Office of Graduate Studies, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. (2017). Grading Fairly and Effectively.

[40] Teaching Support Centre, Western University. (n.d.). Marking practices.
Retrieved from: https://www.uwo.ca/tsc/resources/resources_graduate_students/ta_handbook/marking_practices/index.html

# Giving Feedback

Teachers use feedback to communicate with students about their performance. Feedback should be a continuous process, not a one-time event. After offering feedback, make a conscious effort to follow up and let your students know you are available if they have questions.

## Written Feedback[41, 42, 43]

Since TAs commonly grade assessments, you will be providing written feedback to students. In general, written feedback is most helpful when it can be:

### 1. Understood

- Write legibly. If this is not possible, consider typing out your comments.
- Avoid comments that are ambiguous ("poor effort, could do better"), too abstract ("lack of critical thinking"), too general or vague ("good"), or cryptic ("why?").
- Use words that students understand and avoid using jargon.
- Where words fail, an example or model can help.

### 2. Accepted

- Do not comment on every error or correct every spelling and grammar error.
- Limit the number of comments that you provide students by focusing on the marking criteria.
- Strike a balance between positive and negative comments.
- Comment on the performance, not the person.

### 3. Acted Upon

- Make feedback future-directed. What can the student do to improve on the next assignment?
- Link your feedback to student progress. What improvements have you seen so far in the term on their assignments?
- Provide feedback in a timely manner, ideally within one to two weeks after the assignment submission.

Click here for more information about providing written feedback to students.

[41] Learning and Teaching Office, Ryerson University. (n.d.). Marking essays and short answer questions.

[42] Svinicki, M.D. and McKeachie, W.J. (2014). McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

[43] Centre for Leadership in Learning, McMaster University. (2011). Graduate Student Day: Workshop Handout Material.
   Retrieved from: http://cll.mcmaster.ca/resources/pdf/GradStudentDayHandouts.pdf

# Verbal Feedback[44]

TAs may have to give one-on-one verbal feedback to students after handing back their assessments. The ARCH model is a useful framework for providing verbal feedback.

|   | Definition | Steps |
|---|---|---|
| A | **Ask the student to self-assess.** | 1. Ask the student what is something he/she thinks was well done on the assessment. <br> 2. Ask the student what is something he/she thinks that needs improvement on the assessment. |
| R | **Reinforce what is being done well.** | 1. Re-state the student's self-identified strengths. <br> 2. State the strengths you have noted. |
| C | **Confirm what areas need improvement.** | 1. Re-state the student's self-identified area of improvement. <br> 2. State the areas of improvement you have noted. |
| H | **Help the student with an improvement plan.** | 1. Ask the student for ideas for a plan to improve on future assessments. <br> 2. Work together to form a specific plan. <br> 3. Have the student verbalize the plan and send it in writing via e-mail. |

[44] Baker, D. (2010). ARCH Feedback Model for Clinical Teachers. Florida State University College of Medicine.

**References:**

Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). How learning works: 7 research-based principles for smart teaching. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, P. K. (1993). Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers. (2nd ed.). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Cannon, R., & Knapper, C. (2012). Lecturing for better learning. In Green Guides No. 13. London: Society for Teaching and Learning and Higher Education.

Centre for Leadership in Learning. (2011). Graduate Student Day: Workshop Handout Material. McMaster University.

Davis, B. G. (2001). Tools for teaching. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

McGrath, A, L., Taylor, A., & Pychyl, T. A. (2011). Writing helpful feedback: The influence of feedback type on students' perceptions and writing performance. The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship in Teaching and Learning, 2(2), 1–14. Retrieved from https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/cjsotl_rcacea/article/view/6903/5617

Nicol, D., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. Studies in Higher Education, 31(2), 199–218. Retrieved from http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/rap/docs/nicol.dmd.pdf

Orsmond, P., & Merry, S. (2010). Feedback alignment: Effective and ineffective links between tutors' and students' understanding of course feedback. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 36(2), 125–136. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930903201651

Teaching Commons. (2014). TA Start Up Guide for Teaching & Learning at York University. York University. Retrieved from http://cll.mcmaster.ca/resources/pdf/GradStudentDayHandouts.pdf

# Identifying Student Incivility and UM Resources

As TAs, you are likely to encounter student incivilities and conflicts that will require the use of classroom management strategies. **Incivility** is uncivil behavior including being rude, impolite, and disrespectful. It can be verbal, non-verbal, or in writing. You may experience this type of behavior inside and outside of the classroom (e.g., during office hours).

ex.    Examples of student incivilities are:[45]

- Arriving late to class or leaving early
- Talking or engaging in distracting behavior in class
- Monopolizing class discussions, or making rude or inappropriate comments about other students' contributions to class discussions
- Using technology inappropriately in class
- Sleeping or doing any other non-class activity in class

A behavior may start as being uncivil, but if it persists, or interferes with your ability to do your work or the learning environment, it could then be considered disruptive. Disruptive behavior is defined by the U of M as "behavior that habitually interferes with the learning environment or requires inordinate amount of time and attention of faculty and staff."[46]

In this chapter, you will learn about common student incivilities and conflicts and suggested response strategies. In addition, a list of U of M resources will be provided.

Click here for more information regarding student incivility.

**Please note:** You are encouraged to check with your course instructor for their preferred navigation when facing student incivilities and conflicts.

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[45] Nilson, L. B. (2016). Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors. John Wiley & Sons.
[46] University of Manitoba. (n.d.). Student non-academic misconduct and concerning behaviour procedure, section 2.5 (c) (ii).

# Preventing Student Incivilities[47, 48, 49]

Here are some classroom management strategies that you can apply to your teaching practice to help prevent and/or minimize student incivilities.

| Name of Strategy | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. **Establish professional boundaries** | • Maintain a professional relationship with students at all times. Consider if your interactions with students need to be more formal or causal. Also, consider what kind of personal information about yourself is appropriate to share.<br>• Be clear on your professional boundaries at the beginning of the term, discuss them with the class, and adhere to them.<br>• If students approach you with personal information that may undermine your professional rapport, refer them to the course instructor or one of the support units introduced in Chapter One. |
| 2. **Establish authority** | • Refer to your research and teaching experience as appropriate.<br>• Dress more formally. |
| 3. **Set ground rules and expectations** | • Create a list of ground rules and expectations for classroom behavior (punctuality, classroom etiquette, assignments, participation, etc.) at the start of term. If possible, create the list together with the students.<br>• Refer to the list of ground rules and expectations throughout the term, especially as issues arise in class. It is also beneficial to refer to the list before teaching classes with controversial material. |
| 4. **Model and acknowledge desired behavior** | • Demonstrate professional behavior by being punctual and thoroughly prepared. Thank students for their punctuality or thorough preparation, or commend their participation during class activities.<br>• Demonstrate modes of interaction that you want students to use. For example, clarifying others' remarks before disagreeing or questioning, taking responsibility for mistakes, giving others the benefit of the doubt, etc.<br>• Maintain eye contact with students. |
| 5. **Focus students' attention during class** | • Use active learning techniques to keep students engaged and motivated. Refer to Chapter Five for examples of active learning strategies.<br>• Provide brief breaks during long classes. |

[47] Meyers, S. A. (2003). Strategies to prevent and reduce conflict in college classrooms. College teaching, 51(3), 94-98.
[48] Davis, B. G. (2009). Tools for teaching. John Wiley & Sons.
[49] Center for Research on Learning and, University of Michigan. (n.d.). Teaching strategies: Incivility in the College Classroom.

# Responding to General Student Incivility Situations[50]

If a conflict occurs between you and a student or between groups of students, you should work to address the issue as soon as possible and inform the course instructor.

Here are some recommended strategies as to how to respond to general student incivility situations.

**1.    Do not take it personally**

Conflict situations can make you feel upset, threatened, frustrated, and/or angry. By not taking the situation personally, you control your own emotional reaction, which allows you to respond in a calm manner.

**2.    Check your perception**

It is very easy to misinterpret someone, especially if they are emotional. To ensure that you understand the student and the problem, ask open-ended questions and rephrase their points using positive comments rather than non-blaming words. Ask them to correct any misinterpretations.

**3.    Listen to the student**

When you meet a student, indicate that you are interested in hearing their perspective. When the student explains their situation, really listen; focus on their communication, do not interrupt, and let them finish.

**4.    Choose when and where to deal with the situation**

Try to be attentive to both your needs and the situation when picking the time and place. Some situations are best handled immediately by speaking to the entire class or directly to the student(s) involved. Other situations may require you to speak to the student(s) later in your office.

ex. For example:
- If students are noisy in class, you can respond immediately by pausing until you regain the students' attention, making eye contact with the disruptive students, or asking if there is a problem you can help resolve.
- If you sense that a student is intimidated by authority, you may want to meet in a neutral location, like a conference room, rather than in your office.

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[50] Adapted from the Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. (n.d.). Conflict management for instructors. Retrieved from: https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/managing-students/setting-tone/conflict-management-instructors

## 5.    Focus on the behavior or problem and not the individual

Comment on the behaviour or problem you have observed. Use "I" rather than "you" statements.

> ex.    For example:
>
> - "I find it hard to teach when students are talking during class." versus "You are being very rude in my class."
> - "I notice that you tend to raise your voice during class discussions. This makes me uncomfortable. Is there something going on?" versus "You are clearly an angry person and need some help."

## 6.    Discuss next steps and document your decision

Tell the student what you have decided as the course of action, give them your rationale for your decision, and direct them to the appropriate resources.

> ex.    For example:
>
> - When responding to a mark dispute, you might choose to review the assignment with the student by referring to the marking rubric. In explaining your position, you might want to show an example of an assignment that better meets your expectations.

In many cases, you will want to document your decisions. If the student is not satisfied with your decision, it is good practice to direct them to an appropriate avenue for appeal (e.g., course instructor, department head, student advocacy).

# Responding to Specific Student Incivility Situations[51, 52]

## No One Has Done the Assigned Reading[53]

When no one has done the reading you assigned to them, consider the following strategies: (Mackeachie & Svinicki, 2006):

1.  Avoid taking over and lecturing on the unread material. Give students 5 minutes to scan the material and then ask them to write about it for 5 minutes.
2.  Voice the problematic nature of the situation, and state that there will be review and discussion questions on the readings at the beginning of the next class.
3.  Ask students to compose their own questions on the readings and bring them to class.
4.  Provide targeted questions for students to answer at home while they are reading.
5.  State that there will be some form of assessment about the readings for the next class.
6.  Re-evaluate what you are asking them do to outside of class. Is it too much reading? Too challenging?

## Only One Student Responds/Lack of Participation

It may be common for you to notice that your students are very quiet in the class and only one or two of them are willing to speak up or respond to your questions. Here are strategies that you could apply to respond to the situation:[54]

1.  Give students more time to think and respond.
2.  Ask students to write down their answers first and then share them with the class.
3.  Ask a student to read a passage of text or the problem aloud. Then follow-up and ask them to comment.
4.  Break students into groups to work together to answer the question(s). Be sure to move around the room during group tasks to ensure that students are completing the work you have assigned.
5.  Move some questions online by asking students to write their responses in an online discussion board. Some students may become more proficient participants with an increased sense of anonymity.
6.  Review the expectations for participation.
7.  Arrange a meeting with non-participative students outside of class. Express your concerns and brainstorms ways in which you might better engage them in your class.

[51] Nilson, L.B. (2010). Teaching at its best: A research-based resources for college instructors. John Wiley & Sons.
[52] Case Western Reserve University. Challenging moments with students: Elective Seminar.
    Retrieved from https://students.case.edu/academic/workshops/gradta/documents/doc/challengingm.pdf
[53] Morss, K. & Murray, R. (2005). Teaching at university: A guide for postgraduates & researchers. SAGE Publications.
[54] Mackeachie, W. J., & Svinicki, M. (2006). McKeachie's teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers. (12th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

# Student Complaints about Grades[55]

As TAs, you are encouraged to discuss students' complaints about their grade directly, professionally, and in communication with the course instructor. Strategies you can use include (Davis, 2001):

1. **Provide reflection and digestion time**

   Ask student to wait at least one full day between handing back assignments and discussing grade complaints to provide time for students to reflect on feedback.

2. **Stage specific office hours to discuss grades**

   Set aside specific office hours for discussing assignment feedback and grades. Ask students to come prepared with specific questions about their assignment, especially in relation to the rubric or assignment outline.

3. **Ask for their comments and questions in writing**

   Ask students to submit their concerns formally in writing, and specifically in reference to the assignment instructions and marking rubric.

4. **As appropriate, refer students to the course instructor**

   Inform the course instructor beforehand so they are aware of the discussions you and the student have had to date. Provide a record of all correspondence and feedback given so everyone has the same information to work with. This ensures as fair of assessment as possible.

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[55] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, p. 68.

# Argumentative Students

You may encounter students who challenge everything you or other students say in class. Some argumentative students may simply be emotionally invested in the topic of discussion, while others seek to challenge your authority. The following strategies should assist you in working with argumentative students:

1. **Use student disagreements as opportunities to model scholarly debate**

   Listen carefully to what the student is saying, reflect on his or her assertions, respond in a civil manner with your own interpretation of the material being discussed, and initiate a compromise if necessary.

2. **Consider inviting other students in the class to offer their ideas about the discussion topic**

   Hearing from peers may help argumentative students see alternative perspectives regarding the material. List comments on the board to ensure that all students' ideas are acknowledged.

3. **Ask verbally combative students to meet with you after class**

   Explain to the students that their opinions are valued, but add that there are ways to articulate one's opinions without hostility toward you or other students.

# Highly Emotional Students[56]

The following strategies should assist you in working with highly emotional students:

1. **Schedule an appointment**

   If a student is too emotional to communicate his or her situation, it may help to schedule an appointment for a later time. This delay gives both parties a chance to calm down and to review the problem.

2. **Open your door**

   This gives a chance for neutral, outside observers to witness the event. Leaving the door open protects both the student and yourself.

3. **Acknowledge behaviors and emotions**

   You may want to recognize the student's emotional state at the beginning of your meeting. You could say, "I can see that you are really upset. Can you tell me what you find especially frustrating?" If a student's behavior becomes inappropriate, point it out to them.

4. **Get assistance**

   If you do not know how to approach a highly emotional situation, get assistance from the course instructor, an academic advisor in your faculty, or the Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management. If a student becomes very aggressive or threatening, contact the security services at U of M at:

   - 555 from any university phone
   - #555 from MTS or Rogers Wireless
   - 204-474-9341 from all other phones

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[56] Adopted from the Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. (n.d.). Conflict management for instructors.
Retrieved from: https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/managing-students/setting-tone/conflict-management-instructors

# Ineffective Ways to Deal with Conflicts[57]

**STOP** 1. **Conquest**

Trying to win an argument will turn a disagreement into a battle for dominance. Intimidation tactics can cause students to challenge you further and discourage their participation.

**STOP** 2. **Avoidance**

Ignoring problems does not make them go away.

**STOP** 3. **Quick fixes and bargaining**

A band-aid solution cannot solve a conflict. Compromise can be an admirable way to resolve a conflict, but not when it rewards unacceptable behavior, harms your credibility as a teacher and is unfair to the other students.

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[57] Adopted from the Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. (n.d.). Conflict management for instructors.
Retrieved from: https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/managing-students/setting-tone/conflict-management-instructors

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Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). How learning works: 7 research-based principles for smart teaching. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Orsmond, P., & Merry, S. (2010). Feedback alignment: Effective and ineffective links between tutors' and students' understanding of course feedback. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 36(2), 125–136. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930903201651

This chapter intends to help you explore a set of ethical practice principles that can help define your professional responsibilities as a TA. Specific areas of ethical practice that will be highlighted are student diversity and sexual harassment and violence. The chapter concludes with strategies related to academic integrity.

**Please note:** It is important that you check with your course instructor for their preferred navigation when facing issues regarding ethical practice and academic integrity.

# Ethical Practice Principles

Being a TA, you are considered as "a professional and must therefore respect the ethical considerations of the teaching profession" (Arbach, 2011, p. 1) even though you may carry out some of your duties in a less formal way compared with course instructors (Arbach, 2011). *Ethical practice* in post-secondary education, according to Patel (2017), could range from "plagiarism to public interest disclosure and from race equality to confidentiality of information" (p. 29).

The nine ethical principles[58] outlined in this section are conceptualized as general guidelines and/or expectations that you are encouraged to take into account in your daily teaching practice.

| Ethical Principles | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. **Content Competence** <br><br> "Maintain a high level of subject matter knowledge and ensure that course content is current, accurate, representative, and appropriate to the position of the course." | This principle means that a teacher is responsible for maintaining (or acquiring) subject matter competence not only in areas of personal interest but in all areas relevant to course goals or objectives. |

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[58] Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. (n.d.). Ethical Principles in University Teaching.

| Ethical Principles | Description |
|---|---|
| **2. Pedagogical Competence**<br><br>"Communicate the objectives of the course to students, be aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies, and select methods of instruction that… are effective in helping students to achieve the course objectives." | This principle means that, in addition to knowing the subject matter, a teacher has adequate pedagogical knowledge and skills, including:<br><br>• communication of objectives<br>• selection of effective instructional methods<br>• provision of practice and feedback opportunities<br>• accommodation of student diversity |
| **3. Dealing With Sensitive Topics**<br><br>"Topics that students are likely to find sensitive or discomforting are dealt with in an open, honest, and positive way." | This principle means that a teacher:<br><br>• acknowledges from the outset that a particular topic is sensitive and explains why it is necessary to include it in the course syllabus<br>• identifies her/his own perspective on the topic and compares it to alternative approaches or interpretations<br>• provides students with an understanding of the complexity of the issue and the difficulty of achieving a single objective" conclusion<br>• invites all students to state their position on the issue, sets ground rules for discussion, and encourages students to respect one another when it is necessary to disagree |
| **4. Student Development**<br><br>"Contribute to the intellectual development of the student, at least in the context of the teacher's own area of expertise, and to avoid actions…that detract from student development." | According to this principle, a teacher's most basic responsibility is:<br><br>• to design instruction that facilitates learning and encourages autonomy and independent thinking in students<br>• to treat students with respect and dignity |
| **5. Dual Relationships with Students**<br><br>"A teacher does not enter into dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favoritism on the part of the teacher." | This principle means that it is the responsibility of a teacher to keep relationships with students focused on pedagogical goals and academic requirements. |

| Ethical Principles | Description |
|---|---|
| **6. Confidentiality**<br>"Student grades, attendance records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials, and are released only with student consent, or for legitimate academic purposes." | This principle suggests that students are entitled to the same level of confidentiality in their relationships with teachers.<br><br>Violation of confidentiality in the teacher-student relationship can cause students to distrust teachers and to show decreased academic motivation. |
| **7. Respect for Colleagues**<br>"A university teacher respects the dignity of her/his colleagues and works cooperatively with colleagues in the interest of fostering student development." | This principle means that in interactions among colleagues with respect to teaching, the overriding concern is the development of students.<br><br>Disagreements between colleagues relating to teaching are settled privately, if possible, with no harm to student development. |
| **8. Valid Assessment of Students**<br>"Teachers are responsible for taking adequate steps to ensure that assessment of students is valid, open, fair, and congruent with course objectives." | This principle means that a teacher:<br><br>• selects assessment techniques that are consistent with the objectives of the course and at the same time are as reliable and valid as possible<br><br>• communicates the assessment procedures and grading standards at the beginning of the course<br><br>• grades student exams, papers, and assignments carefully and fairly through the use of a marking system that can be communicated to students<br><br>• provides students with prompt and accurate feedback on their performance at regular intervals |
| **9. Respect for Institution**<br>". . . a university teacher is aware of and respects the educational goals, policies, and standards of the institution in which s/he teaches." | This principle implies that a teacher shares a collective responsibility to:<br>• work for the good of the university as a whole<br>• uphold the educational goals and standards of the university<br>• abide by university policies and regulations pertaining to the education of students |

# Key Issue Related to Ethical Practice Principles – Supporting Diverse Students[59]

This section is to further address Ethical Principle 2: Pedagogical Competence, which advocates for the accommodation of student diversity.

## Clarifying the Concept of Diverse Students

When used within the context of higher education, the term "diversity" could range from demographic changes in global workforce (Akombo, 2013), to the impact of multiculturalism in educational settings (Guo & Jamal, 2007), or more closely to the responses to dynamic ethnic, age, race, gender, academic, religious, or linguistic metrics in the classroom (Davis, 2001).

Discussing diversity in class is not at all a matter of treating everyone the same or defining students by their "differences" (Guo & Jamal, 2007, p. 14). Instead, it's about transforming curriculum to include multiple approaches towards knowing, and being inclusive to previously marginalized knowledge or student groups (Guo & Jamal, 2007).

## Universal Instructional Design

Despite the fact that there seems to be no universal rules or solutions for responding to diversity in the classroom (Davis, 2001), you could adapt universal instructional design (UID) and inclusive teaching strategies in your class to supports the needs of all learners.

UID is a strategy for designing tools and materials that are flexible, consistent, accessible, clear, and supportive of the teaching and learning goals you are designed to achieve. It is not about ensuring accessibility only for students with disabilities, but about considering the potential needs of all learners when planning and delivering course material.

By utilizing the principles of UID, you can plan how to best support learning for all students in the classroom. It also helps with identifying and eliminating barriers to learning more effectively, and minimizing the potential need for special accommodations (Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

> Click here for more information about UID.

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[59] Adapted with permission from the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary. (2017). Graduate Student Guide, p. 13-15.

Some other strategies for inclusive teaching practice that you could refer to:

1.  **Be aware of any biases or stereotypes that you may have absorbed.**

    What kinds of assumptions do you hold about students' motivations to study? For example, do you assume that students taking a course in Religious Studies are all religious?

2.  **Convey the same level of respect for all students.**

    This includes showing equal respect for students' academic capabilities (Davis, 2001).

3.  **Do not make one person the spokesperson for an entire group, or try to "protect" any group of students.**

    These behaviors can have negative implications on students' performance, and for the classroom environment as a whole. (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010).

4.  **Use inclusive language.**

    Your language and demeanor have a powerful impact on your relationships with students and the instructor. As a general rule, handle language around age, race, sex, disabilities, and religion thoughtfully, and only identify people or groups by their differences when relevant to the course material.

> Click here for more resources related to supporting Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the classroom.

# Key Issue Related to Ethical Practice Principles – Sexual Harassment and Violence[60]

This section is to further address Ethical Principle 5: Dual Relationships with Students. As already explained, teachers are required to keep professional relationships with students.

Potentially problematic dual relationships include any form of sexual or close personal relationship with a current student that is likely to impair teacher objectivity and/or detract from student development. In certain cases, some sexual relationships may constitute sexual harassment and even sexual violence which are prohibited under the Human Rights Code of Manitoba and the U of M's Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy.

*Sexual harassment* is uninvited and unwanted sexual attention made by a person who knows, or ought reasonably to know that it is unwelcome. Sexual harassment is defined as a course of abusive, unwelcome conduct or comment made on the basis of gender; or, any sexual solicitation or advance that is unwelcome, especially if it may reasonably be seen to be putting a condition on employment, or the receiving or withholding of any benefit or service.

ex. The unwanted behavior can be physical or verbal. It may include one or more of the following:

- Unnecessary physical contact, such as touching, patting or pinching
- Demands for sexual favours in return for a promise of a reward or a threat of reprisal
- Unwelcome sexual remarks or jokes that denigrate one's gender
- Displaying derogatory materials such as pictures, cartoons or printed matter

Click here for more information regarding sexual harassment.

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[60] Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management, University of Manitoba. (n.d.). Sexual Harassment.
Retrieved from: https://umanitoba.ca/sexual-violence

***Sexual violence*** refers to any sexual act or act targeting a person's sexuality, gender identity or gender expression whether the act is physical or psychological in nature that is committed, threatened or attempted against a person without their consent.

ex. This includes but is not limited to:
- Sexual assault
- Sexual harassment
- Stalking
- Indecent exposure
- Voyeurism
- Stealthing (non-consensual removal of a condom or other form of protection)
- Degrading sexual imagery
- Sexual exploitation
- Distribution of sexual images or video of a person without their consent
- Cyber harassment or cyber stalking of a sexual nature

Sexual Violence Resource Centre

The Sexual Violence Resource Centre (SVRC) provides support, education, resources and referral services for any student, faculty or staff member who has been affected by sexual violence. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence and would benefit from support, the SVRC can help.

svrc@umanitoba.ca

204-474-6562

537 UMSU University Centre

# Academic Integrity[iii]

Another issue that requires your attention in teaching practice is academic integrity. The U of M defines academic integrity as a commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage. Working with academic integrity demonstrates credibility and respect for good academic practices, while upholding the value of a UM degree.



## Integrating Academic Integrity Education into the Classroom

The U of M has adapted a teaching and learning approach in its development of a culture of integrity on campus. The most effective means is a tiered educational approach that integrates academic integrity programming into every aspect of the student learning experience (Educational Advisory Board, 2014).

As a TA, you may or may not be responsible for promoting or monitoring academic integrity in the course that you are TAing in however, it is important that you familiarize yourself with the key strategies that you could adapt into your interactions with students:

**1.     Model academic integrity behaviours, practices, and skills**

Students look to course instructors and TAs for explicit and implicit cues on how academic integrity is upheld within the academic setting. Therefore, it is your responsibility as a TA to demonstrate academic integrity in every aspect of your teaching, such as including references in your lecture notes, and creating (rather than re-using) new exam questions and assessments each year.

> Click here for teaching resources on strategies for creating assessments that decrease the likelihood of dishonesty.

## 2.  Emphasize the grey areas

While most students are aware that certain behaviours constitute cheating (e.g., hiring another student to write an exam), many students are not aware that in situations involving academic integrity, it is not always clear how one should respond.

ex.  For example:
- Collaboration may be appropriate on one assignment, but not another.
- Peer editing may be permitted in certain circumstances, but not when the editing is at odds with the student learning a specific skill, e.g., how to format in a specific citation style.
- At the graduate level and in research, students will often collaborate with other students and faculty members to co-author papers.

Describing these common situations helps students to understand that academic integrity is not always black and white, and thus it is very important to seek clarification and assistance in many situations.

## 3.  Contextualize information

Students need to know how academic integrity is practiced in the course you are TAing in. Students are more than likely to take classes in several subject areas, where expectations may differ for written work, group work, building on previous work, and so forth. Therefore, they will depend on you and the course instructor to gain explicit information on what is expected. This information should be provided in several ways (course syllabus, assignment guidelines, in-person), and reiterated throughout the term.

## 4.  Help students to understand the broad implications

Help students understand how acting with integrity allows them to build the knowledge and skills for their future careers. By doing so, you could make the topic of academic integrity less abstract and more directly relevant and practical to students.

## 5.  Understand how culture and educational background may affect a student's understanding of academic integrity

Students arrive at U of M with a wide range of educational experiences and a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. There are many factors that influence how students understand academic integrity and acceptable practices for group work, crediting others' ideas, and demonstrating learning. You should also keep in mind that many Canadian students arrive at the U of M with little to no experience with academic writing.

The Centre offers workshops and resources to assist with deepening your understanding of these factors, and the International Centre offers group advising sessions on adapting to the academic culture in Canada.

## 6.    Direct students to resources

Many students are not aware of the range of supports available on campus, which range from academic supports, such as writing tutors, subject librarians, study skills instructors and academic advisors, to non-academic supports, such as Student Counselling Centre, Career Services, and others. For more information, please check the "Supporting Units at U of M" section in Chapter One.

As a TA, encourage students to seek support from the many services available on campus, as their tuition covers the cost of these services. It is also worth emphasizing that many students seek the help of private tutors outside of the university; however, these tutors are not trained in academic integrity and working with these tutors may put students at risk for facing an allegation of misconduct.

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Student Resources for Academic Integrity at the U of M:
- Academic Integrity
- Citation managers
- Citation style guides
- Library subject guides & subject librarians
- Academic Learning Centre handouts, workshops and one-to-one tutoring

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# Detecting and Responding to Academic Misconduct

There are six common forms of academic misconduct, as defined by U of M's Student Discipline Bylaw:

1. **Plagiarism**

   The presentation or use of information, ideas, sentences, findings, etc. as one's own without appropriate attribution in an assignment, test or final examination.

2. **Cheating on tests, exams, and quizzes**

   The circumventing of fair testing procedures or contravention of exam regulations. Such acts may be premeditated/planned or may be unintentional or opportunistic.

3. **Inappropriate collaboration**

   When a student and any other person work together on assignments, projects, tests, labs or other work unless authorized by the course instructor.

4. **Duplicate submission**

   Cheating where a student submits a paper/assignment/test in full or in part, for more than one course without the permission of the course instructor.

5. **Personation**

   Writing an assignment, lab, test, or examination for another student, or the unauthorized use of another person's signature or identification in order to impersonate someone else. Personation includes both the personator and the person initiating the personation.

6. **Academic fraud**

   Falsification of data or official documents as well as the falsification of medical or compassionate circumstances/documentation to gain accommodations to complete assignments, tests or examinations.

Despite your efforts at integrating best practices for academic integrity in your class, you may still encounter students engaging in academic misconduct. Many TAs at the beginning of their teaching career fear that these situations reflect poorly on their teaching, and are hesitant to report these cases.

However, all academic staff face cases of academic misconduct at some point in their teaching. While you may feel that informally resolving the issue and reframing it as a teachable moment may be of greater benefit to the student, please keep in mind that these informal resolutions are not recorded by the university and that the student may have previously engaged in academic misconduct.

If you suspect academic misconduct in your class, you must direct it to the course instructor. Although course instructors do not have disciplinary authority with regards to suspected academic misconduct, they can contact the Department Head or Dean/Director for allegations.

Resources for Academic Integrity at the U of M:

- The Student Discipline Bylaw outlines disciplinary actions for academic misconduct and the appeal process available to students. The Bylaw includes a standalone procedure for academic misconduct which defines categories of behavior that constitute academic misconduct, as well as the procedures for investigating cases of academic misconduct.

- Procedural guidelines for responding to academic misconduct are available.

- The Registrar's Office Grades Policy

- The Student Advocacy office provides consultation services for instructors and faculty members regarding policy, procedures, and student cases.

- Visit The Centre's Academic Integrity portal for resources and training.

- Contact an Academic Integrity coordinator at academicintegrity@umanitoba.ca

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[ii] Chapter Seven includes contributions from Ms. Heather Morris, Director of the Student Advocacy Service at the University of Manitoba.

[iii] The Academic Integrity section in Chapter Eight is fully contributed by Ms. Loie Gervais, Academic Integrity Coordinator at the Student Engagement and Success at the University of Manitoba.

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