

Division of Learning and **Teaching Support and** Innovation (LTSI)

Instructor's Guide to Working with TAs 2020-2021



Wondering where to start with your new TA?

Based on course specifics and individual faculty preference, each department requires teaching assistants (TAs) to perform a variety of duties. Moreover, each TA arrives with different levels of skills and experience.

How can you, as the instructor, work within these constraints to create opportunities that benefit everyone involved – you, the TA, and your students?

On the following pages, you will find some suggestions to guide you through the process of working with TAs. Not only will it work towards helping graduate students become reflective, independent, and collaborative teachers, but will also assist in your responsibility to mentor and prepare future colleagues. These suggestions can provide a framework to help you determine how best to work with the TAs you will be interacting with over the coming years.

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- Your role. Find out about your responsibilities as a supervisor of TAs

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- TA Questionnaire. Find out about your TA's previous experience
- What to do. Before the course begins, during the course, and after the course ends.
- TAs learning how to teach. TAs' learning process.

Overview of Primary TA Responsibilities. Find out what TAs may want to know.

TAC Contact Info. Names of TACs for each department.

Responsibilities of the TA Supervisor

According to Sprague and Nyquist (1989), anyone who is responsible for TAs (senior lab instructors, professors, or other designates) takes on three roles: as a manager, as a professional model, and as a mentor.

Manager

As a manager, consider doing the following:

- 1. Make sure that you have a well thought out plan for what TAs will be doing in your course but base this on two things: TA's prior knowledge and what each TA wants to learn.
- 2. Make your expectations clear. Despite years as a student, this is the first time the TA is in a teaching position.
- 3. Be visible, accessible, and visit tutorials and labs (always pre-arranged and never unexpected).
- 4. Keep TAs informed. For example, if there are professional development opportunities on campus or in the department that are related to TA work (such as the TA Consultant program), notify TAs and explain why it is important that they attend.
- 5. Be collaborative and open to feedback. TAs know what is working or not in their classroom. They may not be able to articulate why something is happening but they will notice when there is a problem.
- 6. Give regular feedback. This way TAs will know how they are doing and what to improve instead of guessing what the students and you are thinking. Make it clear how the department evaluates their work.

Professional model

As a professional educational model, you demonstrate how TAs should act. As a model you want to relay the complexity of teaching to TAs. This includes codes of conduct associated with a teaching role at UVic and exposure to UVic policies.

Mentor

Help TAs understand that learning how to teach is a developmental process that takes time. You may want to try a cognitive apprenticeship approach. This is when you talk *out loud* your decisions related to the course, which makes your decisions and reasons for the way a course and its components are designed transparent to the TA.

Additionally, let TAs know that they need to be aware of the values and ideas they bring with them about teaching and learning. Most importantly, help TAs realize that teaching is not the same as learning. Therefore, their ideas about how they learned best are only valid and applicable to a few students and that they have to learn how to take a teacher approach to teaching, not what worked for them as a student approach. As soon as they take on a TA role, TAs need to understand that they are taking on a new role, which comes with a different set of responsibilities.



Communication is key

Supervision. Teaching Assistant Training in the 1990s, New Directions in Teaching and Learning, 39, 37-53.

Adapted from:

http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachle arn/resources/supervisor/resources/ needs/index.html Contact the TA as soon as he or she has been assigned to your course. The majority of TAs, especially new graduate students, are very anxious about their performance, duties, and responsibilities as a TA. By contacting the TA early and offering to meet him or her before the course begins, will help alleviate a lot of his or her fears and anxieties.

To get a sense of the type of experience your TA has, consider sending him or her the following questionnaire:

1. Have you had any formal course work or instruction about how to teach?

___Yes ___No

- If yes, how long did that training last?
- About which topics?

2. Have you had any past teaching (including grading) experience? Yes No

- If yes, at what levels have you taught?
 K - 12
- ____ College\university
- And for how many years?
- ___ Less than one year
- ___ One to two years
- ____ Three to six years
- ____ More than six years

3. In thinking about upcoming TA assignments, what are the three biggest concerns you have? What students will think of me

- Preparing for class
- Establishing and
- maintaining credibility
- Teaching students
- ☐ How to grade students
- Understanding what is expected of me
- Teaching in English or with students who have a different educational culture from my own
- Managing time
 effectively
- Handling potential conflicts with students
- Doing a good job
- Encouraging students to think critically
- Mastering content well enough to teach
- Working with students of diverse
- backgrounds
- Other

What are your strengths?

- __ Writing papers
- __ Study habits
- __ Reading papers
- ___ Working in groups
- __ Organizational skills
- __ Time management
- __ Other, please explain 3



Before the course begins

Duties and responsibilities need to be clear

Try to be as detailed as possible. Even though grading is second nature to you, TAs do not know how to approach that stack of marking. Providing marking keys and rubrics is excellent, but again, a new TA will need guidance and examples to help him or her understand your expectations.

Refer to the TA Checklist (beginning on page 7). These are the type of questions that TAs may want to ask. Often, TAs will not ask for fear of seeming naïve about their role. Please use this checklist as a guide to address what TAs are too afraid to ask.

Encourage attendance at workshops and programs. Educational sessions offered by the Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation (LTSI) will benefit the TA.

Discussion about the importance of professional development will highlight how important the TA role is on campus.

During the course

Provide support and stay in contact

Check in with your TAs. Check in often to ensure that TAs feel confident with their work and to provide the opportunity to engage in questions.

Offer to conduct an observation. If the TA is in a classroom or lab situation, offer to observe his or her interactions with students. At LTSI we have many resources on how to approach teaching observations. Please do not hesitate to ask for guidelines and suggestions.

Encourage the TA to request feedback from students. Mid-term feedback will help TAs reflect on what they are doing in the classroom. Please provide a copy of LTSI's publication, *Formative Feedback for Teaching Assistants (TAs) at UVic,* which contains useful ideas on how to gather feedback from students and colleagues.

When the course ends

Review the course and provide feedback

Provide the TA with some constructive feedback about his or her performance as a TA. Not all departments incorporate feedback for TAs into their program and therefore any feedback that you can provide the TA will be extremely helpful for future appointments. At LTSI we always encourage providing positive feedback so that the TA understands what worked well, then constructive guidance as to what to work on and where to access resources to help in that area, and close with another positive attribute of the TA as a teacher. Review the resource Formative Feedback for Teaching Assistants (TAs) at UVic. It provides many ideas on different ways to provide feedback to TAs.

The **TA Coordinator** has many resources that can assist TAs with their duties, and is available for one-on-one consultations.



Please do not hesitate to refer your TA to **Gerry Gourlay** through email at **Itsitac@uvic.ca** for information, program schedules, or professional development opportunities.

Don't new and experienced TAs differ, and require different types of support?

Your TA may have years of TA experience. In order to provide the support most appropriate for your TA's skill level, ensure that you find out what experiences your TA has. Despite having years of experience, TAs may not have had the chance for instruction about the work they are performing or may have never benefitted from reflecting on their work. See the next page for the barriers that prohibit TAs from learning and if not addressed can lead to TAs repeating habits that are detrimental to students' learning.

TAs becoming, being, and forthcoming as they learn how to teach: TAs' experiential learning process



As TAs take on the teaching role (any TA position) and begin the process of **becoming** a teacher, they bring their past experience of being a student. TAs hold robust beliefs and dispositions related to teaching and learning. Their beliefs and dispositions, however, are narrowly focused and based on what worked for them. Further, since TAs have never been in a 'teaching' role, they default to approaching their work from a student subject position. Taking on a new role is a difficult transition so TAs need support to recognize that being in a teaching role is completely different from a learning role. This is extremely important because TAs typically have a lot of autonomy and make many teaching judgements. These judgements can be very detrimental to students' learning if TAs are not given the support they need through affordances-instruction about teaching and ongoing mentorship. As TAs are **being** teachers, the affordances provided for them determines whether a TA takes an expansive or restrictive approach to learning how to teach. Even if a TA is highly motivated to learn how to teach, if they are not provided with instruction, feedback, and ongoing mentorship and support, the TA will have a restrictive learning experience. But, if a TA is given ample instruction, feedback, and mentorship, they will have an expansive (deeper) learning experience that leads to knowledge development. To confirm knowledge development and make explicit what has been learned, TAs need guidance on how to reflect on their learning so that they can use that knowledge in *forthcoming* teaching. In order to best support undergraduate students' learning, TAs need to be supported throughout their whole learning process, as they are becoming, being, and forthcoming.¹

¹ Korpan, C. (2019). Learning to teach: Teaching assistants' (TAs') learning in the workplace. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.

The TA will be responsible for:

working _____ (number of hours) per week

See Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Agreement at http://web.uvic.ca/~cupe4163/ for details about your position.

__ holding office hours

____ attending lectures

keeping class records

__ creating/selecting class materials

__ presenting new material/lecturing

__ leading discussions/answering questions

__ conducting review sessions

__ holding tutorial sessions

__ duplicating materials

__ preparing/collecting solutions to questions

__ grading/providing feedback on assignments and exams

__assigning course grades

__ ordering, obtaining AV equipment/materials

__ setting up the lab

__ running recitation or lab section(s)

____ demonstrating procedures or setting up demonstrations

_ cleaning the lab

__ others (see following pages)

Overview of Primary TA Responsibilities

It is important that TAs determine how many hours they should allocate for class time, laboratories, office hours, preparation, grading and other duties. By reviewing these pages, and determining which duties they will be taking on, you will be able to better help your TAs plan their time and perform their responsibilities.



Course Overview

- What are the course goals/objectives?
- Who are the students (background with subject, level, class list, etc.)?
- What are the names/emails/phone numbers of other TAs assigned to this course?
- What is the procedure to follow if you are ill or must miss a class/lab?
- What is the workload distribution among TAs assigned to the course?

Initial Tasks

- What are you expected to do prior to the first class meeting?
- Are you expected to attend the first class meeting?

TA/Supervisor Meetings

- How frequently will you meet with the professor/supervisor?
- How can you be contacted by the professor/supervisor?
 - __ office phone: _____
 - __ home phone: _____
 - __ e-mail: _____
 - ___ note on office door: _____ (office number: _____)
 - ___ note in laboratory: ______ (laboratory: ______)
 - __ note in box _____
- How can the professor/instructor be contacted?
 - __ office phone: _____
 - __ home phone: _____
 - __ e-mail: _____
 - __ note on office door: _____ (office number: _____)
 - __ note in laboratory: _____ (laboratory location: _____)
 - __ note in box _____

It is advisable to take home the contact info for the supervisor and other TAs (if there are any) so that you know who to get in touch with in case of illness or emergencies.

Materials

Textbook/laboratory manual:

• How can you obtain a copy?

Other materials:

- If you are responsible for putting materials on reserve, what procedure do you need to follow?
- Will the course have Moodle or another Internet site? (If so, make sure you have access to it.)
 - Find out who maintains and monitors it and who to contact for technical problems.
 - In what way are the students expected to use it?
- Are you expected to read all class materials and answer student questions regarding these materials?
 - Find out who to contact for course content problems.
 - If you are responsible for putting material online, remember that you can only use 10% of copyrighted material

Class Meetings

• How often are you expected to attend class?

- ___ every class
- ____ exams only
- ____ not required to attend any classes
- ___ other
- If you are expected to attend classes, at what time are you expected to arrive?
- What responsibilities will you have with respect to the class meeting?
 - ____ answer questions at the beginning, middle or end of class
 - ____ distribute/collect assignments and/or handouts
 - _____ take notes on the lecture
 - ____ lead discussion(s), facilitate activities
 - ____ notify students of class cancellations
 - ____ set up/run AV/lab equipment
 - ____ lecture/present material (will professor be available for assistance?)
 - ____ clarify class/university policies (lateness, assignment/test make-up, cheating, etc.)

Office Hours

- Does the professor/instructor hold office hours? __ yes __ no
 - If yes, where and when?
- Are you expected to hold weekly office hours? __ yes __ no
 - If yes, where and when?

• How will students be notified of the location and times of your office hours? **Assignments**

• What kind of assignments are students expected to complete? Other Student Contact Responsibilities

• How will students contact you?

• Are due dates and late-acceptance policy specified in the syllabus?

• If you are working in a lab, it is not always wise to give out your lab phone number. We strongly recommend that you never give out your home phone number.

- An email list or Moodle bulletin board is an easy mechanism for building community/answering questions.
- Are you expected to:
 - ____ conduct review or help sessions?
 - ____ tutor individuals or groups (beyond office hours)?
- If so, when and where?

How can you obtain a copy of department policies on grading, plagiarism, and so on, and a copy of university policies that directly affect instruction? **Technology**

- Are you expected to reserve, obtain and return AV, computer or laboratory equipment?
 - If so, what equipment will be needed and when will it be needed?
 - Where is this equipment located?
 - Is there a charge, form or project number that should be used when reserving equipment?

Photocopying

Remembér that only 10% of copyrighted material can be used.

- Are you expected to photocopy materials for the course?
 - If so, what materials will need to be photocopied and where are they located?
- Are you expected to bring photocopied materials to class?

• If you are responsible for photocopying, where should it be done?

- ____ in departmental office?
- Will you be provided with a code?
- Are you required to bring the photocopying to:
 - ____ a departmental secretary?
 - ____ a duplicating service on campus?
- How much lead time is needed?
- What is the procedure?

Assignments

- What kind of assignments are students expected to complete?
- Are due dates and late-acceptance policy specified in the syllabus?

• How can you obtain a copy of department policies on grading, plagiarism, and so on, and a copy of university policies that directly affect instruction?

- Find out who is responsible for marking schemes and grading rubrics.
- Make sure you know the mechanism for grade complaints and articulate this to your class.
- With respect to assignments, what responsibilities will you have?
 - ___ preparing
 - ___ collecting
 - ____ grading/recording scores
 - ____ giving feedback
 - ____ instructing students about specific formats

Exams

• When will exams be held?

• Approximately how many questions and of what type will you be expected to create for each exam? By when? Will the professor/ instructor review the questions you create?

• What resources are available to assist you in preparing questions (e.g.: sample questions, old exams, test banks)?

- Are you expected to score/grade exams? By when?
- Who establishes grading criteria?
- Are you expected to invigilate exams? Will the professor/instructor attend exams?
- Are you expected to bring exams to the exam session?
- Are you expected to bring other materials to the exam session?

Administration/Grading

- What responsibilities will you have with respect to administration and grading?
 - ____ enforce academic misconduct rules
 - ____ assign grades/make recommendations for grading
 - ____ keep class records. If so, when must they be turned in?
 - _____ tabulate grades. If so, when must they be turned in?
 - _____ fill out and/or submit grade sheets. If so, when must they be turned in?
 - ____ post scores /grades. If so, when and where?

continued...



Reference:

Questions TAs may want to ask was adapted from The Center for Teaching and Learning Services. (2008). TA Responsibilities Checklist. Retrieved July 6, 2010, from the University of Minnesota website:

http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/prod/g roups/ohr/@pub/@ohr/documents /asset/ohr_46421.pdf

Questions TAs may want to ask:

TA Performance Evaluation/Feedback

- What manner of performance evaluation can you expect?
 - ____ formal observation/evaluation from faculty/instructor
 - ____ peer observation
 - ____ student ratings
- When will evaluation(s) be given?
 - ____ at mid-semester
 - ____ at semester's end
 - ____ at the TA's request
 - ____ when there is a problem
 - ____ informally during the semester as part of regular meetings
- Student evaluation of TA's performance will be:
 - ____ When? Who will receive copies?

Course Evaluation

• What manner of evaluation will be conducted regarding the course and the instructor/professor?

• Who gets copies of the results?

Other



As a Teaching Assistant (TA), you should know exactly what your responsibilities will be in a given course. This checklist of questions supplements the questions outlined above in the "Being a TA" guide and can be used in conversation with your course instructor before the course begins will help you clarify their expectations, your role, and your responsibilities.

This checklist has been adapted from the University of Manitoba – The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (<u>https://centre.cc.umanitoba.ca/ta-training/working-in-a-remote-learning-environment/</u>).

Roles and expectations as a TA:

- □ What is my role in this course?
- □ What other responsibilities will I have?
- □ Am I expected to attend weekly synchronous lectures?
- □ Whom do I contact if I am unable to fulfill my duties (illness, emergency, etc.)?
- □ How many hours am I expected to spend on the course per week?

Questions to add:

University of Victoria policies and course-specific requirements:

- □ Am I expected to hold virtual, weekly office hours?
- □ If I assist students during office hours, what kind of assistance should I give? How will I know
- if I am helping too much or too little?
- □ What do I need to know about course policies and procedures?
- □ Are there any other UVic policies I should be familiar with? Privacy, VPN, others?
- □ How should concerns about academic dishonesty be addressed?
- □ What should I do if a student challenges me in the course?



What is the policy regarding assignment extensions, accommodations, and make-up tests?Whom should students contact about this?

□ If a student requests an accommodation for accessibility, what should I do?

Questions to add:

Questions related to technical skills:

- □ What do I need to know about Brightspace at UVic?
- □ Which tools will I be using in Brightspace? Announcements, Discussions, Gradebook,

Rubrics, Quizzes, etc.?

- □ If I am monitoring discussions, how often do I need to check-in and make posts?
- Do I need to know how to upload videos, audio, or any other course documents into

Brightspace?

- □ Will I be expected to create or modify any course content in Brightspace?
- □ Are there any additional software or tools that will be used in this course? If yes, what are

they and how do I need to use them?

Questions to add:



Grading questions:

- □ What are my grading responsibilities in the course?
- □ Will I be using rubrics to evaluate students' work? How do I use rubrics in Brightspace?
- □ Where do I enter grades?
- □ Will students be given the grading criteria for assignments, exams, and class participation?
- □ Will I need to grade quizzes in the course, or are they fully automated?
- □ What is the quality of feedback to be provided to students on assignments, tests, and

exams? Should written feedback be provided in each case?

□ Should grades be saved in draft form in Brightspace so that you can review them before they are posted?

□ What is the turnaround time for grading?

□ If students have concerns or complaints about grades that have been received, how should these be addressed?

Questions to add:

Course communication:

□ What are your expectations for my communication with students in the course?

□ Will there be an area in the course for students to ask questions? Am I responsible for

answering those questions?

 $\hfill\square$ Do you expect regular communication between us via e-mail? How often should we

communicate?

□ Will I be responsible for posting announcements in the course?



- □ What is a reasonable turnaround time for answering students' questions and e-mails?
- □ If there are other TA's in the course, am I expected to communicate with them about

grading practices and other course matters?

- □ Will we have any virtual meetings to discuss how things are going during the course?
- □ What other responsibilities will I have?

Questions to add:

References:

Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. Purdue University (Fort Wayne). *Preparing Guidance for Online Teaching Assistants*. <u>https://www.pfw.edu/dotAsset/95590dbc-7703-489e-9933-503cf045ebe1.pdf</u>

- Centre for Teaching Excellence. University of Waterloo. *Being a TA in Online Courses.* <u>https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-</u> <u>resources/teaching-tips/teaching-tips-teaching-assistants/being-ta-online-courses</u>
- Centre for Teaching Excellence. University of Waterloo. *Keep Teaching: Resources* for TAs. <u>https://uwaterloo.ca/keep-learning/resources/ta-resources</u>
- Centre for Teaching Excellence. University of Waterloo. *Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Teaching*. <u>https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-</u> resources/teaching-tips/teaching-tips-inclusive-instructional-practices/synchronous-andasynchronous-online-learning
- Teaching and Learning Support Service. University of Ottawa. *Guide: Fully Online and Blended Courses: A Guide for Teaching Assistants*. <u>https://uottawa.saea-</u> <u>tlss.ca/media/attachments/2019/12/12/ta_guide_2015.pdf</u>
- The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. University of Manitoba. Working in a Remote Learning Environment for TAs. <u>https://centre.cc.umanitoba.ca/ta-training/working-in-a-remote-learning-environment/</u>

Centre for Accessible Learning has kindly provided the following information to assist faculty.

Faculty should encourage TAs to become familiar with UVic's <u>Policy AC1205 and</u> <u>Procedures</u> on providing access to students with disabilities. Students may approach a TA to request or confirm a need for accessible course materials, such as captioning for videos, extra time in a lab, or to sign off on an exam form. Instructors will have received a confidential memo of accommodation for students.

• Students need to expressly permit the sharing of this information with TAs. No further personal information should be requested from the student. If students approach TAs directly for accommodations, they should be referred to CAL.

Please refer to <u>https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/</u> for more information about accommodations and support.

Built in curriculum accessibility (universal instructional design) is the key to reducing the need for individual or "one off" accommodations. Please refer to the booklet: <u>University</u> <u>Instructional Design: Creating an Accessible Curriculum at the University of Victoria</u>

Checklist for Accessibility:

- The course curriculum has been designed in an accessible and usable way and learning outcomes have been established.
- Instructor faces the class when speaking and avoids standing in front of windows or light sources.
- A variety of presentation formats to reinforce or emphasize important points have been used, and discussion questions have been repeated.
- Tour labs and discuss safety concerns, including special issues related to disability. Verbal and written lab instructions were provided.
- Course materials, both printed and electronic, are usable, accessible and available in different formats, such as e-text, or on line.
- Students were informed about willingness to reasonably accommodate and clear expectations for performance were communicated.
- Any request for reasonable accommodation communicated to me by faculty was respected, and referrals to the RCSD were made when students requested accommodation.
- Students who used services and technologies in my class such as note takers, interpreters or transcribers or who used audio recorders were accommodated appropriately.
- All student disability-related information was kept confidential.

Examples of possible accommodations if there are barriers to accessibility:

- Audio-recording the class
- A copy of notes and PowerPoints
- Missing some classes
- Extra time for exams and in-class assignments
- Extensions (with prior approval) to assignments

TAC Contact Information

The TA Consultant Program at UVic positions TA mentors (known as "TA Consultants" or "TACs") in most departments throughout campus. The TACs develop discipline-specific seminars for TAs, and conduct teaching observations of all new TAs and experienced TAs upon request. Below is the list of departments that have a TAC and the name of the TAC. Please contact the graduate secretary for information about the TAC program in your department.

> **Geography** Brianna Brandon

Greek and Roman Studies Allie MacIlroy

Germanic and Slavic Studies Michelle Brewer

> History Rachel Schneider

International TACs Crystal Washington and Sarah Revilla Sanchez

> Linguistics Kate Garrison

Mechanical Engineering Rad Haghi

> Music Ila Zbarsky

Pacific and Asian Studies Jossie Duan

> Physics Maheyer Shroff

Political Science Marta Kleiman

> **Psychology** Liz Williams

Sociology Tayler Zavitz

Visual Arts Clare Lannan ¹⁸

Anthropology William Campbell

Art History and Visual Studies Ambreen Shehzad Hussaini

> **Biology** Yuriko Carrington

> > **Chemistry** Kaitlyn Ramsay

Child and Youth Care Emma Chalifour

> **Civil Engineering** Shervin Shameli

Economics Brooklynn Trimble

Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies Jess Willows

Electrical and Computer Engineering Narges Attarmoghaddam

> **English** Farhad Poordakan

Environmental Studies Maya Frederickson

Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education Bruno Follmer

> **French** Tiffany Kuo