

TA Guidance Sheet

10 Tips for a Successful TA

1. Set Expectations Early

On the first day, let your students know how you intend to run the section. If you want to cold-call on students let them know and do so from the beginning but make sure it's actually random. Discuss laptop use and possibly misuse consequences. Address the following: Will you take attendance? If so, what will happen if students do not attend? What will be the format of the class? Will quizzes be part of the class? Will they be weekly or as needed? Perhaps even develop your own syllabus to set more concrete expectations and help to guide you each week.

2. Know Your Students' Expectations

Are they looking to cover tough material? A good grade? Engaging discussion? Material that they would not have time to cover in class? To get students truly engaged, it is best to know what they want the discussion to cover.

3. Attend Lecture Regularly

Gain Credibility. Be a Role Model. Know what's going on in class so you are up to date on what the professor's covering (not only what's on the syllabus) and can make discussions more relevant. This way you will not repeat or contradict information given at lecture and will know about any changes to the syllabus. You will also be better able to address students' questions about lecture.

4. Prepare Ahead of Class

If you do not come to discussion prepared, students will be less motivated to come to discussion prepared. Try handing out notes, Powerpoint slides, or review sheets. Be sure to include blank sections where students can fill in their own notes, and include exercises for them to try. This will get them involved and more willing to participate. It will also prompt them to take notes. Professors have even been known to draw questions from SI/discussion-generated review sheets when making their tests!

5. Know Students on a First-Name Basis

Be personable and try to relate to your students—not as a friend but as a coach. They will be more engaged in class if you call them by name and will stay more alert. If they feel they connect with you, they will also be more likely to utilize office hours.

6. Use Active-Learning Techniques

A silent class can mean many things – students might not know the material, not care about the discussion section, or already understand the material. Either way, they are not engaged. Go to CET trainings and utilize CET's resources. Don't let the class go silent. Learn about and try some active-learning techniques.

7. Be in Contact with the Professor

The professor may or may not have an expectation for the discussion section. Regardless, talk regularly so that your material does not conflict with the professor's and so both of you are on the same page. It also shows the professor you care about their class and could lead to later opportunities for you. Your talk doesn't even have to be in-person. Use email, phone, video chat, whatever works best.

8. Know Your Fellow Course TAs

Aim to teach the same material as your peers. Keep assignments at the same amount of work/level of difficulty. How grades are distributed should not necessarily be equal across discussion sections, but how material is graded should be fair and the same across all discussion sections.

9. Take Constructive Feedback from Students

Part of being professional is self-growth. One of your primary goals as a TA in a discussion section should be to help students. Grow in your career by seeking constructive feedback. Perhaps give out a mid-semester evaluation. Don't wait too long to ask for feedback, perhaps four weeks into the course do your first evaluation.

10. Don't Be Shy About Asking for Help

You have many resources ready to help you. CET has events throughout the semester and online material to help you be the best TA you can be. If you need help, don't hesitate to ask. If you have any concerns, express them right away so they can be resolved.