

# First Day of Class for TAs

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A checklist of the content recommended for the first day of holding a section in a new semester. The checklist is appropriate for both classroom and online courses.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Use the checklist to plan your lesson plan for the first day of section. Alternatively, review your existing lesson plan using the checklist as a guide to identify items that you may wish to add to the class. For assistance, please contact CET.

### Preparation

#### Self

Particularly if the course you are teaching is new or not one you created, familiarize yourself with the course syllabus and materials in order to demonstrate confidence to students when directly answering course-related questions. If there are questions about the course, especially with assignments or policies, ask the instructor to clarify them ahead of time so you are prepared when students ask you about them. Communicate with other TAs to ensure you are all on the same page with the instructor and have a plan for semester-long collaboration.

#### Tech and materials

Practice with and test classroom facilities and technology ahead of time, make sure projected materials and boardwork will be visible, and have needed materials out and ready before the start of class. Contact USC Learning Environments to receive training on using the technology in your physical classroom and for assistance with classroom facilities.

#### Room

Arrive to the classroom early, or visit beforehand, to decide how to best arrange the furniture if it can be moved (podium, desk position, student desks in groups or circle, etc.) For online courses, also login early or beforehand and decide which features to use and how to best arrange the camera view, chat boxes, breakout rooms, etc.

### Introductions

#### Self

Welcome and greet students, referring to the name of the course/section written on the board or projected. Briefly share your educational background, passion for the subject, professional activities, and something personal, such as a hobby, that can help students see you as a whole and relatable person.

#### Other TAs

Briefly introduce by name any other TAs for the course and explain their roles in the course for the other sections/labs.

#### Students

For small classes, quickly have students share their names and goals/interests in the course topic. For large classes, consider having students each complete an index card or Blackboard post with introductory information for you or introduce themselves to the classmates next to them. If the instructor has already collected this information, ask to review what students provided ahead of holding your section.

#### Section

Give students a sense of how the section fits into the overall course, as well as your personal aspirations for why you think they should want to learn the section material, and advice on how to best succeed in the section.

### Syllabus

#### Texts/materials

Identify the required texts and/or materials students will need to bring to section.

#### Assignments/assessments

Reinforce your role in how each major assignment/assessment is tied to any work practiced or completed in sections. Reiterate exactly what the instructor said regarding how/when/where students will receive information on assignment details (due dates, descriptions, prompts, requirements, grading rubrics, etc.)

#### Policies

Highlight policies unique to your department, program, or course (such as an in-class technology policy, acceptance of late work policy, or safety protocols), and university policies that are going to particularly affect work done during sections.

### Communication

#### Response

Invite communication, explain how students should contact you, and provide your timeline for responding (such as within 48 hours by email, office hours).

#### Q&A

Allow time for answering student questions about the course/section. Ensure a unified message with the instructor’s and any other TAs when responding to course-related questions, or defer to the instructor if the answer to a student’s question is unclear.

#### Private/confidential matters

Request students meet with you individually outside of section to discuss special situations and university-approved accommodations.

#### Office hours

Announce and hold an office hour or informal drop-in meeting opportunity as soon as possible after the first section meeting to address private student questions and issues.

### Structure

#### Environment

Convey a culture and set a tone of mutual respect as responsible adults rather than taking the role of disciplinarian. Reiterate the instructor’s message on applicable topics like attendance, participation, safety, preparation, diverse opinions, and risk-taking.

#### Techniques

Describe the structure of a typical section, techniques used (such as active learning, problem- or case-based learning, or flipped classroom), and reasons for using those techniques.

#### Activity practice

Help students build a sense of community and get accustomed to recurring activity structures and course technology by practicing with a simple introductory Blackboard post or group activity related to the first day’s content or students’ prior knowledge of the course topics.

### Content

#### Collected information

If time permits, give a brief diagnostic test or survey, or ask students to work through and submit a problem or a question they hope to answer by taking the course. If the instructor has already done such an activity, ask to see the data students provided.

#### Provided information

Introduce section content from the first topic or unit.

#### Homework

Remind students of the next assignment due.

#### Wrap-up

End section on-time, having saved the last few minutes for review, reminders, and preview of the next section. If desired, collect a short response from students reflecting on the first section, questions, or concerns.

### Reference

Davis, B. G. (2009). Tools for teaching. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.