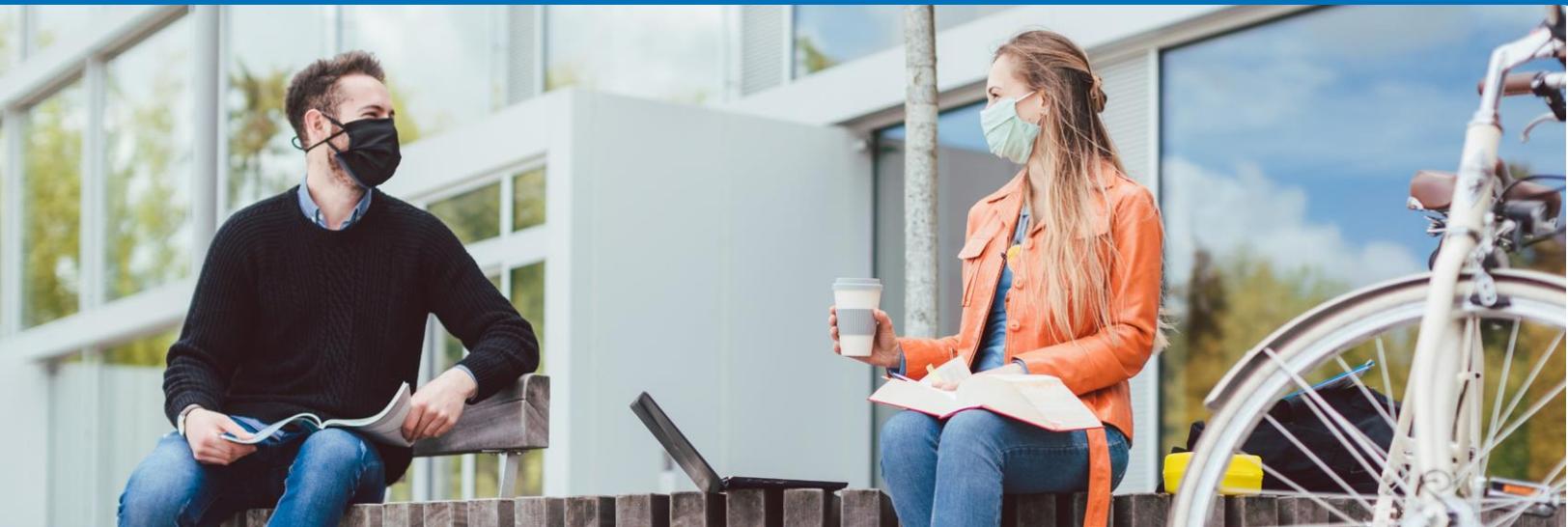


Being a TA

A Guide from Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation
2022-2023



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Wondering where to start as a new Teaching Assistant (TA)?

Based on course specifics and individual faculty preference, each department requires teaching assistants (TAs) to perform a variety of duties. Moreover, you, as a new TA, arrive with skills and experience that you may transfer to your TA role.

In the following pages, you will find some suggestions to guide you through the process of being a new TA. Not only will it work towards helping you become reflective, independent, and collaborative teachers, but will also assist in working with your course supervisor. These suggestions can provide a framework to help you determine how best to work in your TA role over the coming years.



University
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Learning and Teaching
Support and Innovation

Responsibilities of the TA Supervisor

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

Manager

As a manager, course supervisors are encouraged to do the following:

1. Make sure they have a well thought out plan for what their TA(s) will be doing in their course.
2. Make expectations clear and understand that 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 related to TA work (such as the TA Consultant program in your department), 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.
6. Give regular feedback. This way TAs know how well they are doing and what to improve, instead of guessing what the students and course supervisors are thinking. Make it clear how the department evaluates their work.

Professional model

As a professional educational model, course supervisors may demonstrate how you as a TA should act. As a model, they may relay the complexity of teaching to you. This includes codes of conduct associated with a teaching role at the university and exposure to all the policies that you should be aware of as a TA.

Mentor

As a mentor, course supervisors may help you understand that learning how to teach is a process that takes time. Course supervisors may want to try a cognitive apprenticeship approach. This is when they talk out loud about their decisions related to the course, which makes their decisions and reasons for the way a course and its components are designed transparent to you.

Additionally, course supervisors may inform you that you need to be aware of the values and ideas you bring about teaching and learning. Most importantly, this may help you realize that teaching is not the same as learning. Therefore, your ideas about how you learn best may only be applicable to a few students and that you have to learn how to take a learning-centred approach to teaching, not what worked for you approach. As soon as you take on a TA role, you need to understand that you are taking on a new role, which comes with a whole new set of responsibilities.

Reference: Sprague, J., & Nyquist, J. D. (1989). TA Supervision. Teaching Assistant Training in the 1990s, New Directions in Teaching and Learning, 39, 37-53.

TA Questionnaire

Communication is key. A course supervisor should contact you as soon as you have been assigned to the course. The majority of TAs, especially new graduate students, are very anxious about their performance, duties, and responsibilities as a TA. By contacting you early and offering to meet with you before the course begins, this will help alleviate a lot of your fears and anxieties. However, if you do not hear from your course supervisor, do not hesitate to contact them immediately.

To get a sense of the type of experience a TA has, a course supervisor may send you the following questionnaire:

1. Have you had any formal course work or training in how to teach?
 - If yes, how long did that training last?
 - About which topics?
2. Have you had any past teaching (including grading) experience?
3. If yes, at what levels have you taught?
 - K - 12
 - College/ University
4. And for how many years?
 - Less than one year
 - One to two years
 - Three to six years
 - More than six years
5. 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
6. What are your strengths?
 - Writing papers
 - Study habits
 - Reading papers
 - Working in groups
 - Organizational skills
 - Time management
 - Other (please explain)

The TA Coordinator available to assist you with your duties, provide information, program schedules, professional development opportunities and for one-on-one consultations.

Do not hesitate to reach out!
Contact Gerry Gourlay by e-mail at Itsitac@uvic.ca.

Adapted from: <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/resources/supervisor/resources/needs/index.html>

TA Tasks

Before the course begins

Duties and responsibilities need to be clear

Course supervisors should try to be as detailed as possible. Even though grading is second nature to course supervisors, TAs often do not have a clue how to approach that stack of marking. Providing marking keys and rubrics are excellent but you will need guidance and examples to help you understand the course supervisor's expectations.

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

Attend workshops and programs. Educational sessions offered by Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation (LTSI) will greatly benefit you and highlight how important the TA role is on campus.

During the course

Stay in contact

Check in with your course supervisor. Check in often to ensure that your work is meeting expectations and address all questions you may have.

Request an observation. If you are a TA in a classroom or lab situation, ask the course supervisor and/or TAC to observe your 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.

Request feedback from students. Review LTSI's publication, [Formative Feedback for Teaching Assistants \(TAs\)](#) at UVic, which contains many useful ideas on how to gather feedback from students and colleagues. Early and mid-term feedback will help you reflect on what you are doing in the classroom to support students' learning.

When the course ends

Review the course and provide feedback

Request constructive feedback about your performance as a TA. Not all departments incorporate feedback for TAs into their program and therefore any feedback that you can seek will be extremely helpful for future appointments. At LTSI we always encourage asking for positive feedback so that you understand what worked well, then constructive guidance as to what to work on and where to access resources to help in that area. Review the resource [Formative Feedback for Teaching Assistants \(TAs\) at UVic](#) as it provides many ideas on different ways to seek feedback.

Feedback to course supervisor. Provide feedback to the course supervisor from the TA perspective on ways that the course could improve.

Learning How to Teach

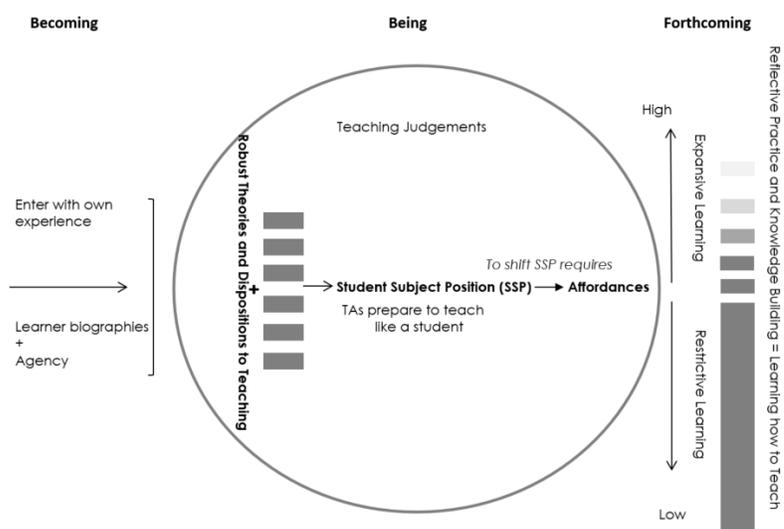
You may have years of TA experience. Despite having years of experience, you may not have had the chance for instruction about the work you are performing or may have never benefitted from reflecting on your work. See the next page for the barriers that prohibit TAs from learning how to teach and if 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 can lead 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 forthcoming¹.

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

Overview of Primary TA Responsibilities

It is important that you, as a TA, determine how many hours you should allocate for class time, laboratories, office hours, preparation, grading, and other duties. By reviewing these pages, and determining which duties you will be taking on, you will be better able to plan your time and perform your responsibilities. Review this list with your course supervisor.

The TA will be responsible for:

- working _____ (number of hours) per week¹
- 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)

Questions TAs may want to ask:

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?

¹See Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Agreement at <http://web.uvic.ca/~cupe4163/> for details about your position.



Questions TAs may want to ask (part 2):

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: lab number:	
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: lab number:	
note in box:	

It is advisable to take home the contact information 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 about your position.

Questions TAs may want to ask (part 3):

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 copy-righted 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 and/or 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 (where and when?)
 - no
- How will students be notified of the location and times of your office hours?

Questions TAs may want to ask (part 4):

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

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:
 - contact 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 the equipment located?
 - Is there a charge, form or project number that should be used when reserving equipment?

Questions TAs may want to ask (part 5):

Photocopying

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

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

Exams

- When will exams be held? Are you expected to invigilate exams? Will the professor/instructor attend exams?
- 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 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?

TA Checklist for Remote Learning Environments

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](#).

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?
- 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

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Teaching and Learning Support Service. University of Ottawa. Guide: Fully Online and Blended Courses: A Guide for Teaching Assistants. https://uottawa.saea-tlss.ca/media/attachments/2019/12/12/ta_guide_2015.pdf

The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. University of Manitoba. Working in a Remote Learning Environment for TAs. <https://centre.cc.umanitoba.ca/ta-training/working-in-a-remote-learning-environment>

Accessibility Requirements

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

Faculty should encourage TAs to become familiar with [UVic's Policy AC1205](#) and Procedures 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.

Built in curriculum accessibility (universal instructional design) is the key to reducing the need for individual or "one off" accommodations.

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 online.
- 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.

Anthropology

Xue Ma

Art History and Visual Studies

Ambreen Hussaini

Chemistry

Nahiane Pipaon-Fernandez

Civil Engineering

Mahsa Torabi

Computer Science

Yichun Zhao

Earth and Ocean Sciences

Julia Horne

Economics

Atefeh Zeinolebadi

Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Brodie Drake

Electrical and Computer Engineering

Mehrab Najafian

English

Lucie Kotěšovská

Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education

Yao Sun

Greek and Roman Studies

Stephanie Taylor

International TACs

Hannah Brown & Iman Fadaei

Mathematics and Statistics

Mikayla Holmes

Mechanical Engineering

Spencer Funk

Music

Isaac Earl

Pacific and Asian Studies

Tanya Brittain

Political Science

Lynn Ng

Sociology

Ashley Berard

Writing

Petranella Daviel