Teaching Assistant Handbook

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning
USASK.CA/GMCTL

Numerous resources were vital in compiling this handbook. Each source is attributed and where applicable, linked to the original webpage immediately after the corresponding section. We are grateful to the authors of these sources. All section header images courtesy of Microsoft Corp.

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Introduction

The Teaching Assistant Handbook is based on the mission and mandate of the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning (GMCTL) and the Framework for Teaching Assistant (TA) Competency Development document by the Teaching Assistant Graduate Student Advancement (TAGSA) Special Interest Group of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE).

In the handbook, the person(s) to whom you report is referred to as 'the course supervisor' may be your lab coordinator, professor, lecturer, instructor, coordinator, lab manager, or leader, etc.

The Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning (GMCTL)

The Gwenna Moss Centre is committed to supporting and improving teaching and learning at the University of Saskatchewan. We have a variety of programming and resources to help faculty, instructors, and graduate students.

The GMCTL Mission

Our mission is to aid USask educators and leaders to set the standard in learning by offering intentionally designed, supportive, and excellent learning experiences.

The GMCTL Mandate

Our mandate is:

- Supporting all USask educators in the continuous development of research-supported teaching and learning practices aligned with intended outcomes for student learning.
- Inspiring and empowering the Indigenization of teaching and learning.
- Helping USask educators use design, teaching and assessment practices aligned with student engagement, well-being, access, and equity.
- Achieving local and institutional aspirations in teaching and learning through delivery of professional learning programs, supports and resource materials for educators.
- Facilitating flexible curriculum development, design, and renewal at the course and program level.
- Enabling ongoing, data-informed enhancement of teaching and learning.

Framework for Teaching Assistant (TA) Competency Development

(From Teaching Assistant Graduate Student Advancement Special Interest Group, 2015.)

The Teaching Assistant Graduate Student Advancement (TAGSA) is a special interest group of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). Their goal is to promote dialogue across institutions about providing graduate student support, and enhancing their TA knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The TAGSA's Framework for Teaching Assistant (TA) Competency Development has four elements:

1. **Reflection.** Once appointed as a TA, reflect on the skills and attributes brought from previous work and disciplinary experience. Continue to reflect and learn from experiences during and after your TA-ship.

2. **Knowledge.** Seek knowledge of your personal teacher identity, course content, teaching strategies, and learner-centered teaching.

3. **Skills.** Seek the skills required to perform the duties assigned, and how to navigate challenges.

4. **Abilities.** Develop professional abilities, and practice effective interpersonal communication.

What is a teaching assistantship?

An assistantship is a paid appointment for graduate students who have been selected to engage in part-time teaching or research work while they pursue an advanced degree. The primary goal of an assistantship is to assist students in strengthening and successfully completing their academic program.

At USask assistantships are classified into three categories: Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, and Student Assistant. As a TA, you become part of a team to support teaching and learning.

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)

Graduate student work appointments are governed by a collective agreement represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) (PSAC Staff contact)Become familiar with this agreement as it defines important aspects of your contract, such as Article 14 – Hours of Work.

A **graduate teaching assistant** is a qualified graduate student who helps a professor or instructor conduct lab or study groups, grade papers or prepare lectures.

Duties associated with being a **Teaching Assistant** or **Graduate Teaching Fellow** *may* include:

- preparation, delivering and/or attending lectures or lessons
    - including facilitating learning activities,
- demonstrating,
- providing student feedback and marking,
- student consultation,
- invigilating assessments,
- holding office hours,
- setting up experiments and assisting in lab supervision
- supervision of field trips, and/or
- conferring with the supervisor in charge of the assistantship

Guidelines for Academic Conduct

. . . from the USask Governance Office are *vital* to review, including Principles II: Honesty and Integrity and Principle III: Respect for the Dignity of Others. *See guidelines applied here, on pages 12 and 13.*

What is expected of teaching assistants (TA)?

'TA' refers to graduate student teachers, tutorial leaders and lab assistants. As a TA you can expect to be an asset to a department and to benefit from the teaching experience. You are expected to be knowledgeable in your discipline and an effective role model for undergraduate students.

You serve as an intermediary

As a TA you are expected to help reinforce to students the learning outcomes established by the professor you support, and you can also provide feedback to the professor about how students are responding to the learning experience.

You are a representative of your department or unit

As a TA you will work as a member of a department at the University of Saskatchewan and are obliged to follow the policies and regulations within the department and meet its standards and expectations. Make sure you understand all departmental requirements before the first class.

You are a representative of USask

As a representative of USask, you are expected to maintain the university standards, including following all guidelines and rules established by the University. If you disagree with the policies of the University or the professor you assist, you are obliged to discuss these privately with your course instructor or an appropriate University administrator.

What makes a great teaching assistant (TA)?

TAs play an integral role in undergraduate teaching and learning in all disciplines. There are three factors that affect TA teaching success (adapted from Rikard & Hye, 1997):

1. **Knowledge of your role.** Just as with the start of any professional position, you must know what is expected of you, what your responsibilities are, who to report to, where to go for support, and how to collect feedback. Much of this information can be found when getting to know (a) the professor/courses instructor's expectations, (b) the skills, abilities, and knowledge required to perform the assigned duties, and (c) your department's graduate teaching policies. **For a list of suggested questions to ask the course instructor/coordinator at the beginning of term, see page 11.**

2. **Skill development**. Some graduate programs, departments, and units have TA training requirements. GMCTL provides training at **TA Success Days** (September and January) and the **TA Success Series.** Reach out to the experts in your program or department, attend sessions, engage with the Success Series activities, and collect resources to learn about the best teaching and learning practices of your discipline.

3. **Communication and administrative support.** A teaching assistantship is an opportunity for you to perform diverse teaching tasks, and to the develop knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be able to perform the tasks in the future. Effective and regular communication with your course instructor is a necessary strategy for maintaining professional and academic balance, as you divide your time between your program of study, your TA responsibilities, and your personal life.

   It is ultimately the responsibility of the course instructor to communicate, regardless of how the department designates responsibility, all relevant information regarding your role in the classroom and course.

Using reflective practice

To Start

Whether you are a new or experienced TA, as part of your professional development it is important to recognize the skills, abilities, experiences, and knowledge that you bring to the classroom.

Use the questions below to reflect on your teaching and learning experiences to date. Afterward, review your answers, and reflect on what you wish to develop going forward.

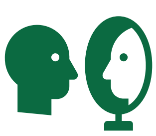
1. **Your skills and abilities.** What kinds of skills and abilities do you bring to the classroom? For example:
   - Are you an engaging speaker, or comfortable speaking in front of groups?
   - Are you good at organizing and presenting information?
   - How would you describe your listening skills?
   - How have you navigated challenges in professional or academic contexts?
   - What strategies have worked for you in communicating clearly, seeking support, and maintaining boundaries?

2. **Your experiences**. What kinds of teaching, academic, and/or leadership experiences do you have? Is this your first teaching role in a university classroom, or one of many?
   For example:
   - ***Teaching:*** Have you worked as a tutor, as a volunteer, or been a member of a team or club? What values and goals informed past teaching and learning experiences? What kinds of values and goals do you wish to pursue in the future?
   - ***Academic:*** Have you presented academic research at conferences or poster sessions? Have you attended any teaching, writing, or public speaking workshops?
   - ***Leadership:*** Have you served as captain of a sports team, head cashier at a retail store, or an active member of a charitable or political cause? What kinds of strategies have you used in the past to facilitate your own success, and/or the success of others?

3. **Your knowledge.** What knowledge of the course content do you bring your role?
   For example:
   - Did you take this course (or a similar course) as an undergraduate student?
   - Have you had any previous interactions with the course instructor?
   - What kinds of tasks do you anticipate doing in your TA-ship? What kinds of knowledge and teaching strategies might you need to (re)acquire?

4. **Your emerging teaching practices.** How would you describe your teaching development to date?
   For example:
   - How have you interacted with students and instructors in the past? What has worked well (or not)? How has your approach to both changed over time?
   - What kind of feedback have you received about your teaching to date? What have you learned from this feedback?
   - What kinds of teaching, professional, and academic training or accreditation have you received to date? What additional training would you like to acquire?

Going Forward with Reflection



What approach to reflection might work for you?

Reflective practice is a process that is cyclical and can support our continual growth as professionals. We teach, we assess how our teaching has (or has not) impacted student learning, we seek out new approaches to improve our practice and improve student learning, we try out those ideas, and then continue in the cycle. As we repeat the cycle, the goal is to gain new insights about our practice and ourselves based on our experiences and our intention for growth.

The main goal of reflective practice in teaching is to impact student learning, with the additional benefit of our own learning and honing our practice. Sometimes we grow by going through the process on our own, however, we can also benefit from receiving feedback from colleagues - and offering feedback to others when it is solicited.

When we first start teaching and are focused on managing our teaching lives from day to day, reflection may be the furthest thing from our minds.

We invite you to consider practicing reflective practice to support your professional growth.

What makes a great TA? and *Using reflective practice* sections, adapted from Braun, R., Carter, J., & Groenhof, I. (2017). *Graduate Student Guide for Teaching Development* (3rd ed.). Berenson, C. (Ed.). Calgary, AB: Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning.
http://www.ucalgary.ca/taylorinstitute/resources/graduateVstudentVteaching

Reflective Practice Models

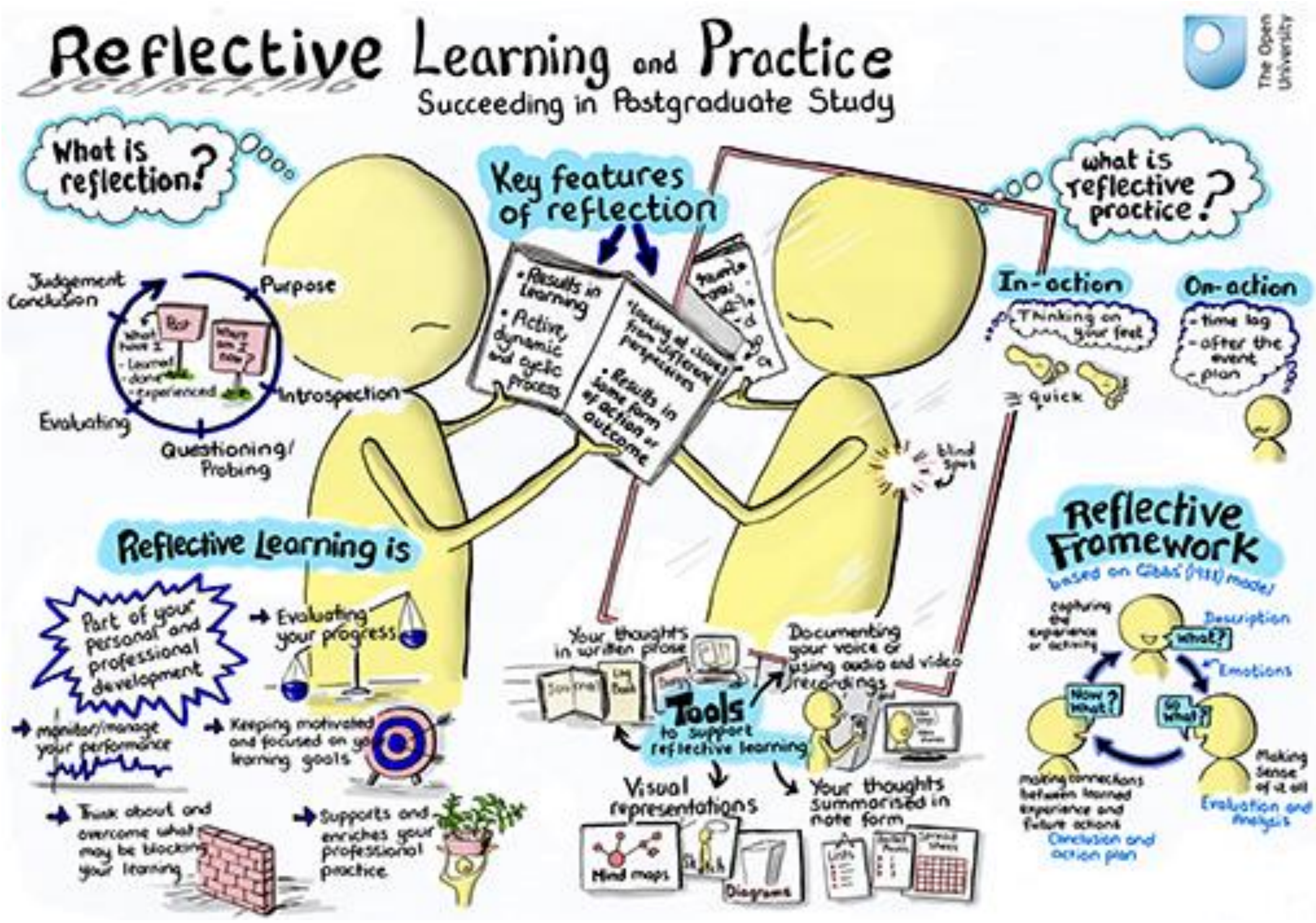


Image courtesy of [The Open University](). Click on the image for a larger version of the PDF.

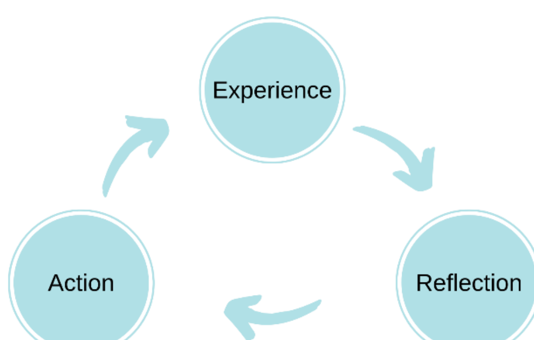
Below are descriptions of **four reflective practice** models, arranged from simple to more advanced.

You will notice common themes in these models and any others that you come across. Each model takes a slightly different approach, but they address similar stages. Their main difference is the number of steps included and how in-depth their creators have chosen to be.

The ERA Cycle

The ERA cycle (Jasper, 2013) is one of the simplest models of reflection, with three stages:

- Experience
- Reflection
- Action



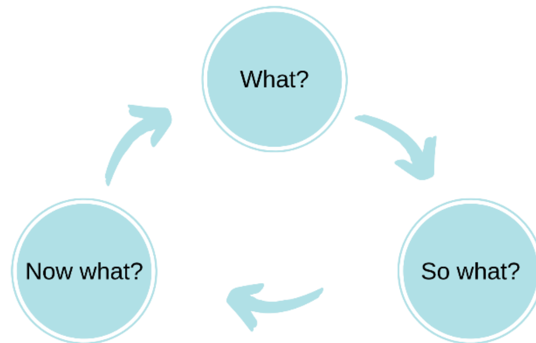
The cycle shows that we will start with an experience, either something we have been through before or something completely new to us. This experience can be positive or negative and may be related to our work or something else. Once something has been experienced, we will start to reflect on what happened. This will allow us to think through the experience, examine our feelings about what happened and decide on the next steps. This leads to the final element of the cycle - taking an action. What we do because of an experience will be different depending on the individual. This action will result in another experience and the cycle will continue.

Reference
Jasper, M. (2013). *Beginning reflective practice*. Cengage Learning.

Driscoll's 'What?' Model

Another simple model was developed by Driscoll in the mid-1990s. Driscoll based his model of the "3 What's" on key questions asked by Borton in the 1970s:

- What?
- So what?
- Now what?



By asking ourselves these three simple questions we can begin to analyse and learn from our experiences. First, we describe **what** the situation or experience was to set it in context. We should then reflect on the experience by asking **'So what?'** - What did we learn because of the experience? The final stage asks us to think about the action we will take because of this reflection, the '**Now What?**' Will we change a behavior, try something new or carry on as we are?

It is important to remember that there may be no changes as the result of reflection and that we feel that we are doing everything as we should. This is equally valid as an outcome, and you should not worry if you can't think of something to change.

References

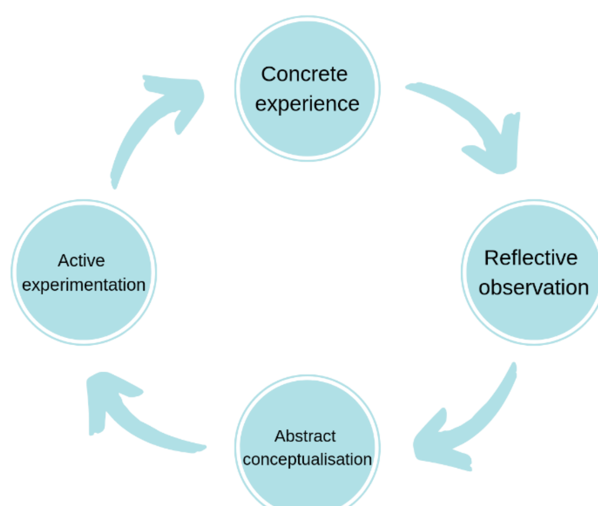
Borton, T. (1970) *Reach, touch and teach*. Hutchinson.
Driscoll, J. (Ed.) (2007). *Practicing clinical supervision: A reflective approach for healthcare professionals.* Elsevier.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Kolb's model (1984) is based on theories about how people learn, and centres on the concept of developing understanding through actual experiences.

It contains four key stages:

- Concrete experience
- Reflective observation
- Abstract conceptualization
- Active experimentation



The model argues that we start with an experience - either a repeat of something that has happened before or something completely new to us. The next stage involves us reflecting on the experience and noting anything about it which we haven't come across before. We then start to develop new ideas as a result, for example when something unexpected has happened we try to work out why this might be. The final stage involves us applying our new ideas to different situations. This demonstrates learning as a direct result of our experiences and reflections. This model is like the one used by small children when learning basic concepts such as hot and cold. They may touch something hot, be burned and be more cautious about touching something which could potentially hurt them in the future.

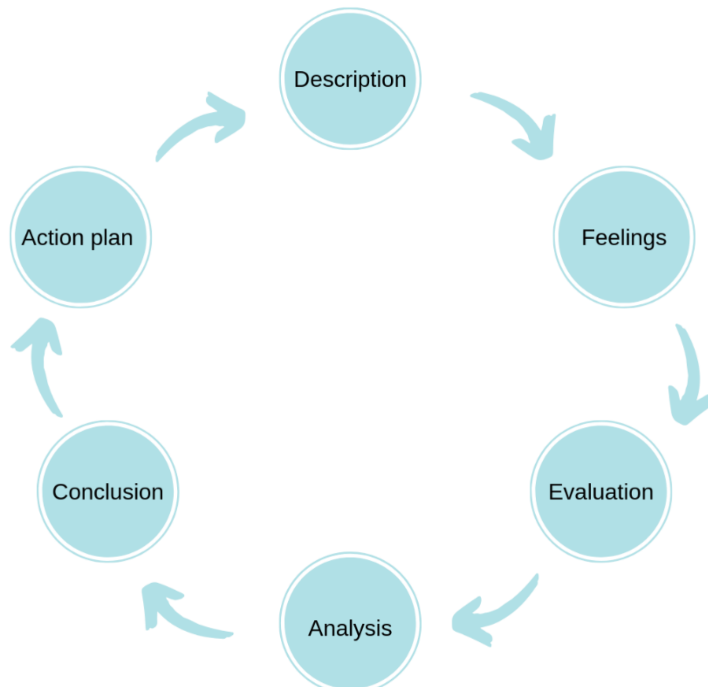
Reference

Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.

Gibb's Reflective Cycle

The fourth model shared here builds on the other three and adds more stages. It is one of the more complex models of reflection, however it may be that you find having multiple stages of the process to guide you reassuring. Gibb's cycle contains six stages:

- Description
- Feelings
- Evaluation
- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Action plan



As with the other models, Gibb's begins with an outline of the experience being reflected on. It then encourages us to focus on our feelings about the experience, both during it and after. The next step involves evaluating the experience - what was good or bad about it from our point of view? We can then use this evaluation to analyse the situation and try to make sense of it. This analysis will result in a conclusion about what other actions (if any) we could have taken to reach a different outcome. The final stage involves building an action plan of steps which we can take the next time we find ourselves in a similar situation.

Reference
Gibbs, G. (1998). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.

Consider . . .

Which model appeals to you, if any – or have you found something else which works for you?

Models can be helpful to think about reflection, although some people find models imply steps must be followed in certain way.

Remember that reflective practice is a continuous process – and a model can simply provide 'a place to start.'

The important part of the process is undertaking reflection as a practice.

Reflective Practice Models section including all images, are adapted from Reflective Practice Toolkit, University of Cambridge.

Questions to ask at the beginning of term

Prior to your first meeting with the instructor: It is best (if possible) to have read through the **course syllabus**. After reading the syllabus (or lab/tutorial outline), you may have questions about the following:

- Learning outcomes
- Main activities, exams and/or assignments
- Approaches to or policies on late assignments or academic integrity
- Working with other TAs in the course

After the instructor has shared their expectations and the requirements of your role, you can use the list below to help clarify any remaining questions.

Getting answers to these questions may take time, but knowing the answers will help you approach your new task with confidence.

Please ask only the questions applicable to your assignment.

1. Will I be:
    a. lecturing,
    b. leading discussions,
    c. running tutorials,
    d. conducting labs, and/or
    e. marking?
2. What will my main responsibilities be? (ex. What is involved in leading a tutorial?)
3. How many students will I be working with?
4. Will I be working with students on Canvas and/or virtually on Zoom?
5. Should I organize group help/review sessions?
6. If I will be leading discussions, do you have preferences for how I run the sessions?
7. If I am conducting labs, what is the scope of my responsibilities? For example:
    a. Do I keep track of supplies and materials?
    b. Do I obtain supplies and materials?
    c. Do I design or revise experiments?
    d. Do I give demonstrations?
8. What do I do in case of emergency or accident in the lab or tutorial room or classroom?
9. When giving feedback on and grading papers (or projects, reports, quizzes, or exams) are the criteria and rating scales in a rubric or checklist?
10. What type of feedback is standard for this course?
11. If there are multiple TAs, how will we ensure consistent feedback and marking practices?
12. How much time do I allot for feedback and marking?
13. What are the expectations for dealing with academic integrity issues?
14. Do I make two copies of all feedback if it is handwritten (not in SpeedGrader)?
15. Who reviews disputed grades?
16. Do I hold office hours, and if so, how many hours and when?
17. If I am to give individual assistance, how much help is too much? What kind of assistance should I ***not*** give? How will I know when to send a student to you for additional assistance?
18. What technology do I need to know how to use?
19. Do I have any autonomy to present new ideas or different teaching methods?
20. What should I do, whom should I contact, if I am unable to attend a class/lab/tutorial?
21. What other responsibilities, if any, will I have?
22. How frequently will you and I meet? What are best ways to contact each you?
23. How can I gather/receive feedback on my work as a TA?

Professionalism as a Teaching Assistant

Becoming a teaching assistant is an opportunity to support student learning while also building your own professional practice. Because you are also a student yourself, you might wonder about the professional norms and behaviours expected of teaching assistants.

Maintaining professionalism is vital to the TA-student relationship, to your reputation, and future career. USask has guidelines in the on 'teacher-student' relationships that apply to your position as a Teaching Assistant, according to the policies and guidelines of USask, as below.

Take some time to review the list, then think about the three questions that follow (p. 13).

Professional practices of teaching assistants

- Respect confidentiality and privacy of students, the course instructor, and other TAs (See **Principle III: Respect for the Dignity of Others, Confidentiality**, USask Guidelines for Academic Conduct, Governance Office)
- Treat students with respect by respecting diverse cultures and perspectives (See **Respect for Others**, USask Guidelines for Academic Conduct, Governance Office)
- Be fair, equitable, and refrain from favouritism; respect the power differential between you and the students
- Ensure discussion groups are inclusive
- Refer students to **Student Wellness** if you have concerns about a student's wellness, which includes their mental health
- Handle disagreements with the course instructor/professor respectfully
- Practice professional communication in person, emails, discussion boards, on Canvas
- If you suspect academic misconduct in student work speak to your course instructor, not the student. See **Suspicion of Academic Misconduct.** USask Guidelines for Academic Conduct)
- Respond to emails in a timely manner and keep all copies of communication
- Be prepared for your duties as a TA and be on time
- Be present for your set office hours
- Do not leave doors closed when meeting with students, but be sensitive to voices carrying into the corridor
- Mark and provide feedback with consistent and transparent standards adhering to academic integrity (See specifically, **Fair and Valid Assessment**, USask Guidelines for Academic Conduct)
- Give constructive criticism on sensitive matters, professionally
- If appropriate/required, attend all lectures (and take notes if necessary)

To consider with the professional practices above:

Which of these professional practices are most important to you?
Which ones have you not considered or been aware of before now?
What would you add to this list?

Page 12, adapted with permission from University of Victoria's [Teaching Assistant's Codes of Conduct] with USask guidelines and policies applied.

Professional Boundaries as a TA

In addition to the practices above, you will want to think about how you are establishing your professional reputation by being clear about boundaries with students. Considerations such as how you dress, how formally or informally you speak with students, how you communicate (ex. - email, Canvas Inbox) and connected with students outside of class/lab/tutorial time you will be, how you use humour and establish rapport with all students, where you meet for office hours – all go into how students perceive you.

It is important to maintain a professional distance with students as you are part of the teaching team – not a friend of students, despite perhaps being close in age with similar non-academic interests.

Image retrieved from https://tinyurl.com/5sp5wzbr

If you are unsure about setting and maintaining boundaries, check with your course supervisor.

Questions below can help you explore various aspects of establishing boundaries in your professional role.

- What professional boundaries will you set around interacting with your students on social media?
- How will you establish friendly rapport with *all* your students without hindering your professional presence? See – **Managing interactions and relationships** – USask Governance Office
- What will you do if you have a prior relationship with a student you (See USask's **Conflict of Interest Policy** – Disclosure to 'unit head' – course instructor)
- What norms do you want to set for your office hours whether in person or online: by appointment, drop in, individual, group? Will you take summary notes and send them to both the instructor and student?
- How can you ensure that your use of humour (including jokes, cartoons in slides, etc.) is appropriate and professional?
- How would you prefer students address you?
- How do you want to handle technology/cell phones during class time? *Make sure you model what you expect of your students.*
- How will you navigate questions about assignments, due dates, difficult topics, etc., so that all students have the same information?

- How do you want to present yourself by how you dress? In some fields, business attire is expected. In labs, appropriate safety rules must be followed. In other contexts, it may be completely your choice.
- How will you set and maintain friendly professionalism in your email communications with students? Again, modelling professional communication also helps students learn the norms of your field/discipline.
- How will you respond if a student asks to:
  - Go to a party with them?
  - Lend them money?
  - Accept a gift?
  - Join a group they're a member of?

  For the most part, agreeing to the above, risks accusations of favouritism or conflict of interest due to formation of a non-teaching relationship.

  USask's **Principle II: Honesty and Integrity,** Managing interactions and relationships, from **Guidelines for Academic Conduct**.

Professional Boundaries as a TA adapted from *Lesson 5, Professionalism, Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary*, with USask policies and guidelines applied.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a shared value in higher education around the world. The International Centre for Academic Integrity defines academic integrity as a commitment to six fundamental values: *honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage*.

As a teaching assistant, it can sometimes be challenging to determine your duties when you have concerns about or witnessed academic misconduct. The guidelines below offer a recommended framework for how to handle these kinds of situations.

What to do

- Get clarity on specific rules about academic integrity at the course level.
- Know where to find USask's **Regulations on Student Academic Misconduct**.
- As suggested in 'Questions to ask at the beginning of term' on page 11, start a conversation with your course instructor about what they expect from you around upholding integrity in your role, so both of you have clear expectations.
- Act as a role model for academic integrity.
- Discuss any alleged or actual breaches of integrity with the course instructor.
- Gather evidence related to the alleged misconduct. Keep detailed notes of the incident, including dates and times, who was involved, etc. Provide this information to the course instructor.
- Remember that learning how to address academic misconduct is part of your training as a teaching assistant, but you are not alone!

Artificial intelligence

- Refer to the resources offered or suggested by the University related to academic integrity and artificial intelligence, **updated as of September 2024**:
  - Our **USask Academic Integrity** webpage
  - **Generative Artificial Intelligence GenAI** and **Academic Integrity - Students**
  - **GenAI guide** (Writing Help, USask Library)
  - **Academic Integrity Module** (USask Library)

What not to do

- Do not upload student work into any artificial intelligence tool or platform. Students own their work, and it is not your right to upload it for any reason.
- Do not keep suspected academic integrity issues a secret (even if the student asks you to). Talk to the course instructor or lab coordinator.
- Do not discuss the matter with any other teaching assistants, students, etc.
- Do not confront a student. It is the role of the course instructor/lab coordinator to address alleged or actual academic misconduct with the student(s) involved.
- Do not impose any sanctions (punishments) on your own. The course instructor (not the TA) is responsible for following the guidelines established within the faculty about how to address actual or suspected cases of academic misconduct.
- Do not share details (even if they are de-identified) on social media, even in closed or private groups.

Guidelines courtesy of U Have Integrity by *Dr. Sarah Eaton, PhD, Werklund School of Education & Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, September 2019*, adapted with University of Saskatchewan policies and guidelines.

Responsibilities of a TA Supervisor

According to Sprague and Nyquist (1989), anyone who is responsible for TAs (senior lab instructors, professors, or other designates), referred to in this handbook as course supervisors, 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 often, 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. If there are professional development opportunities on campus or in the department related to TA work, notify your TA(s) and explain why it is important that they attend.

5. Be collaborative and open to feedback.

6. Give regular feedback. This way your TA(s) 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. Consider adding questions to the SLEQs to gather student feedback for your TA(s)

Educational 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, by talking through 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 must learn how to take a learning-centred approach to teaching, not necessarily what worked for you as a student.

Reference

Sprague, J., & Nyquist, J. D. (1989). TA supervision. Teaching assistant training in the 1990s. *New Directions in Teaching and Learning, 39*, 37-53.

Responsibilities of a TA Supervisor, adapted with permission from University of Victoria *Being A TA*

Meeting with your Course Supervisor

Communication is key. A course supervisor should contact you as soon as you have been assigned to the course. Most 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.

If there is not a course supervisor or lab coordinator, speak to your department's administrative personnel for advice on how to proceed.

To get a sense of the type of experience a TA has, a course supervisor may have questions such as the following:

1. Have you had any formal course work or training in how to teach?

2. Have you had any past teaching (including grading) experience? If yes, at what levels have you taught and for how many years?

3. What are your strengths?

Think about what you've done well at as a student or in employment in the past:

- Being well organized
- Building positive relationships/rapport with others
- Communicating well verbally
- Managing time
- Problem-solving
- Reading papers
- Writing
- Setting up labs and experiments
- Organizing events
- Working well in a team or group
- Other?

4. What is your availability?

5. How would you like to receive feedback?

6. What are concerns you have in performing your duties?

It is normal to have concerns or wonders such as:

- What will students think of me?
- Preparing well for class or labs
- Mastering content well enough to teach it
- Establishing and maintaining credibility
- Teaching students
- Marking assignments
- Knowing what is expected
- Time management – balancing TA work and study
- Handling questions or conflicts from students
- Gooding a good job
- Encouraging students to think critically

Meeting with Your Course Supervisor, adapted with permission from Being a TA, University of Victoria

TA Tasks- A Term Timeline

Having a term timeline for reference can assist you in building your knowledge, skills, awareness, and portfolio as a Teaching Assistant – and in remembering the importance of offering and receiving feedback.

Although it can be difficult to juggle competing demands, taking the time to reflect on your learning and experiences, including through feedback you receive throughout the term can enrich your experience.

Before the course begins

Duties and responsibilities need to be clear

Ask the course supervisor to be as detailed as possible. Even though grading is second nature to course supervisors, TAs often do not have strategies on how to approach a 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 '*Questions to ask at the beginning of term'* ***section*** (page 8). These types 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 the questions as a guide to address what you need to ask

Attend workshops and programs. Educational sessions offered by Gwenna Moss Centre 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 to address all questions you may have.

Request an observation. If you are a TA in a classroom or lab situation, ask the course supervisor to observe your interactions with students. We have resources at Gwenna Moss Centre on how to approach teaching observations. Please do not hesitate to ask for guidelines and suggestions.

Consider asking a peer to observe your work with students. Set a goal and ask them to provide feedback on whether you met that goal.

Request feedback from students.

Early and mid-term feedback will help you reflect on what you are doing in the classroom to support students' learning. Contact GMCTL at **gmctl@usask.ca** for our *TA Feedback Form* and to ask any questions about seeking student feedback on your teaching and support as a TA.

When the course ends

Reflect on the course and ask for feedback. Ask for constructive feedback about your performance as a TA. Any feedback that you can seek will be extremely helpful for future appointments, so that you understand what worked well, and what to work on for the future.

Provide feedback to the course supervisor from the TA perspective if it is requested.

TA Tasks – A Term Timeline section, adapted with permission from *Being a TA*, University of Victoria

Beginning to teach

Whether you have been teaching for some time, or are new to teaching, planning lessons in advance is a good idea. It may help with your confidence level and allow you to map out how each class fits into, and prepares students to meet, the overall course learning outcomes.

Using a consistent lesson plan template to design your classes also gives a sense of consistency – giving students the sense that lectures will always include activities to help them build the necessary skills to succeed. In addition, following one general outline from one class to the next will cut down your preparation time.

Below you'll find an overview of things to consider when planning your classes and provide you with a model you can use to plan and execute a lesson.

Characteristics of Pedagogy-Driven Lessons

- Based on well-designed and written learning outcomes, relevant to the students, their course and program
- Interactive, students practicing and applying what you want them to learn
- Well-organized
- Assessing student learning (generally formative, not for a mark, but to show their learning thus far of the learning outcomes).

Lesson Plans – An Overview

A lesson plan functions as both a planning tool and a ready reference during the lesson itself. As you consider how to organize your lesson, you will want to think about who your learners are, factoring in any requirements or accommodations that might be needed. This might include considering how fast learners may be able to read during a silent reading segment or taking mobility issues into account when moving yourself or asking participants to move.

A lesson plan does not describe every moment of the lesson, nor does it try to capture every possibility that may arise. It does outline the activities the instructor plans to introduce. The plan may be written in detail, or it may simply capture the highlights in outline form.

Depending on the instructor's preferences, it might include points of action and reflection, including ways to generate learner involvement and enthusiasm. It may also include logistical items like proposed timing and which instructional resources to bring. Some people prefer more detailed plans; however, with increasing experience, instructors often create shorter, more concise plans.

A lesson plan is generally subject to revision and improvisation during the lesson itself. Rehearsing a lesson or simply walking through it in your mind is a good idea. However, the actual lesson usually takes more time than a simple run-through rehearsal. Learners need time to clarify points, take notes, and verify instructions. Instructors need time to move around, manage transitions from one phase to another, and respond to questions. The more participatory the activities, the less precise you can be about the timeframe.

The BOPPPS Lesson Plan Structure

BOPPPS Lesson Elements		
Beginning	**Bridge-In (Why)**	Begins the learning cycle by gaining learner attention, building motivation, and explaining why the lesson outcome is important.
	Outcome (What)	Outlines the learning intention by clarifying what the learner should be able to know, think, value, or do by the end of the lesson.
	Pre-Assessment	Formally or informally answers the question: "What does the learner already know about the subject and outcome of the lesson?"[4]
Middle	**Participatory Learning (How)**	Involves the learners actively in the learning process. This intentional sequence of activities or learning events helps the learners achieve the desired learning outcome.[5]
Closing	**Post-Assessment**	Formally or informally demonstrates whether the learner has indeed learned enough to meet the outcome outlined above.
	Summary/Closure	Provides an opportunity for the learners to reflect briefly and integrate the learning as the lesson cycle comes to an end. In some situations, this section may include the development of an action plan for application of learning outside the workshop and/or reference to the next lesson.

Bridge-In

Responsibility for learning rests primarily with the learners. At the same time, the instructor has a responsibility to create conditions that motivate learners. The bridge-in is meant to gain attention and establish relevance for the lesson. Sometimes known as the "motivational statement" or "hook," the bridge-in helps the learners prepare for what is about to happen.

An effective bridge-in enhances the motivation to learn by connecting learners to the content of the lesson in an interesting and/or relevant way. This segment of the lesson is usually quite short.
However, in lessons where the motivation may be less than optimal, the bridge-in is particularly important. Unenthusiastic learners may be "hooked" if the bridge-in provides answers to questions like:

"What's in it for me?" **"Why does this matter?"** **"Why should I learn this?"**

Strategies for Building Motivation During the Bridge-In

Strategies that build motivation early in a lesson:

- Provide reasons for learning this topic, explaining why the topic is important and how it may be useful in other situations, or demonstrating that it is a transferable skill.
- Tell a short and engaging story in connection with the topic.
- Show a brief animation or comic.
- Refer to something in the learners' own experiences*.
- Pose a **provocative question** linked to a current event or the learners' personal lives.
- Show a live stream of a related event to set the scene.
- Offer a startling statistic or unusual fact that prompts curiosity.
- Link the topic to material already discussed.

* NOTE: Personal stories and examples can be very effective. In a multi-cultural or diverse setting, however, it is important to consider learners' life experiences and backgrounds. If a learner is not aware of current trends in popular culture, a story meant to *bridge* might be mystifying or, if everyone else laughs at the joke, could make the learner feel excluded.

Outcomes (Learning Outcomes)

Learning outcomes are statements that articulate what a learner should know or be able to do by the end of a lesson. Learning outcomes are typically stated near the beginning of the lesson to help learners focus their attention on what is most important in the lesson. Outcomes can refer to what the learner should know, do, or feel/believe by the end of the lesson.
Incorporating outcomes into your lesson helps learners to direct their learning and monitor their own progress, signals what is important and valued in the lesson, and helps the instructor to select the content and activities that will best allow the learner to achieve the outcomes in the time allowed. They can also be used to help keep the lesson focused.

Learning outcomes may be pre-determined by the instructor when designing the lesson, but there is also an opportunity to involve learners in the development of their own goals and outcomes for the lesson. Although outcomes are introduced at the beginning of the lesson, they are often referenced either directly or indirectly at the end of it as well. The post- assessment, for example, is one way that the instructor can encourage learners to reflect upon their experience, as well as to determine whether the outcomes for the lesson were met by the learners.

Pre-Assessment

The pre-assessment answers one or more of these questions: What do the learners already know? What can they already do? How do they already feel? What are their present attitudes?

Within a 10-minute lesson, the pre-assessment is likely to be quite short. It should match the outcome as closely as possible. For example, if the lesson is an introduction to terminology, a pre-assessment may ask questions that help identify terms learners already use. If the lesson focuses on the development of a skill, the pre-assessment might involve asking learners to identify if, where, and when they have performed that skill before. (And some learners might even actually perform it.) Pre-assessments for expressive outcomes may include questions that identify the learners' previous experience with the topic.

The Value of the Pre-Assessment

The pre-assessment can:

- reveal learners' interests,
- identify learners who can be resources within the class,
- allow learners to express their need for review or clarification,
- focus attention and signal the purpose of the lesson,
- help the instructor adjust the lesson for depth and pace to better fit a particular group of learners, and
- assist the instructor in responding to individual strengths, interests, and weaknesses.

Participatory (Active) Learning

> "Active learning simply means getting involved with the information presented — really thinking about it (analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating) rather than just passively receiving it and memorizing it. Active learning usually results in the generation of something new, such as a cause-effect relationship between two ideas, an inference, or an elaboration, and it always leads to deeper understanding." (King, 1993)

Learning is an active process. Only by engaging with the material or task can most students experience learning that lasts. Several educational theorists propose that learners personally construct their own knowing. This suggests that the most effective learning may occur when, through personal interaction with the content or materials, learners actively create their own set of knowledge, skills, and values.

Learners understand and remember concepts by testing, exploring, and mentally manipulating ideas. This is often accomplished through discussion, debate, and dialogue. Physical and problem-solving skills improve with repeated practice and feedback. Changes in individual beliefs and attitudes are difficult to measure as they are often modified gradually as the learners are exposed to various viewpoints and experiences. Over time, this exposure leads to integration and synthesis of new information and perspectives.

All of this may create challenges for a person whose discipline area and/or approach has traditionally depended on the transmission of information from instructor to learner, exclusively through uninterrupted lectures. The use of the traditional uninterrupted lecture which runs for 60 to 90 minutes or more delivered to provide information, does little to create learning that lasts. For a variety of reasons, many people are not primarily **auditory learners**. Therefore learning-by-listening is not an effective strategy for everyone. It is helpful to think about how you can maintain and enhance learners' active **engagement**.

Active learning is often measured by the level of learner participation which is a particularly difficult concept to define precisely. There are at least four main kinds: a) interaction between the instructor and the learners; b) interaction among learners themselves with the instructor facilitating; c) action by the learner individually while completing a task; and d) reflection by the learner individually while thinking, writing, or doing a task.

Reference
King, A. (1993). From sage on the stage to guide on the side. *College Teaching, 41*(1), 31.

Learners' comfort and facility with participation depend on a variety of learning preferences, cultural traditions, and previous learning experiences. (In some settings, for example, instruction may have been carried out in a formal atmosphere where an instructor makes an uninterrupted presentation, followed by questions. In other settings, participation might have been measured by attendance alone.) What's more, learners may already possess information or abilities related to the topic. In this case, you may choose to share the teaching responsibilities with the learners.

The strategy you select for participatory or active learning may also depend on how well the learners have "learned to learn." If the learners are skilled and experienced in the process of learning, an instructor might be able to plunge them into a **discovery learning** situation with little guidance. On the other hand, if they lack confidence and/or competence as learners, a more structured approach may be more effective.

Another important factor is the physical setting, including access to digital resources and instructional technologies. Some factors you might consider:

- The instructional technologies you use or involve your learners in using will depend on your knowledge, access, and familiarity with various options and the potential for learning (related to the outcome) that they offer.
- Fixed seating in a large classroom may make small group discussion difficult.
- If your learners have assistive learning devices or visual or hearing issues, you may want to pay particular attention to how you arrange the learning space.

Decisions about how best to facilitate participatory learning, then, will be affected by:

- the comfort level of the instructor,
- teaching/learning considerations,
- the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the learners, and
- other practical and logistical issues.

Strategies for Engaging the Learners

Instructors are encouraged to build active learner engagement into their lessons. Strategies that encourage active participation within this setting could include:

- small group discussion about a specific question or problem arising from the course material,
- pauses in presenting for student reflection through writing, discussion, or question development,
- short application tasks like solving an equation or a small problem,
- prediction or forecasting of answers to questions (often at the beginning of the lesson),
- students working on a problem and then evaluating each other's work,
- role plays, case studies, scenarios, or simulations, and posing a "thought" question—one that is not answered until later in the lesson.

Post-Assessment

The post-assessment answers two questions: What did the learners learn? Were the desired outcomes accomplished? A post-assessment that is conducted within a 10-minute lesson must be short. It should match the desired learning established at the beginning of the lesson. For example, if the lesson is an introduction to terminology, an appropriate

post-assessment might be a matching or sentence completion exercise. If the lesson focused on learning a skill, the post-assessment might require the performance (perhaps partial or simulated) of that skill.
Expressive outcomes are assessed mainly by reflection on the experience, often by the learners themselves. This might involve writing about “the relevance of the lesson for me” or discussing the possibilities or limitations of an idea that was explored.

In some situations, the post-assessment may be critically important. In a workplace training setting, a practicum course, or an apprenticeship program, for example, the instructor or facilitator of learning may need to consider very seriously what will happen if a learner cannot demonstrate that learning has occurred, especially if there are implications for safety or service delivery.

Summary/Closure

Just as the Bridge-In segment introduces a lesson, the Summary/Closure segment wraps up the learning experience, creating a sense of completion. It may also help the learners reflect on and integrate their learning. Finally, the instructor’s summary may also prepare learners for future lessons (e.g., “Now that we have done this, later we will try …”).

For some learners, revisiting the original outcome(s) of a lesson is an important opportunity for personal reflection. For others, it is an opportunity to celebrate achievements. And for some, it completes the learning contract by answering the question, “Did we do what we said we would do?” If the learners identified their own goals at the beginning of the lesson, it would be important to revisit these in some way. The instructor might ask them to reflect and comment briefly on the extent to which they met their goals to “close the circle” or synthesize the learning.

Whatever strategy is used, this section of the lesson is usually brief.

Strategies for Closing

The summary/closure might include:

- a brief content review in which the instructor or learners recap main points,
- group process reflections (time for learners to discuss the group process),
- acknowledgement and recognition of effort and achievement,
- individual insights offered during a quick roundtable for each person to have a “last word”
- suggestions for application. This may include the exploration of ideas about how to further their learning, noting how to use it later and/or creating a personal action plan. In workplace training, participation may be related to a personal development or a performance improvement plan. An action plan may outline how the participant will transfer learning back to the workplace.

Lesson Planning and *BOPPPS* description taken directly from:

Instructional Skills Workshop Network Executive. (April 2021). *The Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) Handbook Part One: Workshop Overview, Part Two: Workbook, and Part Three: Further Information & Resources.*

BOPPPS Lesson Plan Template

You can use this template for planning lessons.

TOPIC:			**Time**
Bridge-In			min
Learning Outcome(s) *Use action verbs e.g., describe, explain, etc.* The student will be able to . . .			min
Pre-Assessment			min
Participatory Learning			*min*
What does the instructor do?	*What do the learners do?*	*Aids e.g., handouts, props*	
Post-Assessment			min
Summary			min
Differentiated Instruction and/or Accommodations *Describe what you have considered to make the lesson inclusive and engaging.*			
Success Criteria: *What will success look like? (Link directly back to learning outcome)*			

Question Strategies

Effective question strategies capture students' attention, foster student involvement, and facilitate a positive, active learning environment. The following strategies for asking questions, responding to questions, and listening can help instructors get students answering the questions asked in class in ways that promote learning.

Asking Questions

Establish expectations early

Start asking questions early in the course term to set the tone for an active learning environment.

Make it clear on the first day that you will be posing lots of questions and that you want the students to interact with you during a lecture. Let them know that you are interested in their ideas and that you encourage questions and comments throughout class.

Let students know who will be called on and why

Will you wait for volunteers to answer questions? Or will you call on students — a practice sometimes referred to as "cold calling"? A study by Dallimore, Hertenstein, and Platt (2012) suggests that more students respond to questions voluntarily in classes with high cold calling. If you plan to call on individuals, give students reasonable opt-out opportunities. Whatever your approach, let students know early in the term how questions and answers will be handled in class, and why. Be transparent about the learning outcomes you hope to foster through your question style.

Prepare meaningful questions in advance

Think about different questions that you can ask your students as well as different ways to ask them. The types of questions you ask should capture students' attention, arouse their curiosity, reinforce important material, and foster an active learning environment.

Questions that are high level, divergent, structured, and single can generate student engagement:

- **High-level questions** require analysis, synthesis, or evaluation and often begin with "why" or "how." Low-level questions, or questions that require rote memory or restating course content, can help you assess whether students understand the material, but high-level questions are more engaging.
- **Divergent questions** have multiple plausible responses, which make them "safer" to answer. They also encourage high-level thinking (e.g., "What are some...?). Convergent questions only have one correct answer and are "riskier" (e.g., "What is the...?).
- **Structured questions** point students toward a context or frame within which they can formulate an answer (e.g., "What are some of the chemical structures at work in this solution according to our model?)" Unstructured questions (e.g., "What's at work in this solution?") are wide open and as a result can feel riskier to answer or can elicit responses outside of the relevant area.
- **Single questions** clearly let students know what you are asking them (e.g., "How can this principle clarify the problem for practitioners?"). Ask just **one question at a time** and refrain from adding others to qualify or clarify what you're trying to express. Asking multiple questions in a row (e.g., How can the application of this principle clarify the problem? What about the principle is useful to practitioners? Why would practitioners in the field turn to this principle?) leaves students uncertain of what to answer.

- **Asking "how" and "why" questions**, avoiding questions with one correct answer (including yes/no questions), making sure your question is sufficiently specific, and asking only one question at a time will help foster high-level thinking and engagement in your classes.

Be cautious of asking "Are there any questions?"

This question, and others like it (e.g., "Do you understand?") are often viewed by students as a "ritualistic" exercise on the instructor's part and are often met with silence. When asking the above, be sure that your question is genuine and has a clear purpose. If a question is met with no response, be prepared to use follow-up probing questions: "That means that if I were to ask you on an exam whether ______, you would know how to answer?" This can elicit questions and concerns from students.

Responding to questions

Wait for the answer

Instructors often don't give students enough "wait time," or the amount of time an instructor waits after asking a question before giving the answer or moving on (Rowe, 1986). Waiting at least five seconds after asking a question can result in deeper student learning and a more dynamic classroom environment. As the use of wait-time increases, so do:

- The number of student responses.
- The number of unsolicited but appropriate responses.
- The use of higher levels of logical thinking.
- The incidence of speculative thinking.
- The number of questions students ask.
- Students supporting their answers with evidence, logic, and details.
- Student-to-student communication and exchanges.
- The number of positive responses.
- The students' confidence in their ability to construct explanations (Rumohr, 2013).

Although the silence of wait times might seem awkward and uncomfortable, smile, wait patiently, scan the room, and endure at least a **five to six second wait** between your question and student responses.

Reach non-responsive students with wait times

Do the same students tend to respond to your questions? When the first person to raise their hand is always chosen to give an answer, it can communicate to students that the fastest answer is the best answer. In fact, we might prefer to encourage answers that take time to formulate — thoughtful, logical, or analytical answers. To avoid this, consider explaining to your students that you want everyone in the class to reflect on your question for a set period (between 20-60 seconds) and that you will then open the floor to answers. This strategy has the added benefit of giving less extroverted students and students with learning disabilities more time to prepare to participate. If this isn't a feasible strategy to use with all questions, considering using it once a class instead.

Encourage student-to-student interaction

Try to structure your comments to encourage students to interact with one another, "Mark, that's a good point. Could you relate that to what Sally said earlier?" Be prepared to facilitate recall of Sally's comment. When students are required to respond to one another, they become more attentive.

Admit when you don't know the answer

You'll lose more credibility by trying to fake an answer than by stating that you don't know. If you don't know the answer to a student's question, say so, "That's a good question. I'm not sure about that." Then follow up in one of the following ways:

- ask the class if anyone knows the answer (be sure to verify any responses)
- suggest resources that would enable the student to find the answer
- volunteer to find the answer yourself and report back at the next class

Listening actively

Repeat questions/comments to the whole class

Repeating student questions or comments to the whole class ensures that everyone can hear the information. You may need to paraphrase a long or complex question/comment. When responding to student questions or comments, be sure to look around the room to include all students in your comments. A general rule of thumb is to respond by focusing 25 percent of your eye contact on the questioner and 75 percent on the rest of the class - this is the 25/75 rule.

Give clear signals to students that you are listening

Avoid interrupting a student's answer, even if you think the student is heading toward an incorrect answer. Also, be sure to maintain eye contact and use non-verbal gestures such as smiling and head nodding to indicate your attention and interest in the student's response.

Acknowledge all student contributions

Thank or praise the student for having asked a question or expressed a view with comments such as "Good question" and "Thank you for sharing that with us." Such comments reinforce the behaviour of asking questions and volunteering information during class. Be sure, however, that you vary your reactions to students to avoid overusing the same comments. You can vary your responses in the following ways:

- Restate what the speaker has said to reinforce the point.
- Invite the student to elaborate: "Tell us more about that."
- Ask for clarification: "What do you mean by that?"
- Expand the student's contribution: "That's right, and to follow up on that point…"
- Acknowledge the originality of the response: "That's a good point. I hadn't thought of that."
- Connect the students' response with other students' comments.

References

Rowe, M. B. (1986). Wait times: Slowing down may be a way of speeding up. *Journal of Teacher Education. 31*(1), 43-50.

Rumohr, F. (2013). Reflection and inquiry in stages of learning practice. *Teaching Artist Journal, 11*(4), 224-233.

Types of questions for leading discussions

Name	Best for	Stems and examples
Open ended	• Getting student to elaborate on an idea • Starting a topic or switching directions in a discussion	"What do you think of" "Why did x (where x is general)"
Probing questions	• Gain clarification about student understanding • Help students see the bigger picture • Avoid misunderstanding or confusion • Involve a reluctant student (if directed)	"When should you" "How is X connected to y" "So how can we decide"
Funnel (Socratic)	• Get deductive or inductive thinking • Diffuse issues • Improve critical thinking	Varies, a progression like what, how, why is common 5 whys protocol/why well
Process questions	• Check depth of knowledge • Consider steps in informed judgement • Describe a process	"What is" "How do you" "What are the advantages of"

Essential tips for leading discussions

Setting up

- Set norms, including for challenging topics, and respond if there is an issue
- Use small groups rather than whole class whenever you can. Talking time is learning time, so you want as many students as possible thinking and talking
- Communicate amount of time or number of responses when you are first starting

During

- Use graphic organizers, the chat, whiteboards, etc. to support summary and transfer
- Reward asking questions as the valuable action of good learners
- Use enough wait time (thinking time before expecting response) to allow for the slowest thinkers
- Balance the discussion, so lots of voices are heard.
- Use rephrasing to help clarify your questions or student answers

After

- Bring closure at the end, posting a record of the summary in Canvas if possible

Marking and Grading Tips

Grading and providing feedback are primary duties of most TAs. These duties can be incredibly time consuming and depending on your approach, can take more time than you can devote, and more hours than your weekly assignment.

This section provides suggestions and ‘quick tips’ to assist you in doing grading for different types of disciplines, with the following attributes:

- Speed
- Consistency
- Objectivity and fairness
- Facilitating learning and growth

General Grading Strategies (any discipline)

- Follow a grading scheme/key/rubric/checklist provided. If none was provided, create your own after reviewing a few student submissions first.
- Take breaks. Set a goal to mark an entire section of an assessment for every student before taking a break. Consider when the best part of the day is to grade.
- Avoid distractions to prevent grading sessions being stretched out.
- After grading, recheck the first assignments and then **summarize the main learning issues for the course instructor.**

Written Feedback Strategies (any discipline)

To make **effective use of your time** and provide students with **feedback they can learn** from, try these approaches:

- Talk about the text, not the student
- Focus on higher-level issues
- Identify lower-level issues once, with a comment that the issue occurs throughout
- Don’t try to catch everything!
- Ensure your feedback reflects priorities of the instructor
- Build a comment bank in the Comment Library in Canvas’ Speedgrader
    - How do I use the Comment Library in SpeedGrader? guide
- Balance the ratio of comments to weighting criteria
- Make a **‘Comment Sandwich’:**
    - Identify an area of strength
    - Identify an area for development
    - Indicate how to improve, ending on a positive note
- A variation of the sandwich 😊
    - Identify 2 things the student should keep doing
    - Identify 2 things the student could improve in the future

Grading Strategy Tips for Problem Sets and Exams

- For speed and consistency, grade one question, section, or page at a time, rather than ‘student-by-student.’ Canvas has settings in Quizzes and New Quizzes for grading one question at a time.
- Develop shorthand or codes and provide students with a key to interpret your code.
- Find out if students have access to an answer key.
- When adding instructive notes, use a key word, page number or lecture date.
- When finding errors, consider what type of error it is: omission (something is missing), commission (unrelated/wrong information) or the answer doesn’t match the questions.

Time Management During Marking-Heavy Times

Protect your productivity and your health with these time management tips.

Time Management Strategies

- **Prioritization:** Identify what needs to be done first and focus on that.
- **Chunking Tasks:** Break down large tasks into smaller, manageable tasks and tackle them one at a time.
- **Time blocking:** Block off chunks of time for specific tasks and avoid multitasking.
- **Pomodoro technique:** Work for 25 minutes, take a 5-minute break, and repeat.
- **Avoiding distractions and multi-tasking:** Turn off notifications on devices and limit time on social media. Focus on one task at a time to increase productivity and efficiency.
- **Take breaks:** Take short breaks throughout the day to avoid burnout and increase focus.
- **Delegation:** Identify tasks that can be delegated to others.

Self-Care Approaches

- **Practice mindfulness:** Take a few minutes each day to practice mindfulness meditation or deep breathing exercises to reduce stress and increase focus.
- **Get enough sleep**: Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night to improve cognitive function and overall well-being.
- **Exercise regularly:** Regular exercise has been shown to reduce stress and improve mental and physical health.
- **Connect with others:** Schedule time to connect with friends, family, or colleagues to maintain social connections and reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Take time for hobbies:** Engage in activities that you enjoy, such as reading, cooking, or listening to music, to promote relaxation and reduce stress.

Accessibility Requirements

If you are not already familiar, learn about with provisions for access and equity for USask students. It the **course supervisor's responsibility** to ensure required accommodations are provided to students,

USask is guided by Saskatchewan's Human Rights legislation and the University's **Duty to Accommodate policy**.

Accommodations are supports or services that allow a student with a disability, or other accommodation needs, a fair opportunity to engage in academic activities and fulfill essential course and program requirements. Accommodations are meant to level the playing field for students; they are never meant to provide an advantage to students. Accommodations are not the same as modifications; students must still meet the learning outcomes of their program.

How are they administered?

Some accommodations can be arranged by an instructor (ex. - record lectures, extensions for assignments, copies of notes, missing a class, extensions with prior approval on assignments) while other accommodations are managed by AES. Accommodations managed by AES include classroom changes, exam accommodations, assistive technology, note-taking, and alternative format materials.

Please see your PAWS page -> Search Access and Equity Services and log into the **Accommodate how-to guide** for additional details.

Accessibility Requirements section sourced from *USask's Access and Equity Services webpage.*

TA Training Resources at USask

Workshops and resources

The Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning offers a selection of workshops, activities, and resources focused on developing specific skills and knowledge relevant to roles as a Teaching Assistant (TA). Please see our **Registration Calendar** for our current offerings.

You can receive recognition on your co-curricular record for attending TA Success Sessions and completing TA Series activities that are most relevant to you.

See the **TA Success Days** webpage for information about September and January dates.

TA Success Series

The TA Success Series offers a selection of activities focused on developing specific skills and knowledge relevant to roles as a teaching assistant. Participants complete activities and receive recognition on their co-curricula record. Choose from activities and experiences that are most relevant to you, including: marking effectively, lesson planning, facilitating labs, problem-set tutorials, seminars, and more.

Recognition: Your attendance, participation and completion of each activity will be recognized on your **Co-Curricular Record**.

Timeline: All activities should be completed within approximately *one academic year.*

Activities:

- Workshops and Reflection
- Observation and conversation with an instructor or experienced TA
- Micro-teaching experience
- Deliver a guest lecture or TA Success Day session

Grad courses on teaching

(Title is linked to the webpage for more information.)

The following teaching courses are specifically designed for graduate student teachers:

- GPS 982 Mentored Teaching (by Fellowship only)

Courses for graduate students

- GPS 960 Introduction to Ethics and Integrity (compulsory)

Certificate courses:

- GPS 974 Graduate Professional Skills Certificate Program (taken with GPS 984 Thinking Critically)
- GPS 986 Teaching Preparation Certificate

Contact Us

The Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning can be reached by email at gmctl@usask.ca if you have questions about the information above. We are in the Murray Building, 3 Campus Drive, Room 50, across the lobby from the Murray Library, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon SK.