



International American University

Teaching Assistant Program Handbook

TEACHING ASSISTANT PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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1 INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your new position as a Teaching Assistant at the International American University. You will find yourself taking on many new challenges as you embark on your dual role as a graduate student and a teaching assistant

International American University has established the teaching assistant program to assist in hybrid and on-line courses. The goal of the program is to assist in the development of graduate school student and foreign Academic Facilitators for teaching roles. As such, teaching assistants play a crucial role in IAU's efforts to ensure academic success among the institution's undergraduate population.

The Teaching Assistant Program (TAP) is a key component of a larger commitment that IAU has to provide support to graduate students in their development as teachers, and in their preparation for teaching roles after graduation. The hope is to generate excitement among graduate students about their current and future teaching roles and supports the University's mission to enhance students' learning experience.

A formal instructor evaluation is required bi-annually for all adjunct instructors. The Dean of Academics or assigned representative will be the evaluator of all adjunct faculty. Peer evaluators will be selected from among the instructors.

We look forward to meeting you and would like to help you succeed in your teaching.

1.1 Selection

Prospective teaching assistants must:

- a. Be an active graduate student.
- b. Must have a C.G.P.A. of 3.0 or above.
- c. Must have a desire to teach.
- d. Must obtain 2 letters of recommendation from two different faculty members. At least one letter of recommendation must be from an IAU faculty.
- e. Petition to work under the supervision of a faculty member at IAU and must have the faculty member accept.
- f. Be approved by the Dean of Academics.

1.2 Responsibilities

At International American University, teaching assistants may:

- Work with the instructor in providing progress through authentic observations, recognizing learning problems and makes referrals as appropriate alongside the instructor.
- Work with the instructor in evaluating student assignments using various assessment methods.

- Works with the instructor in making appropriate adjustments in the instructional program and as required.
- Work with the instructor for the continual improvement of the school's curriculum.
- Demonstrate proper operation and use of equipment and materials. Assist students with **IAU Online** components. Assist students in personalized instruction of specific computer software and hardware.
- Reporting to IAU administration regarding various issue for the respective course.
- Assisting the instructor with the **IAU Online** course room, including uploading files, updating the grade book, fixing broken links, and other **IAU Online** -related tasks.
- Tutor students on a one-to-one basis providing individualized academic support.
- Monitor attendance.
- Proctor examinations.
- Prepare and deliver lectures.
- Perform related duties as assigned.

The critical thing to remember is to discuss your responsibilities with your supervising professor to make sure that you understand what is expected of you. Also try to establish a regular weekly meeting time with your supervising professor in order to discuss any questions or problems that come up.

1.3 Training

Prior to being placed in a hybrid or on-line classroom, prospective TAs will undergo training under the tutelage of his/her supervising professor. You will use this handbook to get your started, staff will instruct you on using Moodle, you will receive personalized instruction from your supervising professor, and you will participate in Faculty Development Program.

TA-1: TA-1 individuals will be under the direct supervision of a supervising professor. The expectation is that the TA has an excellent grasp of the course material. The TA's role and responsibilities will be disseminated from the supervising professor. Training may include video-taping lectures, use of technology, and test development.

TA-2: TA-2 individuals will be minimally supervised by the supervising professor. The expectation is that the TA has a widespread, advanced knowledge of the course material. The TA's role will be developed and established by the supervising professor.

Credit: TAs will receive 3 units credit each semester that they teach under IAU internship program.

2 TEACHING ASSISTANT PROGRAM (TAP)

2.1 Preparing to teach

Effective Teaching

Do we really know what constitutes effective teaching? Is teaching effectiveness something that can be defined, evaluated, measured? What does the research tell us?

The studies which have been done on this topic have used various approaches and perspectives to examine the construct of “effective teaching,” ranging from classroom observations to measuring student learning outcomes to expert opinion and learning theory (Chism, 2004). Although the approaches varied considerably, there is consensus on what makes teachers successful. Enthusiasm, rapport, interest in students, organization and intellectual challenge are the traits that appear over and over again in descriptions of excellent teachers. Think about your own experience and your best teachers and these traits will undoubtedly come to mind.

In terms of effective methods, there are many to choose from depending on one’s own context. When deciding what methods to use, it is helpful to keep in mind.

1. **Encourages Student-Faculty Contact:** Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.
2. **Encourages Cooperation among Students:** Learning is enhanced when it’s more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one’s own ideas and responding to other’s reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding.
3. **Encourages Active Learning:** Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and, most importantly, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.
Good practice:
4. **Gives Prompt Feedback:** Knowing what you know and what you don’t know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. When getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In classes students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to learn and how to assess themselves.
5. **Emphasizes Time on Task:** Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one’s time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty. How an institution defines time expectations for students, faculty, administrators and other professional staff can establish the basis for high performance for all.

6. **Communicates High Expectations:** Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important for everyone—for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves and for the bright and well-motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers and institutions hold high expectations of themselves and make extra efforts.
7. **Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning:** There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students' rich hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learn in new ways that do not come so easily.

As far as your role as a TA goes, students should be actively involved in the learning process and encouraged to ask questions. Students asking questions of the teacher is considered normal learning behavior and in no way implies any fault in the instructor's teaching. It is of critical importance for international teaching assistants especially to pay close attention to student questions and to spend the time and effort necessary to make sure they have understood the question before they give an answer. Furthermore, it is better to say you don't know an answer and will find it for the next meeting, than to pretend you know or to ignore the question. One of the major roles a TA has is to answer student questions and nothing frustrates undergraduates more than feeling that a TA does not understand or is not willing to answer their questions.

2.2 Becoming a More Effective Teacher

1. **Over-plan:**
 - Ensure material to be covered is ready and in place.
 - Estimate time needed for each topic/segment/lesson.
 - Plan various techniques (e.g., case studies, games, role plays, video, small groups, etc.)
 - Provide handouts and other materials if needed: Put them in the order in which you will use them.
2. **Prepare several lessons at a time:** Try to stay ahead in the course preparations. Keep in mind the "big picture" of the learning objectives and course goals. Give yourself enough time to get comfortable with the material for each class so you don't need last minute, frantic changes.
3. **Visit the classroom ahead of time:** Know where the equipment is, find out from staff any other requirements or equipment you might need.
4. **Attend supervisory professor's class if available** TAs should attend the supervisory professor's class to learn of his/her style and techniques. Prepare any questions you might have in order to meet with him/her after class. .

5. **Don't assume the students know the basics of a subject matter.** Find out the students' backgrounds and realize that the basic may need to be taught or reviewed.
6. **By the same token, don't assume students know how to learn.** Discuss good study or reading strategies in class so the weaker students can find out how the better students go about the task of learning.
7. **Do the homework prior to their assignment.** Do all homework assignments yourself BEFORE you give them to students so you can check for any mistakes and anticipate their questions or difficulties.

2.3 Set the Tone for the Class

One of the most difficult areas to negotiate is setting the right tone for your relationship with your students. Friendliness is highly valued by undergraduates but you are not their "friend." While you want your students to be comfortable learning with you, they must also respect you as the instructor of the course.

How can you establish yourself as the authority figure in the class while maintaining a friendly and comfortable learning atmosphere? If you are a new TA it may take some experimentation to get the right balance. You must recognize what kind of teacher you are and decide what types of behaviors are compatible with your personality. Do you want students to call you by your first name or do you prefer Ms. or Mr.? Are you more comfortable teaching in jeans or in more formal clothing? While there are no right and wrong answers to these questions, there are some general guidelines that will help you negotiate this terrain.

- Decide what you want your students to call you and put that in writing on the syllabus and introduce yourself that way in class.
- Make sure you announce verbally what you want your students to call you. Write your name on the blackboard, as you want to be addressed—if you want them to use Mr. or Ms. plus your last name, then don't just write your first and last name on the board. Be sure you repeat this information for the first 3-4 classes so that students who've missed a class get the information. You would be amazed how many undergraduates at mid semester cannot name their TA and if they don't know how to address you, then they aren't going to be comfortable talking to you.
- Use self-disclosure sparingly. Do not share too much personal information with your students; rather talk about campus events, course issues or small-talk topics such as sports or weather to build rapport. Of course, when appropriate, you should feel free to talk about things like trips you've taken, pets or your hometown, but you should not discuss your personal life or problems with your students.
- Be aware of your body language. Nonverbal messages are very powerful. Reduce the distance between you and your students by moving around the classroom rather than standing behind a desk or lectern. Be sure you make and maintain eye contact with all students in the classroom. Don't forget to smile and show your enthusiasm for your subject material. These guidelines will help you establish rapport with your students regardless of your preferred style of teaching. While engaging in friendly discussions outside the classroom and acquainting yourself with your students' lives can facilitate teaching and learning, you must maintain some distance and objectivity.

In the classroom there are many ways to communicate your interest and concern for your students. Remember that your students are likely to learn better when they feel that their experiences, thoughts, and feelings matter and when they know that they will be treated with respect. Here are some suggestions to help accomplish these goals:

- Call your students by name.
- Watch students' body language for signs of boredom or lack of comprehension (e.g., dozing, chatting with a neighbor, paper rustling). If you see this behavior, try moving around the room, changing the pace of the lecture or asking questions.
- Be aware that students are trying to take notes and do not write quickly on the board and then erase the material before the students can catch up. Use verbal cues such as "There are four reasons why... and the first reason is" to help students take effective notes.
- Be sensitive to students who have different cultural backgrounds and therefore different cultural interpretations of behavior. For example, an unwillingness to express an opinion may be a culturally-based norm, rather than a sign of lack of preparedness.

If students perceive that you are friendly and interested in their success at the University, you may find that they will approach you for assistance in other areas of their lives. Be sure you are familiar with the counseling and tutoring resources available on campus.

2.4 Relationship with Supervising Professor

In terms of the teaching assistant's relationship with the supervising professor, good communication is again important. Each of us can gain knowledge about teaching by talking with our supervisor and learning from their years of experience. By working with different professors, different styles can be observed and our own individual approaches to teaching can be developed.

It is also important to talk with the supervising professor if the TA's role and/or responsibilities need clarification. Questions you may wish to discuss with your supervisor are suggested below (Seegerstrale, 1982):

1. What do you want the section to accomplish?
2. How much leeway do I have in running sections?
3. Will there be separate readings assigned for sections by the professor or may I make my own assignments?
4. Is section attendance mandatory? Will there be a section grade?
5. How much responsibility for grading will I have?
6. How can I get some help for my teaching?
7. How often will I meet with the professor?

8. If there are several TAs working with the professor in the same course, to what extent am I to coordinate my plans with theirs and what is the mechanism for doing this?

Many of these questions may be answered in initial meetings, but if you have any unanswered questions, be sure to find a time when it is convenient for your supervising professor to answer those questions before the semester begins so that you can communicate expectations clearly to your students.

3 TEACHING TECHNIQUES

3.1 Your Students

Your first class will consist of new students, students of various ages, and students from many differing backgrounds and cultures. Many are new to the American university system and some might even be facing culture shock. The Johnson Foundation (1989) point out some differences they might face:

- They are used to a set schedule of daily assignments that are often collected
- Many students have formed a continuing and strong support network
- Many are used to a weighted grading systems differentially rewarded performance in courses by level of difficulty

As a result, the expectations of university academic life, emphasizing self-initiation, independence and responsibility may be quite jarring for some students. Some factors to consider are:

- Most often, college is the first extended experience students have had with independent living. The transition from family, town and school to the newness of independence and the wonders of university life can all too easily overshadow what may be perceived by the student as dull academic responsibilities
- For the most part, entering students are used to being in the upper halves of their graduating classes, to being widely known and respected by their peers and teachers - in other words to being "big fish in small ponds." Here they are- very "small fish" in an awfully "big pond." This is often a difficult transition.
- Many are working adults and have a difficult time at first balancing school, work, and family lives.

Therefore, as you prepare your course plans and materials, try to build in structures and strategies that will help minimize the difficulties faced by incoming students in your classes.

3.2 Course Syllabus

The syllabus is an important tool in any instructors' repertoire whether they be faculty or TAs and it sets the tone for the course and provides documentation of all the key course elements. It gives the students a sense of where they are going and how they are going to get there. Each course at IAU has an outline course syllabus. With the permission of the supervising professor, some elements can be changed or altered. The items below comprise the elements of a good syllabus:

1. **Course information:** Course title, number, credits; meeting times and locations including computer facilities; textbook and other required reading including where to buy or find; course description with sequence of topics to be covered with a calendar for assignments, dates of exams, due dates for end-of-semester papers/projects; other required student supplies, e.g., calculators.
2. **Your information:** Your full name and title, how students should address you, your office location and office hours, phone number and email address and preferred mode of communication, home page URL, departmental office phone number and location.
3. **Student Learning Objectives:** Each IAU syllabus has stated learning objectives for the course and each week. What will students be able to do at the end of your course as a result of taking this class? These form the basic structure of the course and you should design your lectures and activities around these objectives.

Nilson (2003) suggests pointing out that students can expect to acquire these abilities only if they honor these abilities only if they honor all course policies, attend class regularly, complete all assigned work on time and in good faith and meet all other course requirements and expectations.

4. **Grading:** IAU considers grading an important part of academic freedom. However, all policies and procedures should be explicitly stated, including your rationale for your choices. All scoring for assignments, exams and papers/projects should be clearly laid out, including whether or not the lowest score can be dropped, policies on make-up exams and rescoring of exams, challenging exams, penalties for late work and missed assignments, and your position on extra-credit assignments.

5. Classroom Management Policies

- a. **Attendance:** Is attendance required? How will it be monitored? Will there be excused absences? What documentation is required? How much of the grade (if any) does attendance constitute?
- b. **Late arrivals/early dismissals:** Late arrivals and early departures can be disruptive to other students, but not in every class situation.
- c. **Decide how much these behaviors may affect your class and set your policy accordingly.** State any policies or procedures that you wish to use, such as early departures submit a request in writing before the start of class and sit in designated seats near the door. Will late arrivals pose a problem for your class or not? Will there be a penalty? Whatever policies you set, you must be consistent and firm in your implementation.

- d. Make firm policies on cell phones, electronic notebooks, eating, talking, etc.
6. **Academic Dishonesty:** Define cheating and/or plagiarism in the context of your course as well as giving IAU's definition of the behaviors and student code of conduct. Refer students to IAU honor code and definitions of academic misconduct and the attendant judicial processes. Let your students know exactly how you define cheating on every assignment and what the penalties will be. To discourage cheating in courses with significant writing components tell students what search software you will be using to check for plagiarism. Tell students that cell phones are NOT allowed to be taken out during examinations to avoid cheating behaviors that are on the rise such as text messaging a friend outside the room who has a textbook or photographing pages of texts and storing them in the cell phone. Review syllabus information before significant assignments are due.
7. **Be sure to make enough copies!** Ensure each student has a copy of the syllabus and go over it in detail. Every online component will also have a copy of the syllabus.
8. **Present your syllabus:** Plan how you will present the syllabus on the first day. Depending on the length, you may have students read it in class, discuss it in groups and then sign a statement of understanding and cooperation. Have them discuss what they are looking forward to in the course or what they think will be difficult for them. You might assign it for homework and give a quiz on it the next day, either graded or ungraded. You can also include personal response questions regarding their opinions or feelings about items on the syllabus. Only by involving the students in some kind of syllabus-centered activity will you get them to read the document thoroughly.

3.3 Testing and Grading

Testing is probably the most commonly used type of assessment instrument in education, along with paper writing and quizzes. Everything we say about testing, however, can be applied to all types of assessment: projects, homework assignments, presentations, journals, surveys, case studies, etc. All types of assessment require careful consideration and planning in order to provide you and your students with valid and reliable feedback on how well the learning is progressing. Any assessment you develop requires a backward look at the learning objectives that you established when you first designed your course. Just as those learning objectives shaped your decisions on what teaching methods to choose, so they should guide you on deciding what kinds of assessment you need. The goal of assessment is to show students (and you of course) whether or not they are meeting your learning objectives.

The other factor in testing, which also links back to your learning objectives, is the cognitive level of the tasks. Remember Bloom's taxonomy and consider carefully the match between the cognitive levels used in your learning objectives and the levels used in your assessments. If your goals involve synthesis and application, your tests should not be just about knowledge and comprehension.

General Testing Practice Guidelines

The following guidelines can be considered "best practice" advice for all types of testing situations:

- The more tests (and other types of assessments as well) the better. It is better to begin testing early in the semester and have multiple opportunities to evaluate your students' learning. The more data you have the easier it is for you to evaluate your students and the students will be more relaxed when they know that there will be other chances to show what they have learned in case they have a bad day. Also, early test feedback allows students time to change the way they are studying in order to be more effective test-takers.
- A good way to develop test topics/questions is to write down a couple of ideas after class. That way you don't have to go back to your notes to see what you covered in class and the material will still be fresh in your mind. You can also solicit potential test questions from the students as an exercise in identifying the key concepts covered in a class period.
- Carefully check all tests for any errors and make sure the formatting is user friendly. Leave enough space so students can write out their answers legibly and make sure the instructions for each section are explicit. Tell students (on the test) how many points each section is worth and how much time they have for the test so that they know how to prioritize their responses.
- In the beginning of the test, start off with some simpler tasks/questions to allow students a warm-up period. This technique also builds student confidence and gets them thinking about the topics before they tackle the more difficult questions.
- Always give a verbal announcement of the upcoming test, even though it's printed on the syllabus. Remind students of the learning objectives and go over what material will be on the test. Tell them about the format of the exam.
- Always have someone else proofread or even take your test to make sure that the instructions are clear, the items themselves are unambiguous and that it can actually be completed in the time allotted.
- Be sure to vary the types of questions/tasks on any given test so that students can find some question styles that are a good match for their preferred learning styles. See section below for more guidelines on writing both objective and essay tests.

Test Development Objective Tests

Suggestions for Developing Objective Tests:

1. Write clear and unambiguous directions for the test and each section.
2. Write the items clearly and simply, avoiding double negatives or "trick" constructions. Try to put the question in a positive form, since the use of negatives can be confusing. Anxious students may not see the word "not," so underline or boldface the word "not" if it must be used. Double negatives involve using a negative in both the stem and options.
3. Group questions by type (e.g., true/false, multiple choice, etc.).
4. Start questions with words like "who," "when," or "where."
5. If questions are interrelated so that a student must use a correct answer to one question in order to correctly answer another question, partial credit should be considered.

6. Be sure that the true/false questions are unequivocally true or false. Avoid qualifiers such as “always” or “in most cases.”
7. In questions requiring the student to complete the sentence, avoid too many blanks. Also, if the blank is at the end of the statement, students can first get an idea of what the question is about.
8. Specify in the directions whether an answer in a matching test can be used more than once. Possible answers should be in the same category (e.g., all parts of the body, laws, map locations).
9. Construct math and science tests using questions similar to class and homework assignments. Make the questions as interesting as possible and avoid long, complicated computations. Focus on ideas, not endurance.

Suggestions for Multiple Choice Questions:

- Write first the stem or structural element that remains constant. This may be in the form of a question (e.g., “In which of the following processes is it necessary to break a covalent bond?”) or an incomplete statement (e.g., “In Experiment 19 you used a spectrophotometer to directly determine...”).
- The stem should be concise and clear. Students should know what is wanted without having to read all the options in order to understand the stem. Include as much of the item in the stem as possible to avoid repetition of wording in the options (e.g., rather than beginning each option with “in supply-side economics,” include this wording in the stem).
- Write the correct or best answer after writing the stem. Decide whether this will be a “correct” or “best” answer in relation to the alternatives. This can influence your construction of the “foils” or “distracters” (i.e., wrong answers) and your correct answer. Also, check with colleagues to ensure that authorities in the field would agree with you on the “best” answer.
- Students should be made aware in the directions of whether they are providing the correct or best answer.
- Write the correct answers the same length; otherwise test-wise students may be able to detect correct answers solely on the basis of the options' construction. Also, do not write them so similarly that students can quickly disregard them as a group.
- Avoid giving clues. Test-wise students realize that qualifiers (e.g., “all,” “never,” “always”) are generally found in foils, while other qualifiers (e.g., “usually,” “sometimes,” “maybe”) are often included in correct answers.
- Avoid using “all of the above” or “(b) and (c)” above. If you are asking for the best answer, these options are contradictory and strain logic. If you are asking for the correct answer, “none of the above” may then be appropriate.
- Advise students (e.g., before the exam, in the test's directions) whether they will be penalized for wrong answers, and if so how much.
- Avoid patterns in the correct answers to multiple choice questions. For example, having “a” be the correct answer for ten questions in a row.

Suggestions for Developing Essay Tests:

1. Determine the processes you want to test (e.g., analysis, synthesis, etc.).
2. Start questions with words such as “compare,” “contrast,” or “explain.”
3. Word the item so that students know whether a broad and sketchy or specific and in-depth answer is required. If you want students to include particular concepts in their answers, phrase the question to make this clear.
4. Do not have too many questions for the time available nor have questions too long to read. Students must take time to prepare their answers before writing them.
5. Take the test to ensure the time needed to complete it is appropriate.

Going over the tests and quizzes can help students learn. Generally a teacher should not change what is considered a correct answer despite possible student arguments; however, if the best students in the class get the answer wrong, the fault might lie with the wording or instructions of the test. Teachers can also learn from this process and identify areas to be reviewed.

After listening to student disagreements about test questions, be sure to summarize the correct understanding of concepts or procedures. Preparing Your Students

How to get Better Test Scores

1. **Keep Current.** Prepare for tests as if they occurred without prior notice. Instead of memorizing the subject matter, paraphrase it and integrate it into your total store of knowledge.
2. **Be Prepared.** Bring several pens and pencils to the test. Arrive a few minutes early. A little excitement may improve your performance. Important: Self-control.
3. **Quickly scan the entire test at the start.** Ask the instructor immediately about any unclear phrasing. Be sure to follow all instructions exactly and to understand the criteria. Example: If a list is requested, do not compose an essay. Ask if wrong answers will be penalized. If not, guessing may improve your score slightly.
4. **Mentally schedule your answers and set priorities.** For example, if the test lasts two hours, answer at the rate of 1% each minute. This pace gives you a little reserve time for the more difficult questions and for the all-important review.
5. **Study each question carefully and plan your answer.** Conserve time by avoiding repetitions. Examples: Lab (do not write out) each question. Give as much detail as is requested, but no more. Omit side issues, especially if they encroach on other questions. Do not write out the same answer to more than one question. Cross out wrong answers (instead of taking time to erase them). Exception: Computer-scored tests require complete erasures of mistakes.
6. **Avoid dogmatic presentations.** In an essay on a controversial issue, give all sides before justifying your view. A statement is false if any part of it is wrong.

7. **Don't belabor the obvious.** For example, don't write that a company should set goals. Instead: Specify what goals are appropriate. Try to cover all bases, but briefly. Most teachers disdain padding.
8. **Use clear expressions.** Define technical terms so that a person who is not familiar with them would understand.
9. **Allow time for review.**
10. **Use the test as a springboard for further learning.** Don't blame the teacher or text if the grade received is lower than you hoped. Pinpoint and remedy the weakness.

Grading Reports

The first and most important thing to remember about grades is that they are privileged information between the student and the instructor and the instructor must always guard the students' privacy.

Instructors of undergraduate courses must notify students of their mid-semester progress before the end of the eighth week of the semester. Students with low marks should be encouraged to consult with you or their advisor. The Registrar does not receive these marks and they do not appear on the students' permanent record. Beyond the midterm, if students are still failing, they should be advised of their academic options and strongly encouraged to speak with their advisors. Herr-Gillespie, Hilsen, and Wadsworth (2002) suggest the following relative to grading:

TA Role in Grading

If you will be grading as part of a team or grading for a supervising professor there are some questions you need to ask:

- Who has responsibility for assigning the grades—the TA or the professor?
- Is there a departmental rubric that will be used to assign grades?
- Will there be opportunities to discuss grading issues with other TAs and/or a supervisor?
- Are there departmental guidelines on the expected breakdown of assigned grades?
- How do we handle grading for those students for whom English is not a native language (composition/writing based classes)?

Because students take grades personally, it is critical that your grading be perceived as accurate and fair. To help establish objective grading practices, you should have answer keys for objective tests, a list of acceptable alternative answers on short-answer questions (although every possible answer cannot be anticipated) and you should know which answers may get partial credit. Points and weights for each question and section and the weights assigned to factors such as spelling and grammar should be determined ahead of time. Points and weights should appear on the test itself so that students can make informed decisions on which questions to spend the most time. And remember, what is right or wrong for one student should be right or wrong for all students.

Here are some further suggestions and considerations while grading:

- If you are grading for a professor, do a trial run in which both of you grade a set of papers. Comparisons can be made and any differences can be discussed.
- Read and grade all students' answers on an essay question before going on to the next question to help ensure objectivity. Reading a few tests first can help a teacher get an idea of the range of responses and can help avoid grading early papers "harder" and becoming more lenient or vice versa.
- Grade as anonymously as possible. For example, do not look at student names on the work before grading it.
- Expectations should be based on the fact that undergraduate, not graduate, work is being evaluated.
- Be aware of your mood and its potential influence while grading. Do not drink while grading. Also, if you try to grade too many exams at one time, fatigue can dull your responses.
- Give grading your full attention—students have invested quite a bit of their time and work.
- Try to give the students detailed comments on their essay questions; an attempt should also be made at giving positive feedback. If the class is large, an answer key can be posted along with a list of common errors, which includes how many points were deducted for these errors.
- Comments should be more detailed for research papers on which students spend many hours. A couple of sentences can give students valuable information and show that you have read the paper carefully.
- After the first quiz or exam, review (it should have been presented on the first day of class) the grading criteria on your syllabus. TAs should consult with the department about the appropriateness of grading students on a normal distribution curve.
- You should be prepared for student questions and complaints about grades. Individual student performance should be discussed outside of class. You should listen to the students and take their view seriously; however, you should not be intimidated or abused. If the dispute cannot be resolved, the issue should be directed to the supervising professor or department head.
- Be proactive - use the following page as a handout or to discuss with your students to help them perform their best on tests.

Good Assignments

A well-designed assignment should be able to "meet the students where they are" and help them move forward in learning the new material. Both the levels of thinking (see Bloom's Taxonomy, pg. 28) involved in the task and the content of the class need to combine to challenge and engage the students. Below is a checklist to create good assignments.

- Check for discipline jargon. If you need to use certain technical words, be sure that your students know what the terms mean or know where they can find definitions.

- Check for higher ed jargon Because you will be working with students who are primarily at the beginning of their college experience, their vocabulary may not yet be developed as fully as you might expect. Help them expand their knowledge by explaining any terms you use in your assignments. For example, when you say “Please interpret...,” make it clear whether you want them to offer their opinions or to cite evidence or sources. If you want citations make sure you tell them how they should be formatted and included in the writing.
- Check to see that the assignments connect with the course objectives. Look at the goals you’ve listed in the syllabus and determine how the assignment will help students achieve that goal. You can even have the students do a quick evaluation of an assignment in terms of how it helped them learn the material.
- Check to see if the assignment is boring. If you think the essay topic or homework question is boring, it probably is. Talk to other TAs about their assignments, ask them to look at yours or ask a faculty member who has taught the course for some ideas. You can also have the students do some brainstorming with the material and find out what they understand, don’t understand or want to understand better in order to create more relevant assignments. Don’t forget about the Institute for Teaching and Learning, 6-2686, we can help you evaluate your assignments and give you suggestions and some fresh ideas for using them.
- Check to see if the assignment is too challenging. When students are overwhelmed by an assignment they are more likely to resort to plagiarism or other forms of cheating. If you assign any large projects, be sure to break it down into more manageable assignments with timelines. Have students turn in work as they go rather than all at the end of a large project. If students seem to be struggling too much with an assignment, discuss it with your supervising professor to see if there might be another way to approach it.

Grading Policies: See Instructor Handbook for IAU policies on grades.

3.4 International Students

International teaching assistants (ITAs) face many challenges in their introduction to the American university classroom. In addition to taking on a new role as an instructor, they must also overcome language barriers, cultural gaps and differences in academic expectations in the classroom.

The Language Barrier

For many TAs the language barrier is one of the toughest problems they must face going into a classroom. It is not, however, an insurmountable problem if TAs realize that there are many ways to improve communication which go beyond language alone. TAs can use some of the following strategies to build rapport in the classroom, which will have the effect of lessening the focus on their English problems:

1. Come to class a couple of minutes early and make “small talk” with your students as they enter the room. You can talk about the weather or ask your students how the football/soccer/basketball team is doing, the topic is not important. What is important is that you are signaling to your students that you are friendly, interested and

- approachable; three traits of an instructor that undergraduates value highly. They also gain valuable practice with conversational American English.
2. Get to know your students' names. By making an effort to pronounce and learn their names you are showing your students that you care about them as individuals and want to get to know them.
 3. Prepare very carefully. If you are organized and well prepared for each class, language problems can be minimized. Students will perceive you as a competent and knowledgeable teacher, yet understanding of their language limitations.
 4. Try to keep a sense of humor about miscommunications that may arise and don't hesitate to write on the board or use overheads/handouts/PowerPoint if they can't understand you. If you cannot understand a student's question, don't give up. Ask the student to repeat the question slowly or ask if another student can rephrase the question.
 5. Always check for student comprehension of the material by asking them some questions or by asking for a summary of what was just presented. Do not ask "Does everybody understand?" because most of the time you will get no response. Prepare some real content or process questions to check comprehension.
 6. Remember to speak slowly and project your voice. If students can't hear what you are saying they will struggle with the subject matter in your lecture.

Cultural/Pedagogical Barriers

Another area where TAs need special preparation is that which pertains to the differences in our cultural and pedagogical norms.

Beginning with admissions to the university, you will notice that our students are a very diverse group in terms of levels of preparation for your classes. Admissions here are not based solely on qualifying examinations, so you may find your students' backgrounds vary more than those of students you have been worked with in the past. The lack of preparation some students may exhibit should not be confused with lack of intelligence, however. It is simply the result of not having a mandatory national curriculum, particularly at the high school level. Whereas in the US we emphasize a more liberal arts approach to course work, students from Asian and European countries are accustomed to more of a specialized educational background and curricula.

Unlike many European, Middle Eastern and Asian educational systems, in the US we tend to behave very informally in class. They are also not accustomed to having dialogue with instructors or even asking questions in class. Point out that you are accessible outside of the classroom, which may be new to them. We consider this informal interaction as a critical part of student learning. TAs will have to make an extra effort to put their students at ease in approaching you and actively encourage them to come see you after class or make an appointment with you.

By and large, the international TAs will find their students interesting, challenging and friendly if they themselves can be open to getting to know their students and the undergraduate culture.

4 FIRST DAY OF CLASS

4.1 Before Class

Suggests the following:

- **Student list:** Obtain a copy of your class registration list.
- **Visit the classroom:** Make sure that you have visited your classroom ahead of time and find out if you will need to get keys, for example, to open the cabinets in the high-tech rooms. Also, check the size of the room with your class list to see if the room is going to be big enough to accommodate all those who have registered. Note whether the desks/chairs are fixed installations or whether they can be moved about and decide how this may affect your choice of class activities. Notice whether you will need chalk or markers to write on the board. Is there an overhead projector in the room? Are any lights in need of replacement? What's the temperature in the room like? Do the windows work? Is there construction going on right outside? If necessary, contact the administrative assistant in your department office to make a room change.
- **Online:** Ensure the classroom is set up with syllabus, schedule, course material, etc.
- **Course Materials.** Prepare whatever copies, overheads or lab materials that you might need well ahead of the first class. Never leave these tasks until right before class because you will most certainly be interrupted by a copy machine jam or other distractions. Make extra copies of your syllabus because there will be students who have not yet registered who will simply show up on the first day. Gather whatever s other materials you will need (markers, erasers, keys, pen, class roster) and put everything together with your handouts.
- **Outline first class schedule:** Make an outline of everything you want to do in the first class. Be sure to arrive at your classroom early in case the door is locked or the board needs cleaning. Chat with the students as they enter. Making small talk is a great way to build rapport and put everyone at ease.
- **On-line Introduction:** Be sure you post to students your contact information, office hours, and a short bio. They will want to know something about their instructor. Encourage students to post their own bio also.

4.2 During Class

- **Introduction:** Introduce yourself! Your students are very interested in finding out who you are and what kind of teacher you will be. Say your name and write it on the board. Be sure to tell your students how they can address you: Ms? Mr.? First name? Nickname? If you are an international TA, have the students practice pronouncing your name. Tell them you will be giving them a quiz on your name in the second class! Share a bit of your background so that your students know why you are teaching this course. As a teaching assistant, be sure your students understand which parts of the course/assessments you can change or not change. Make sure they know who to talk to about issues which are beyond a TA's control. Tell them

why you are excited about this course. Be sure that while you are talking to them, you make eye contact with all the students, even those in the back of the room. Walk around the room if possible.

- **Engage students:** Begin to learn your students' names from the very first class. Try to talk to each student during roll call, check your pronunciation of their names, and ask if they prefer a nickname. Have your students fill out an index card with their names, email addresses, reasons for taking this course, majors, related courses they have taken and any other information that will help you get to know them better as learners. Have your students get to know each other through some kind of icebreaker. You can do a "stand-up, sit-down" activity where you ask students to respond to questions such as "I am a psychology major" or "I am from Connecticut" by standing up and then sitting back down. The students can take turns introducing each other to the class or you can have them do a scavenger hunt where they interview their fellow classmates to find names for items like "has traveled in Europe or Asia," "prefers sports to movies," etc. Once students get to know each other, they will be much more comfortable interacting and participating actively. However, even with icebreakers, students may be too shy to ask questions during the first day of class, so at the end of class have them write anonymously (give them about two minutes) their reactions to this first day.
- **Course materials:** Distribute the syllabus. Go over it in class or better, have the students read it and explain it to teach each other in pairs and then give them a quick quiz on it. Be sure you draw their attention to the learning objective which you have on your syllabus and show them how the materials and assessments all relate to those learning objectives. Be sure to emphasize policies on missed exams and make-ups, absences, and late work. If you are using a daily quiz, be sure to mention that late arrivals will be penalized by a missed quiz score. Ask the students if they have purchased their books yet and point out to them features of their textbook which they may not have noticed, such as a glossary of key concepts/terms in the back, appendices which may contain useful data/charts/maps, etc. and any answer keys for student self-correction. Use this time to give them some tips on how to read effectively, how to find main ideas and identify the key concepts. Don't assume that they know how to read for learning.
- **On-line:** It is highly recommended that you post your expectations to the class. It should include postings requirements, late work, excuses, "incompletes", grading criteria, exams, etc. The "expectations" document can often be helpful as a policy document when issues or problems arise.

4.3 Closing Class

- **Introduction:** Be sure to end the first class formally. Closure is an important part of the lesson. Summarize the important points and reiterate assignments for the next class (even if it's written in the syllabus!). Don't be tempted to end the class early—if you do all of the activities suggested in this unit, you will have more than enough activities to fill the allotted time. Don't forget to SMILE!
- **Remain after class.** Try to plan to stay a few minutes after class ends, especially on the first day, because students will need to talk to you about registration problems or questions about whether they can take the class or not. If possible, jot down the student's name and what you talked about so that you will remember what you told

them. If another class needs to come in, just move out into the hallway to continue your discussion or invite the students to your office if it is close by.

- **First day review.** Once you get back to your office or home, organize your notes and materials, attend to any changes that need to be made and if possible, write down what you thought went well and what you felt didn't go well. This will help you in future lesson preparations. Now, take a deep breath—you survived your first day!

4.4 First Day Checklist

1. Am I energized and enthusiastic about this class?
2. Is the classroom arranged properly for the class activities?
3. Are my name, course number and course name written on the board?
4. Do I have an icebreaker planned?
5. Do I have a way to start learning names?
6. Do I have a way to gather information on student background, interests, expectations for the course, questions, concerns?
7. Is the syllabus complete and clear? Do I have enough copies?
8. Have I outlined how students will be evaluated?
9. Do I have announcements of needed information ready?
10. Do I have a way of gathering student feedback?
11. When class is over, will students want to come back? Will you want to come back?
12. REMEMBER: Relax, have fun and enjoy.

4.5 Engaging Students

An effective teacher needs to be interested in and enthusiastic about the subject. Your enthusiasm will signal to the students that this is a topic worthy of attention and study. "Enthusiasm is caught, not taught." Communicate your enthusiasm by using your voice effectively. Remember to vary the pitch, volume, tone and pace of your voice to emphasize new and important information and to keep the students' attention. Walk around the classroom so that all students feel your presence.

Leaving the front of the classroom removes a psychological barrier between the teacher and the students. Use eye contact as another source of communication. Good eye contact combined with knowing your students' names ensures that your students will remain involved and motivated. Be sure to smile from time to time and not just at the

students who smile back! Here are a couple of classroom techniques designed to keep your students actively involved in the learning.

“Pair and Share.” After posing your question to the class, allow the students to discuss it with a neighbor before giving an answer to the whole group. Ask for volunteers to discuss the answers their pair came up with.

At the end of one class, pass out the questions or problems for the assignment/next class. Make sure you have multiple copies of each question/problem so that each group of students answer the same questions. Allow time for the groups to compare answers and have each group write one of the answers/problems on the blackboard. Or, group the students by same question and have each group responsible for just one question, which they must present to the rest of the class. For more tips, see McKeachie, 1999.

Online: Be engaged and present in the classroom. The minimum expectation is that you will be in the classroom a minimum of four days a week. Be sure to constantly check your inbox for student messages and questions. Students respond positively when the instructor is omnipresent. Especially engage students who do not have any response postings from colleagues.

4.6 Sustaining a Positive Environment

Tips on Sustaining a Positive Learning Environment

1. Be concerned about the physical setting.
 - a. Check the lighting in the room. Make certain all can see to read the texts, Overhead or large screen projection. On the other hand, there is no good reason why every light has to be on at eight o'clock in the morning.
 - b. Encourage students to inform you about any discomforts. For example, if an open window is causing a chilling draft, tell them to feel free to make needed adjustments.
2. Make the examples you use relevant to your students' lives: “How would you feel if somebody dropped a whole load of oil in Lake Superior?” “How will this current drought affect your budget?”
3. Do not be so rigidly tied to your syllabus that you do not take the time to capitalize on real life situations. If there is a major local event, find a way to connect this event with what is going on in your class and your students' lives.
4. Address students by name. Use a seating chart, name tags, or whatever may work for you to learn their names.
5. Remember not all reasons for incomplete assignments are excuses. Yes, we must establish rules, but there are occasions where the rules need to be broken. Be compassionate, not cynical. Grandmothers really do die.
6. Constantly read your audience's response:
 - a. If it is clear from the expressions on their faces they have no idea what you are talking about, be willing to take the time to present the concept in different words,

- with different illustrations. Expecting their confusion to disappear with time is not good enough.
- b. If students are bored or you have just covered an in-depth topic intensively, there is nothing wrong with stopping. Allowing them to talk or stretch for a minute or two and then continuing.
 - c. In long classes, provide a short break to address human comforts. Students have a difficult time following you if they have pressing needs.
7. Provide nonverbal encouragement:
- a. Maintain eye contact.
 - b. Move about the room. Come out from behind that podium. Display your willingness to be a person; sit on a sturdy desk or table. Move into their space.
 - c. Be animated and expressive, both facially and bodily. Let them see and feel your enthusiasm.
8. Model the thinking processes in your field for your students. Do not just tell them; show them and then let them practice. If you are not talking, it does not mean you are not teaching.
9. Use positive reinforcement:
- a. Give students recognition for contributing to in-class discussions or answering questions. Use positive reinforcement when possible, but if the answer is incorrect, try to lead the student through continued questioning to reach an acceptable position.
 - b. Use student test answers to review material after a test. Keep track of good answers as you correct the tests and let the students “star” a bit. This is a lot less boring than you reading all the right answers.
 - c. After getting permission from the student, share good student work with the rest of the class.
 - d. Validate student opinions by referring to points students made previously, not always using “as I said last Thursday. “Say, “to follow up on John’s point Tuesday...”
10. Keep constant tabs on how your students are progressing:
- a. Use conferencing outside of class to discuss problems and areas where students are doing well.
 - b. Be willing to provide review, catch-up or further explanation sessions.
 - c. If students are not going to make it, honestly counsel them out before you are forced to fail them.
11. When asking questions, pause. Students need time to process the questions and their answers. Count to 15 before moving on. If you do not, the message you are

giving is, "I really don't want to take away from my time to listen to a student." This is not the message you should be sending out if you want your students to learn. Verbalizing information helps students internalize it. We should provide as many occasions as feasible for them to verbalize. Invite responses by pausing for a good length of time. If you wait long enough, you will get an answer if you have not worded the question in an alien language or manner.

12. Do not talk down to students:
 - a. Avoid judging behaviors, which cause students to feel inadequate.
 - b. Avoid stereotyping. Do not think that females have a certain set of interests and males have another. Do not think that all older students like to talk in class. Do not target examples and questions towards certain groups in your class.
13. Be a facilitator during discussions, not the emcee. You do not have to do all the talking in your classroom. Let the students help each other learn as you guide them. A marvelous peak experience occurs when the students forget you are there and pass right by you in the discussion. It is then that you know you are going your job.
14. Use peer pressure to your advantage on assignments and classroom decorum. Students can motivate and reprimand each other.
15. Give your students possibilities for providing feedback during the course. You might want to try one or two of the following:
 - a. At the end of the first week, ask students to take out a piece of paper and anonymously comment on "things I like about this class," "things I dislike," "how I would like to see things change."
 - b. Have a suggestion box outside of your classroom or office.
 - c. Establish a lecturer's feedback group. Any student can attend to bring up anything about the course. Usually these groups meet in the instructor's office or the cafeteria.
 - d. Use a formative evaluation instrument to get a reading early in the course.
 - e. Have a consultant from your instructional development service discuss the course with the students during part of a class hour.
 - f. Have a random sampling of students interviewed by a consultant to answer questions you have composed.
16. The classroom climate is enhanced by out-of-class contact. Recognize students in the halls and malls.
17. Read the dean's lists, the school paper, the sports section of the local paper, etc., to learn about the accomplishments of your students. Mention them in class.
18. The climate in your office is just as important as the one you establish in class.
 - a. Let students know where your office is and how to find it.

- b. Make conscious choices about how you arrange your office. When going over papers, have the student sit beside you so you can both see the product being discussed.
- c. If you are located in an inner complex, inform your students that the secretary doesn't bite.
- d. If you are working when a student appears, don't ignore the student. Take a moment to set a meeting time which is mutually agreeable.
- e. Personalize your office. Family photos, rugs and plants help.
- f. If you make appointments with students, keep them. If you are detained, call someone to post a note for the student.

4.7 The Lecture

Lectures, as we all well know having come this far in academia, can vary tremendously in their quality and yet they remain one of the favored methods for the delivery of academic information.

We can all, from our own experience, name the various qualities of a bad lecture:

- poorly organized
- droning, monotonous delivery
- too fast or too slow
- repeating information from the text, previous lecture
- students not engaged
- lack of examples/relevance to students' lives
- poor use of technology
- reading of lecture notes

In contrast then, a good lecture should have the following qualities:

- material organized and framed keeping students' level of knowledge in mind
- key points and ideas highlighted by speaker's intonation and voice enthusiasm conveyed use of active learning techniques
- refers to text or other lectures to scaffold learning but does not repeat old information technology used effectively and competently
- use of examples, relevant personal experience or reference to recent news item or startling fact to capture interest

The good lecturer uses a variety of techniques to capture and maintain audience interest. Be yourself, don't be afraid to show your enthusiasm for your subject and surprise your students once in a while. Walk around the classroom, speak loudly, speak softly, make eye contact, laugh and ask the students to participate. Be aware of your students' body language as a gauge of how well they are following and attending to the material. McKeachie (1999) suggests building in summaries of the material periodically within the lecture. This allows the students to catch up both with processing the information and with taking notes. It also makes for a clear transition to the next topic, which helps the students organize their notes and ideas more effectively. Be sure to take time during your

lecture to ask your students specific questions to keep them involved and to check comprehension

Leading a Discussion

Discussion sessions hold a central place in the teaching and learning that occurs in university courses. Memory research has shown that active engagement with material, whether elaborating, questioning, connecting or summarizing, greatly enhances our long-term retention and retrieval of the information. If we think about the goals of our courses and we know that we want our students to be able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate and apply the new information we are giving them, then we need to provide them with an opportunity to actively practice these higher-level thinking skills. This practice is the purpose of discussion sessions.

Starting a Discussion

One of the biggest challenges facing a new instructor is how to get the students talking. McKeachie (1999) offers the following suggestions for initiating discussions with your students:

- Start the discussion with a common experience: If you can relate your topic to some common experience that all your students have had then they are more likely to participate in discussing it.
- Start the discussion with a controversy: While this can often get the students talking very actively, it can be difficult for an instructor to get the students to consider all the positions on a topic. The instructor may have to play devil's advocate in order to get discussion of the other side. The instructor should make it clear that this is role-playing by using phrases like "Suppose I take the position that _____" or "Let me play the role of devil's advocate for a bit." (McKeachie, 1999, p. 49), so that the students don't think they are being tricked or deceived.
- Start the discussion using questions: There are several types of questions (see Bloom's Taxonomy) that you can use to start a discussion. While you may want to ask a couple knowledge or comprehension questions to make sure the students have understood and read the material, the best questions for starting a discussion are application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Be sure you pose the question at the appropriate level or the students may not be able to answer it. Don't give up if you get no response to a question; try rephrasing it or giving an example. Check to see if there are any terms you are using that the students don't understand or if they have a question about the material that is preventing them from answering your question. The most important thing to remember about using questions is to wait for an answer. Higher level thinking takes time and it may take a minute for the students to gather their thoughts before they can speak up.

Dealing with Problems

The two most common problems in running a discussion are actually the flip sides of each other - the student who is too talkative and dominates the class and the student who says nothing at all. Despite their opposing characteristics the solutions for dealing with these two types of students are similar.

One solution is to use small group or pair discussions before opening up the discussion to the whole group. This forces the quiet students to participate and at the same time reduces the anxiety about being wrong or talking in front of a whole group of strangers. It allows the students to get acquainted and reduces the amount of time any one student can continue talking to the detriment of the other students. You can also ask students to write their responses first and then ask them what they wrote. This bolsters the shy students and limits the talkative student. Sometimes the simplest solution is simply to meet with the student individually to find out why they are not participating or to discuss the impact of their monopolizing the discussion on the rest of the students. But regardless of which method you use, be sure you know your students' names and find out a little about their backgrounds so that you can better understand their motivation for taking the course and what they hope to learn from it.

Ending a Discussion with Summary Learning

Students may need some help realizing how and what they are learning by participating in discussion sessions. By carefully formulating your questions in class and by giving students questions to guide their reading before the class meets, you can make explicit the learning goals of the discussion and the main ideas/topics involved. Provide clear transition points to new topics or problems. Before you move on to a new topic/discussion, either give a summary or ask a student to summarize the material that was just discussed. In this way the students can see what they have gained by going to class. You might also have one student present a summary of the previous class discussion at the beginning of the next class. This is especially helpful for sections that meet only once a week as it allows the students to connect the discussions and keep in mind the learning objectives of the entire course. Be sure to write your learning objectives (2-3) for each class or the blackboard and return to these objectives at the end of class to summarize what was accomplished in the discussion.

Using Questions to Teach (Socratic Method)

Questions are an integral part of the classroom discourse and can originate either from the students to the instructor or instructor to students. In order for questions to succeed and learning to occur, there are certain conditions that must be met:

Instructor to Student

1. Questions should be at the appropriate level and there should be a variety of levels of questions in each class. (see Bloom's Taxonomy)
2. You must allow sufficient wait time (minimum 10 seconds) for students to answer the questions. The more complex the question, the more wait time they will need.
3. Do not answer your own questions. If no one volunteers an answer after a reasonable wait, rephrase your question. Tell students to discuss their answers with a partner or write down their answers and exchange them for discussion before asking for an answer in front of the whole class. Always give students the message that they must attempt to answer the questions and that you will not jump in to do it for them, just to save time.
4. Never ask "Any questions?" because you will most likely not get any responses. Either ask students "What questions do you have?" or ask them a real question about the material you have just covered.

5. Think about the kinds of questions that will match your learning objectives and help your students integrate the new material they are learning with what preceded it.

Student to Instructor

1. When students ask questions, make sure you listen to the whole question and then repeat it, paraphrasing if necessary, so that all of the students know what the question is before you begin answering it.
2. Never brush off a student's question or answer sarcastically. If you don't know the answer, be honest and tell them you will find out before the next class meeting.
3. Don't feel you must answer every question—let other students respond to student questions when appropriate.
4. Encourage your students to ask questions—this promotes engagement in the material and lets you know when they are having difficulties.

Question and answer is a form of dialogue between students and teachers. Remember that getting answers to questions is never a waste of time from the students' perspective, even if it means that less content is covered in the class. There is not much point in covering more material if the students are not following you and staying engaged and the best way to judge that is through the effective questioning techniques outlined above.

4.8 Using Media in the Classroom

Using Media in the Classroom

The most important thing to remember about the use of media in the classroom is that you should not use it just because you can, but use it because it makes sense. Your slogan should be "pedagogy before technology." In other words, you should design your class activities and presentations based on what you want to achieve and if using technology helps you to achieve your ends, then use it.

However, using technology almost certainly will require significant effort on your part. The results of using it can be very rewarding for both you and your students but do not have any delusions that it will always be easy. Using technology can be very easy but using it well requires preparation and training. Spending time to learn how to use technology in the classroom pays great dividends and can make you an effective and enjoyable instructor.

Here are a number of basic hints for using a computer-generated and projected presentation:

- Engage in some form of training in the use of any technology you plan to use. At least check your presentation methodology and materials with a peer, staff, or collegial professor.
- Practice with the technology before you meet with your class (ideally before classes begin or during break).
- Use font styles and sizes that are clearly legible from the back of the room. You should also make rational decision regarding positive or negative images and

colors. Be aware that a projected image may not look exactly the same as it does on your computer screen. Be also sensitive to the ambient light situation that may exist in your room.

- Provide handouts if possible. These do not have to be totally comprehensive or complete but it avoids the students trying to copy everything you project on the screen.
- Be succinct in the amount of material you present. “Death by PowerPoint” is a course-threatening disease. Use the projected frames to provide an outline or points of discussion. You should provide the details in your oral message.

4.9 Humor in the Classroom

“How can I use humor in my class?” is one of the most common questions asked of good teachers. Teaching Assistants experience faculty members who are clearly comfortable using humor in its many different forms but do not know how to start to build it into their style. There is little mention of humor in teaching texts so here are a few suggestions.

If a cell phone rings, say “If that's for me, tell them I'll have Swiss cheese on rye.” Depending upon your personality and your students, you may find other ways to alter their behavior through humor.

Feel free to use humor in your syllabus, printed notes or web pages, but don't overdo it. Use humor, stories, jokes etc. only in context of your subject. Gratuitous use of humor may work once or twice but may become tedious after a while. Use humor to break up your presentations. You will get more attention immediately afterwards.

Humor can often help a student remember a point. There becomes an association between the (remembered) humor and your instructional item. Be sensitive to gender issues and do not use possibly offensive items. Be careful not to use humor involving ethnicity, race, sex, disabilities and other sensitive issues. Some humor is high risk. For example, quick quips may come out wrong and offend. Cartoons and other proprietary humor can be used in the classroom but not posted on the web. Copyright is something of which you should always be aware. Self-effacing or self-deprecating humor is very safe. It is often best to laugh at yourself. Humor can be a lot of fun for you too!

Why would you not use humor? It might offend your students, embarrass you, not be your style, completely fail, take too much time, not be appropriate or break copyright. If you are a sensitive person you will be OK. There are lots of sources of humor around. Exploit it and use its great educational effect.

4.10 Getting Feedback

The Minute Paper

In order to stay in touch with your students and to find out how effectively you are teaching, the Minute Paper, which was developed by Cross and Angelo (1993), is a quick and easy way to gather information. It takes almost no time and is quite easy for students to complete. The basic concept is that your students will take a minute or so to write out

an anonymous response to a question which you pose. The question can concern the students' learning:

- "What is the most important point you've learned today?"
- "What was the muddiest point for you in today's class?"
- "What can we do to improve your learning in this class?"

The procedure for administering this type of evaluation is quite straightforward. You can either hand out index cards or have the students take out a piece of paper. State your question and write it on the board. Give the students a minute or two to respond, reminding them not to write their names on the paper. Collect the papers or cards and go through them after class. In the next meeting, give the students a brief summary of the results and if necessary, how the results will affect the class.

You yourself are a valuable source of feedback on your teaching. You can feel it when a lesson goes well or when something you planned just did not work the way you expected it to. By taking some time to reflect on these experiences and think about why they happened, you may be able to identify those things that work well for you and your students in your classroom and those things that don't.

4.11 Bloom's Taxonomy

The various types of questions that we use with our students can be categorized in many ways, but probably the most often cited taxonomy is Bloom's. Bloom based his taxonomy on the types of tasks most often called for in academic settings.

1. **Knowledge Questions:** recall and recognition: major ideas, dates, names, places, etc. *Key words:* Who, what, where, when, define, describe, select, identify, tell, choose, match, which one, omit, etc.
2. **Comprehension Questions:** understanding, interpreting facts, translating knowledge, comparing and contrasting *Key words:* summarize, contrast, explain, predict, state in your own words, demonstrate, discuss, show, give an example, select the best definition, which statements support, infer, etc.
3. **Application Questions:** use information, solve problems, apply information to new situations. *Key words:* Calculate, illustrate, show, relate, what would result, modify, judge the effects, tell what would happen, complete, discover, examine, etc.
4. **Analysis Questions:** finding patterns, parts, organization, components *Key words:* Identify, analyze, connect, classify, arrange, order, what does the author believe or assume, find the inconsistencies, separate, compare, what conclusions, separate fact and opinion, etc.
5. **Synthesis Questions:** creating new ideas from old ones, generalizing from facts, relating elements or knowledge in a new way, predicting, drawing conclusions. *Key words:* Combine, develop, choose, state a rule, solve the following, plan, formulate, rearrange, compose, modify, generalize, propose an alternative, etc.
6. **Evaluation Questions:** discriminating between ideas, making choices and defending them, assessing the value of theories, verifying the value of the evidence, identifying subjectivity. *Key words:* Assess, criticize, judge, recommend, convince, appraise, what is more logical/better/appropriate/moral, rank, support, grade, summarize,

measure, discriminate, etc.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Benjamin Bloom created this taxonomy for categorizing level of abstraction of questions that commonly occur in educational settings.

Competence	4.11.1 Skills Demonstrated
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation and recall of information • knowledge of dates, events, places • knowledge of major ideas • mastery of subject matter • <i>Question Cues:</i> list, define, tell, describe, identify, show, label, collect, examine, tabulate, quote, name, who, when, where, etc.
Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding information • grasp meaning • translate knowledge into new context • interpret facts, compare, contrast • order, group, infer causes • predict consequences • <i>Question Cues:</i> summarize, describe, interpret, contrast, predict, associate, distinguish, estimate, differentiate, discuss, extend
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use information • use methods, concepts, theories in new situations • solve problems using required skills or knowledge • <i>Questions Cues:</i> apply, demonstrate, calculate, complete, illustrate, show, solve, examine, modify, relate, change, classify, experiment, discover
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing patterns • organization of parts • recognition of hidden meanings • identification of components • <i>Question Cues:</i> analyze, separate, order, explain, connect, classify, arrange, divide, compare, select, explain, infer
Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use old ideas to create new ones • generalize from given facts • relate knowledge from several areas • predict, draw conclusions • <i>Question Cues:</i> combine, integrate, modify, rearrange, substitute, plan, create, design, invent, what if?, compose, formulate, prepare, generalize, rewrite

Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare and discriminate between ideas • assess value of theories, presentations • make choices based on reasoned argument • verify value of evidence • recognize subjectivity • <i>Question Cues</i> <p>assess, decide, rank, grade, test, measure, recommend, convince, select, judge, explain, discriminate, support, conclude, compare, summarize</p>
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5 FAQs

1. What can I do to not feel nervous?

Feeling nervous is a problem faced by almost all new teachers. There are a few things you can do to at least reduce how nervous you'll feel the first time you meet your class. Make sure that you know where your classroom is and how all the equipment in the room works so that you do not become flustered in front of your students. You should check out your room a couple of days before classes actually start in case there are any problems to be addressed. Be sure that you have read over your syllabus and are prepared to discuss it with your students. Remember that your students are nervous too and plan some introduction activity so that the students will do some of the talking. As the students get to know each other they will begin to relax.

2. How important is it to learn every student's name?

Learning your students' names is critical to communicate to them that you care about them as individuals. Although it may seem daunting at first, you'll be pleased at how much your efforts will be noticed and appreciated by the students.

3. What do I do if I have a student who makes trouble?

While it is good to be prepared to deal with a troublemaker, your best bet is to try to avoid this situation by making your expectations about classroom behavior very clear from the first day. Also remember that your department is your first line of defense. Always check with your department head or advisor on how to handle these types of problems. You can also consult with your supervising professor.

4. Should I be friendly or formal?

Generally speaking, an informal and friendly attitude is the norm for American classrooms, but the issue of just how friendly you should be is not always clear. You want your students to feel comfortable with you in the classroom but you don't want to undermine your authority in the class. It is possible to be friendly while maintaining your authority as long as your students do not mistake your friendliness for leniency on deadlines and grades.

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