Wondering where to start with your new TA?

Based on course specifics and individual faculty preference, each department requires TAs to perform a variety of duties. Moreover, each TA arrives with differing levels of skills and experience.

How can you, as the instructor, work within these constraints to create opportunities that benefit everyone involved - yourself, the TA, and your students?

In the following pages, you will find some suggestions to guide you through the process of working with TAs. Not only will it work towards helping graduate students become reflective, independent, and collaborative teachers, but will also assist in your responsibility to mentor and prepare future colleagues. These suggestions can provide a framework to help you determine how best to work with the TAs you will be interacting with over the coming years.

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3 What to do. Before the course begins, during the course, and after the course ends.
5 Indicators of TA development. How to differentiate new and experienced TAs.
7 Overview of Primary TA Responsibilities. Find out what TAs may want to know.
13 TAC Contact Info. Names of TACs for each department.
Contact the TA as soon as they have been assigned to your course. The majority of TAs, especially new graduate students, are very anxious about their performance, duties, and responsibilities as a TA. By contacting the TA early and offering to meet him or her before the course begins, will help alleviate a lot of his or her fears and anxieties.

To get a sense of the type of experience your TA has, consider sending them the following questionnaire:

1. Have you had any formal course work or training in how to teach?
   ___Yes ___No
   • If yes, how long did that training last?
   • What did your training cover?

2. Have you had any past teaching experience?
   ___Yes ___No
   • If yes, at what levels have you taught?
     ___Elementary (Gr K - 6)
     ___Secondary (Gr 7-12)
     ___College/university
     • For how many years have you taught?
       ___Less than one year
       ___One to two years
       ___Three to six years
       ___More than six years

3. In thinking about upcoming TA assignments, what are the three biggest concerns you have?
   □ What students will think of me
   □ Preparing for class
   □ Establishing and maintaining credibility
   □ Getting content across to students
   □ How to grade students
   □ Understanding what is expected of me
   □ Teaching in English or with students who have a different education culture from my own
   □ Managing time effectively
   □ Handling potential conflicts with students
   □ Doing a good job
   □ Encouraging students to think
   □ Mastering content well enough to teach
   □ Working with students of diverse backgrounds
   □ Other

Adapted from: http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/resources-supervisor/resources-needs/index.html
Try to be as detailed as possible. Even though grading is second nature to you, TAs often do not have a clue how to approach that stack of marking. Providing marking keys and rubrics are excellent, but again, a new TA may need some guidance and examples to help him or her understand your expectations.

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

Encourage attendance at workshops and programs. Educational sessions offered by the Learning and Teaching Centre will benefit the TA. Discussion about the importance of professional development will highlight how important the TA role is on campus.

Check in with your TA. Check in often to ensure that he or she feels confident with his or her work and to provide the opportunity to engage in questions.

Offer to conduct an observation. If the TA is in a classroom or lab situation, offer to observe his or her interactions with students. At the Learning and Teaching Centre, we have many resources on how to approach teaching observations. Please do not hesitate to ask for guidelines and suggestions.

Encourage the TA to request feedback from students. Mid-term feedback will help TAs reflect on what they are doing in the classroom. Please provide a copy of the Learning and Teaching Centre’s publication, Formative Feedback for Teaching Assistants (TAs) at UVic, which contains many useful ideas on how to gather feedback from students and colleagues.
When the course ends

Review the course and provide feedback

Provide the TA with some constructive feedback about his or her performance as a TA. Not all departments incorporate feedback for TAs into their program and therefore any feedback that you can provide the TA will be extremely helpful for future appointments. At the Learning and Teaching Centre we always encourage providing positive feedback so that the TA understands what worked well, then constructive guidance as to what to work on and where to access resources to help in that area, and close with another positive attribute of the TA as a teacher.

The TA Training Program Manager has many resources and handouts that can assist TAs with their duties.

Please do not hesitate to refer your TA to Cynthia Korpan at local 4798 or through email at tatrain@uvic.ca for information, program schedules, or workshop listings.

Don’t new and experienced TAs differ, and require different types of support?

Your TA may be a novice or have years of TA experience. In order to provide the support most appropriate for your TA’s skill level, you may want to familiarize yourself with the progression of TA development from new to well-practiced. On the following pages, you’ll find summarized research on the characteristics of new and experienced TAs. You’ll also find a framework that will allow you to help your TA find success regardless of his or her teaching proficiency.
The following chart was developed by Jody D. Nyquist and Donald H. Wulff (1996, 19) in their book, "Working effectively with graduate assistants."

It demonstrates the progression of TAs from new (senior learners) to more experienced (colleague in training or junior colleague) in the teacher role.

Reference


## Indicators of TA Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Learner (New TAs)</th>
<th>Colleague in Training</th>
<th>Junior Colleague (Senior PhD student)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concerns</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self/survival</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will students like me?</td>
<td>How do I lecture, discuss?</td>
<td>Are students getting it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discourse Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-socialized</strong></td>
<td><strong>Socialized</strong></td>
<td><strong>Post-socialized</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give simplistic explanations</td>
<td>Talk like insiders, use technical language</td>
<td>Make complex ideas clear without use of jargon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach to Authority</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Independent or Counterdependent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interdependent/Collegial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rely on supervisor, supervisory committee</td>
<td>Stand on own ideas – defiant at times</td>
<td>Relate to faculty as junior colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach to Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaged/vulnerable, student as friend, victim or enemy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Detached/student as experimental subject</strong></td>
<td><strong>Engaged/professional student as client</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Love” students, want to be friends, expect admiration or are hurt, angry in response, personalize interactions</td>
<td>Disengage or distance themselves from students – becoming analytical about learning relationships</td>
<td>Understands student/instructor relationships and the collaborative effort required for student learning to occur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a complement to the previous table, Nyquist & Wulff (1996, 26-28) created the table below to help a supervisor with the stage at which a TA is at in his or her development. Identify whether your TA is a first-time teaching assistant (Senior Learner); a TA with some experience (Colleague in Training); or a senior PhD student who has a lot of teaching expertise (Junior Colleague).

By understanding what stage a TA is at in his or her confidence with teaching, you will be better able to help guide him or her through his or her work as a TA. The framework below provides some guidelines and suggestions as to how to approach working with TAs in your courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Emphasis on Supervisor’s Role</th>
<th>Senior Learner</th>
<th>Colleague in Training</th>
<th>Junior Colleague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>“Do the task my way and check back with me.”</td>
<td>“Think about the problem generate options, and let’s discuss potential outcomes.”</td>
<td>“You make the decision. Let me know if I can be of help to you. I’m interested in the outcome.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching assignments for TAs</th>
<th>Senior Learner</th>
<th>Colleague in Training</th>
<th>Junior Colleague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist professor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Design and teach a basic course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade papers, hold office hours, conduct carefully planned quiz sections, collect feedback on course</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assume larger role in course</td>
<td>Assist with an advanced course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop writing assignments, generate test questions, do some lecturing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Training Activity for TAs</th>
<th>Senior Learner</th>
<th>Colleague in Training</th>
<th>Junior Colleague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TA Conference, TAC run seminars, and TA workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pro-seminar designed to build repertoire of teaching skills</td>
<td>Reflective practicum over curricular and pedagogical development and potential approaches to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule meetings, observation by supervisor, frequent feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation and feedback from supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function of Evaluation</th>
<th>Senior Learner</th>
<th>Colleague in Training</th>
<th>Junior Colleague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently assess performance in teaching assignments</td>
<td>Provide systematic feedback on the development of individual instructional skills</td>
<td>Provide feedback as a colleague on developing a personal teaching style and approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The TA will be responsible for:

- working _____ (number of hours) per week


__ holding office hours
__ attending lectures
__ keeping class records
__ creating/selecting class materials
__ presenting new material/lecturing
__ leading discussions/answering questions
__ conducting review sessions
__ holding tutorial sessions
__ duplicating materials
__ preparing/collecting solutions to questions
__ grading/providing feedback on assignments and exams
__ assigning course grades
__ ordering, obtaining AV equipment/materials
__ setting up the lab
__ running recitation or lab section(s)
__ demonstrating procedures or setting up demonstrations
__ cleaning the lab
__ others (see following pages)

It is important that TAs determine how many hours they should allocate for class time, laboratories, office hours, preparation, grading and other duties. By reviewing these pages, and determining which duties they will be taking on, you will be able to better help your TAs plan their time and perform their responsibilities.
Questions TAs may want to ask:

**Course Overview**

- What are the course goals/objectives?
- Who are the students (background with subject, level, class list, etc.)?
- What are the names/emails/phone numbers of other TAs assigned to this course?
- What is the procedure to follow if you are ill or must miss a class/lab?
- What is the workload distribution among TAs assigned to the course?

**Initial Tasks**

- What are you expected to do prior to the first class meeting?
- Are you expected to attend the first class meeting?

**TA/Supervisor Meetings**

- How can you be contacted by the professor/supervisor?
  
  - office phone: __________
  - home phone: __________
  - e-mail: __________
  - note on office door: __________ (office number: ______)
  - note in laboratory: __________ (laboratory: ______)
  - note in box __________

- How can the professor/instructor be contacted?
  
  - office phone: __________
  - home phone: __________
  - e-mail: __________
  - note on office door: __________ (office number: ______)
  - note in laboratory: __________ (laboratory location: ______)
  - note in box __________

It is advisable to take home the contact info for the supervisor and other TAs (if there are any) so that you know who to get in touch with in case of illness or emergencies.
Questions TAs may want to ask:

Materials

Textbook/laboratory manual:
• How can you obtain a copy?

Other materials:
• If you are responsible for putting materials on reserve, what procedure do you need to follow?
• Will the course have Moodle or another Internet site? (If so, make sure you have access to it.)
  • Find out who maintains and monitors it and who to contact for technical problems.
  • In what way are the students expected to use it?
• Are you expected to read all class materials and answer student questions regarding these materials?
  • Find out who to contact for course content problems.
  • If you are responsible for putting material online, remember that you can only use 10% of copyrighted material

Class Meetings

• How often are you expected to attend class?
  ___ every class
  ___ exams only
  ___ not required to attend any classes
  ___ other

• If you are expected to attend classes, at what time are you expected to arrive?

• What responsibilities will you have with respect to the class meeting?
  ___ answer questions at the beginning, middle or end of class
  ___ distribute/collect assignments and/or handouts
  ___ take notes on the lecture
  ___ lead discussion(s), facilitate activities
  ___ notify students of class cancellations
  ___ set up/run AV/lab equipment
  ___ lecture/present material (will professor be available for assistance?)
  ___ clarify class/university policies (lateness, assignment/test make-up, cheating, etc.)
Questions TAs may want to ask:

**Office Hours**

- Does the professor/instructor hold office hours? __ yes __ no
  - If yes, where and when?
- Are you expected to hold weekly office hours? __ yes __ no
  - If yes, where and when?
- How will students be notified of the location and times of your office hours?

**Assignments**

- What kind of assignments are students expected to complete?

**Other Student Contact Responsibilities**

- How will students contact you?
- Are due dates and late-acceptance policy specified in the syllabus?
- If you are working in a lab, it is not always wise to give out your lab phone number. We strongly recommend that you never give out your home phone number.
- An email list or Moodle bulletin board is an easy mechanism for building community/answering questions.
- Are you expected to:
  - ___ conduct review or help sessions?
  - ___ tutor individuals or groups (beyond office hours)?
- If so, when and where?

  How can you obtain a copy of department policies on grading, plagiarism, and so on, and a copy of university policies that directly affect instruction?

**Technology**

- Are you expected to reserve, obtain and return AV, computer or laboratory equipment?
  - If so, what equipment will be needed and when will it be needed?
  - Where is this equipment located?
  - Is there a charge, form or project number that should be used when reserving equipment?

**Photocopying**

- Are you expected to photocopy materials for the course?
  - Remember that only 10% of copyrighted material can be used.
  - If so, what materials will need to be photocopied and where are they located?
- Are you expected to bring photocopied materials to class?
- If you are responsible for photocopying, where should it be done?
  - ___ in departmental office?
    - Will you be provided with a code?
- Are you required to bring the photocopying to:
  - ___ a departmental secretary?
  - ___ a duplicating service on campus?
- How much lead time is needed?
- What is the procedure?
Questions TAs may want to ask:

Assignments

• What kind of assignments are students expected to complete?
• Are due dates and late-acceptance policy specified in the syllabus?
• How can you obtain a copy of department policies on grading, plagiarism, and so on, and a copy of university policies that directly affect instruction?
• Find out who is responsible for marking schemes and grading rubrics.
• Make sure you know the mechanism for grade complaints and articulate this to your class.
• With respect to assignments, what responsibilities will you have?
  ___ preparing
  ___ collecting
  ___ grading/recording scores
  ___ giving feedback
  ___ instructing students about specific formats

Exams

• When will exams be held?
• Approximately how many questions and of what type will you be expected to create for each exam? By when?
• Will the professor/instructor review the questions you create?
• What resources are available to assist you in preparing questions (e.g.: sample questions, old exams, test banks)?
• Are you expected to score/grade exams? By when?
• Who establishes grading criteria?
• Are you expected to invigilate exams?
• Will the professor/instructor attend exams?
• Are you expected to bring exams to the exam session?
• Are you expected to bring other materials to the exam session?

Administration/Grading

• What responsibilities will you have with respect to administration and grading?
  ___ enforce academic misconduct rules
  ___ assign grades/make recommendations for grading
  ___ keep class records. If so, when must they be turned in?
  ___ tabulate grades. If so, when must they be turned in?
  ___ fill out and/or submit grade sheets. If so, when must they be turned in?
  ___ post scores/grades. If so, when and where?
Questions TAs may want to ask:

TA Performance Evaluation/Feedback

• What manner of performance evaluation can you expect?
  ___ formal observation/evaluation from faculty/instructor
  ___ peer observation
  ___ student ratings

• When will evaluation(s) be given?
  ___ at mid-semester
  ___ at semester’s end
  ___ at the TA’s request
  ___ when there is a problem
  ___ informally during the semester as part of regular meetings

• Student evaluation of TA’s performance will be:
  ___ When? Who will receive copies?

Course Evaluation

• What manner of evaluation will be conducted regarding the course and the instructor/professor?
• Who gets copies of the results?

Other

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Reference:
The Resource Centre for Students with a Disability has kindly provided the following information to assist faculty.

Faculty should encourage TAs to become familiar with UVic’s Policy AC1205 and Procedures on providing access to students with disabilities. Students may approach a TA to request or confirm a need for accessible course materials, such as captioning for videos, extra time in a lab, or to sign off on an exam form. Instructors will have received a confidential memo of accommodation for students.

- Students need to expressly permit the sharing of this information with TAs. No further personal information should be requested from the student. If students approach TAs directly for accommodations, they should be referred to the RCSD.

Please refer to www.rcsd.uvic.ca for more information about accommodations and support.

Built in curriculum accessibility (universal instructional design) is the key to reducing the need for individual or “one off” accommodations. Please refer to the booklet: University Instructional Design: Creating an Accessible Curriculum at the University of Victoria

http://ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/publications/documents/____UVicUIDBook.pdf

Checklist for Accessibility:

- The course curriculum has been designed in an accessible and usable way and learning outcomes have been established.
- Instructor faces the class when speaking and avoids standing in front of windows or light sources.
- A variety of presentation formats to reinforce or emphasize important points have been used, and discussion questions have been repeated.
- Tour labs and discuss safety concerns, including special issues related to disability. Verbal and written lab instructions were provided.
- Course materials, both printed and electronic, are usable, accessible and available in different formats, such as e-text, or online.
- Students were informed about willingness to reasonably accommodate and clear expectations for performance were communicated.
- Any request for reasonable accommodation communicated to me by faculty was respected, and referrals to the RCSD were made when students requested accommodation.
- Students who used services and technologies in my class such as notetakers, interpreters or transcribers or who used audio recorders were accommodated appropriately.
- All student disability-related information was kept confidential.

Examples of possible accommodations if there are barriers to accessibility:

- Audio-recording the class
- A copy of notes and PowerPoints
- Missing some classes
- Extra time for exams and in-class assignments
- Extensions (with prior approval) to assignments
The TA Consultant Program at UVic positions TA mentors (known as “TA Consultants” or “TACs”) in several departments throughout campus. The TACs develop discipline-specific seminars designed for TAs in the departments they are responsible for, taught in the fall or over the academic year, that cover a range of practical topics, tips, approaches and issues most pertinent to TAs at UVic and complemented by supporting materials. Below is the list of departments that have a TAC and the name of the TAC. Please feel free to contact the department for the TAC’s contact information.

**Anthropology**  
Karoline Guelke

**Computer Science**  
Anthony Estey

**Economics**  
Peter Bell

**Engineering**  
*Electrical, Computer, Mechanical*  
Jonathan Reaume

**English**  
Samantha MacFarlane

**Exercise Science, Health and Physical Education**  
John Buxcey

**Geography**  
Maral Sotoodehnia

**History**  
Derek Murray

**Music**  
Aleksandra Koerbler

**Pacific and Asian Studies and Greek and Roman Studies**  
Lauren Tee

**Political Science**  
Alexander Robb

**Physics and Astronomy**  
Charli Sakari

**Sociology**  
Edwin Hodge

**History in Art, Theatre, and Writing**  
Matthew Gusul