How To Be a Super TA

TA qualities

• Present addition problems using different angles
• Helpful, engaged, not just showing up
• Effective at soliciting student feedback
• Relatable, approachable, accessible
• Be excited about topics, shares, interests, what they like about subject, enthusiastic
• Be tough but fair/flexible/open minded
• Be knowledgeable about subjects/class
• Know your students
• Honest
• Able to reward questions for understanding
• Enthusiastic
• Funny (not dry/only factual)
• Bigger picture/relevance of knowledge
• Strategies for different learning styles
• Be patient

What makes a good teacher:

• Friendly, polite
• Enthusiastic, excited, genuinely having a good time, encouraging, builds student confidence (supportive)
• Shows video of some amazing thing to stimulate curiosity, inspiring
• Gives lots of helpful feedback (gives positive feedback ways to improve)
• Patient, wants students to succeed
• Dedicated, put lots of time into teaching
• Ask lots of questions, make students think, get students involved and engaged
• Challenge student to think critically
• Encourages students to get involved in extracurricular opportunities related to class (get students involved in science)
• Organized
• Be good in your own way, be yourself
• Make difficult topics approachable
• Really interested in the topic
• Share cutting edge research with students
• Supportive, guide students to manage new situations

Impacts from a former teacher:
• Teacher very accepting and encouraging, interacting one on one
• Enthusiasm
• Teachers value their teaching very creative, approachable (challenging)
• Critical pedagogy – horizontal rather than vertical relation between student and teacher
• Good facilitation, can make boring topics interesting
• Friendly yet professional, really listen
• Passionate, humble
• Fantastic communication
• Nice, knowledgeable, provide information where to search
• Respectful
• Fairness, believing in your students
Classroom Management
• Guideline at the start
• Timeline: announce to students
• Challenge: students/class too quiet, nobody participates
  Guideline = if nobody volunteers, TA starts picking on students
  Or take participation marks off
  Or ask easier questions
• Icebreakers: have students form groups, TAs can introduce themselves, have students get up
• Be explicit about purpose: to share ideas, not to get right answers
• Challenge: how to deal with students who are being rude?
  Redirecting – give suggestions
  Use gently authority (there will be consequences – but be calm/gentle)
  Have guidelines
  Address whole class (not just students being rude)
  Walk around ‘be with the students’
  If students are chatty ask if they’d like to share (nicely)
• Challenge: if not disruptive, let it happen
• Students sleeping/how do you deal with them?
  Avoid by having active/participatory learning activities
• Challenges: lack of attention:
  Use participatory learning
  Make a joke/loud noise
  Ask questions
  Be aware of what students are doing
• Challenge: students challenge what TAs say/know/present
  Ask students to (informally) cite it
  Be honest and confident
  Invite students to have a conversation later
  Trust your knowledge/course material
  Be clear with the students: how they should know the topic for the course
  Refer students to other resources (including faculty)
• Challenge: Students being actually disrespectful
  Be firm
  Talk to students in private
  Explain that everything is student’s choice (if behaviours is not disruptive)

Grading

• Consistency grading (TA and between TAs)
• Check back on your grading (review)
• Rubric – comments to professor
• Time for grading: optimum
• Right environment (avoid distractions)
• Help grading: coffee, productive times, consistency, efficiency, alertness, office
• Consistency: mark together, grading rubric, write notes, one question at a time, open-ended question/long answers, confidentiality
• Finding patterns in answers
• Sufficient feedback
• Avoid offensive comments
• Positive, effect comments
• Positive language
• Guide students in right direction
• Try adding ‘comment’
• Consistency in grading
• Review grading of initial 5-10 papers and last few papers
• Mark one question at a time

Inclusivity

Participation:
• Ask questions to both women and men, but take into account sex ratio bias in the class
• Be conscious/aware that some people are more likely to participate than others
• Be conscious/aware of your own biases
• Be creative to include/encourage even the quieter students
  Eg: set a max number of questions that say one student can answer
• What if no one is answering questions?
  Have students discuss questions in smaller groups
  Calling on students by name, particularly if they have not yet answered a question
  (requires keeping track)
• In big classes (80 or more) make activities for smaller groups, then report back to larger group
• Clicker questions are good but can break up flow, also can be misused (friends bringing friends clickers), tedious

Language:
• Be careful of using only certain pronouns (always he)
• Do not use demeaning or degrading words that could be hurtful to people

Learning styles/learning issues:
• Take into account that some people are colour blind, dyslexic and may have other disabilities – use resources at UBC (eg. Access and diversity)
• Some people may use cheat sheets in languages other than English
• Make materials available to everyone (don’t assume everyone has good finances)
• Offer different options for different learning styles (eg. Visual, auditory)

Group activities:
• What if 2 people are close friends and start working in a group?
  Split up groups, set up groups randomly
  Set the tone from the beginning of the course – be clear about course expectations
• Be aware that people are different

**Participatory Learning**

• Active learning to engage students (not lecturing)
• Open ended questions, drawings, clickers, multiple modes of learning, visual, kinetic, concept mapping, game
• Be explicit why these activities are used
• Discussion, debate – higher Bloom’s level applications
• Getting students involved, interactive
• Encourage students with bonus marks
• Use small groups (eg. Think pair share, 1 minute paper, votes, thumbs up/down)
• Facilitation learning, don’t just tell
• Ice breakers important, get to know one another
• Exercise (hands-on)
• Expert groups – interact peer to peer
• Students develop an organization structure to the info
• Tips to retain information
• Mnemonics
• Dichotomous key, visual relationship tables for comparison
• Need to facilitation discussion, encourage all to participate
• Learn it, do it, teach it
• Break up instructions with activities even worksheets

**TA Faculty Relations**

• Talk clearly about expectation (should have a set number of hours for TAing)
• Right from the beginning (communicate)
  Regular meeting with teaching team
  Structure provided about schedule, hours, marking
  If unsure, ask – don’t be shy
• Role of TA varies from course to course
• Teaching evaluations (formal feedback from students each term)
• A clear communication of what the expectations are for both TA and faculty (hours, roles, course policies)
• What to do if you are going over your hours. You are uncomfortable/unprepared for your responsibilities? Etc
  Talk to your faculty
  You have options to deal with problems: Talk to your faculty (course), talk to other experience TAs, other Faculty, Shona, TA union
• Faculty and TAs are a teaching team
• Who do you interact with the most? Depends on the course (some are lab only, some are lab and lecture)
• Find out the expectations for your course, whether you are expected to go to lecture
• Are TAs involved in modifying the course?
  Depends on the course, constructive criticism usually welcome!
• Teaching evaluations: every term from the students, some courses also from faculty (if not part of your course, you can ask faculty for feedback)

Time Management

• Issues:
  o Research vs TAship, inside versus outside class, lab versus lecture TAships, office hours (how get students come?, advertise, bring other work because it is slow)
• Ideas:
  o Knowing what you’re going to teach and what is expected
  o Have outline of class period (30 in to prep class at least)
  o Set standards for class/lab time so students know what to expect
  o Email can get out of hand if you are not careful. Set boundaries and stick to them!
  o Know ahead of time what will take a lot of time (plan your lab work around that)
  o Know the big picture – big versus ‘little’ concepts
  o Identify areas of flexibility in class time
• Grading:
  o Know the dates of grading
  o Familiarize yourself with the rubric
  o Know how much feedback to give (too much versus not enough)
• Open communication with faculty to make sure you are spending the right amount of time
• How to balance TA duties with grad school duties (thesis writing)?
  Plan around course schedule (union rules) and talk to faculty union rep for issues
• Know timeline of the class (big versus little picture): intro, lab components, tutorials (key concepts), wrap up
- Set boundaries for out of class time