

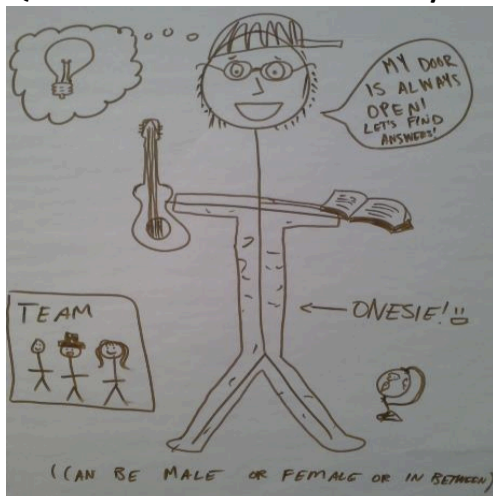
# How to be a super TA

## TA qualities



- Engaging, interested in student education
- Practice examples
- Relaxed and calm
- Passionate about subject
- Being able to pass on a skill
- Set a tone for inclusivity
- Being personable
- Provide a comfortable environment
- Encouraging, sharing
- Patient and organize
- Being a team player

## Qualities of an effective teacher/TA



- Enthusiasm (over the top!)
- Works hard/goes out of the way to engage with students
- Teaches problem-solving, not just answers questions
- Available to students/approachable
- Uses rewards to motivate
- Puts biology into relevant context
- Interdisciplinary
- Passionate about subject
- Things about students' P.O.V.
- Has sense of humour
- Knowledgeable
- Works in a collaborative teaching team
- Willing to say "I don't know let's find out"

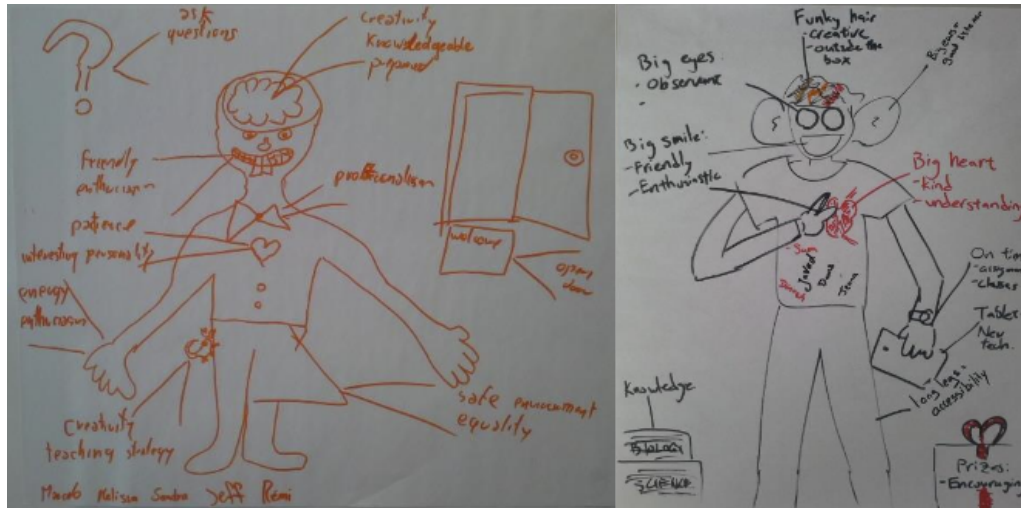
## Good TAing



- Good at explaining
- Authenticity – be yourself
- Interactive/creative
- Enthusiasm
- Supportive
- Control encouraging
- Teach with questions
- Caring
- Patient
- Knowledgeable

- Communicate
- Varied methods
- Relating complicated ideas to real life

## Characteristics of our favourite teachers/TAs



- Enthusiasm
- Accessibility/approachability/availability
- Comfortable with classroom environment
- Challenge students with good questions
- Friendly
- Explaining processes
- TAs who add in context and new content based on their own experience/interest
- Very interesting personalities, opinions, discussions
- Creativity
- Kindness, patience
- Use different strategies to teach
- Use of good examples

## Be prepared for your first class

- Have a check list
- Practice
- Learn students' names
- Think of how to create a friendly environment – have everyone talk

- Learn about students' background and goals
- Get familiar with your teaching space
- Know deadlines, mark breakdown, syllabus and policies
- Review materials
- Learn how to use Connect
- Identify potentially hard material
- Show up early to set up and get settle
- Clarify expectations and audience (ask instructors and former TAs)
- Set boundaries for student contact hours and communication mode
- Time management!
- Have a lesson plan

## **Classroom Management**

- Encouragement
- Seating arrangement
- Addressing student privately
- Maintaining classroom community
- Think pair share
- Make students feel comfortable
- Community guidelines
- Group size management (smaller groups for shy students)
- Relatable: friendly but not friends
- Managing time
- Form groups: students with different levels
- Take students aside if they are shy
- Warnings: few minutes before activity ends

## **Grading**

### **Challenges**

- Consistency (take breaks)
- Student drama
- Biases
- Plagiarism
- Objectivity/subjectivity

### **Tips**

- Remark first two assignments to ensure consistency

- Mark question by question
- Do not look at students' names
- Mark friends' assignments together
- 24<sup>th</sup> rule: re-mark (but re-mark whole thing!)
- Refer to rubric
- Ask other TAs for help
- Mark in a stable mood: Don't mark when you are in a bad mood or when you are hungry (follow your habits – but don't drink!)
- Balance between too little and too much
- Feedback: Sandwich method
- Put in as much effort as the student did
- Ask instructors when in doubt\*\*

## **Inclusivity**

### **Means**

- Everyone feels respected
- Everyone is participating
- Everyone feels welcome
- Not excluding anyone on purpose or by accident
- Some students are reserved
- Student can exclude each other e.g. by language, intentionally or unintentionally

### **Language can be a barrier**

- Avoid idioms; watch your language (simple/clear)
- Talk to students after/during class to check their understanding
- Encourage groups to speak English (when all group members have a different first language) = For safety, for learning, for knowing when students need help

### **Community Guidelines**

- Directly talk to individuals that are being disrespectful
- Bring point about respectful/inclusive behavior with the entire class at beginning of course (e.g. when setting community guidelines)

### **Dominant personalities within groups**

- Opportunities to shuffle people
- Talk to person
- Assign people letter/number/shape and use them to organize groups
- Have strategies to get quiet/shy people to talk
- Take time to get to know personalities in your class (if possible)

**If professor is being discriminatory**

- Approach teacher (if not malicious)
- Talk to administrator/coordinator
- Talk to students who may have been discriminated against, situationally dependant

Let your students know that is ok to make mistakes

University policy

Some humour may not be understandable

Be both professional and friendly

Try to learn names

## **Participatory Learning**

How to get students to participate? How to motivate them?

- Rewards: give participation marks
- Reduce barriers: in groups safe to discuss
- Open to different perspectives
- Try different approaches
- Get to know students
- Use their names, ask opinions

How do you go about developing activities?

- Borrow from other TAs
- Try short/small activities first
- Ask students to present/small components
- Use different teaching strategies

Methods that work:

- Small groups discussion/work
- Use space effectively
- Think-pair-share/small groups
- Encourage shy: share ideas
- Value student contributions
- Use names to direct questions to prompt response

Engage students in topic (not a lecture): Literature support – effective

- PBL (Problem-based learning), discussions

Differs from inclusivity: avoid bias

Challenge: Med school students – not interested

- Explain that participating will help them learn
- Motivate-practice, underscore relevance, give marks if possible

Barrier: Afraid to speak

- Ice breakers, small groups, Think-pair-share
- Get to know students, use names
- Go around table, ask all

How to increase interest, enjoy learning?

- Provide examples of opportunities

How to pole students?

- Survey, minute paper

How to motivate shy or not interested (too cool)?

- Work in small groups
- Be encouraging (body language, words)
- Step by step: warning, speak, stand, write on board, group notes (posted, pass along)
- Use variety of active learning strategies
- Change groups
- Use photos to learn names
- Get to know students, find interest of cool students
- Set rewards (not always marks)

Deficit student: be enthusiastic, show interest in them, and be inclusive

Quiet student: ask why in course, favorite food, fun activity, various ice breakers.

## **TA/Faculty Relations**

- Changing role
- Meetings overtime
- Make time constrains clear
- Be open
- Ask for agenda
- Class structure depends on professor: clarify expectations
- Always ask to the instructor
- Offer to help – reciprocal
- Different teaching styles/interests: Instructor designs context (mandatory) but you could provide suggestions/ideas
- Be respectful

- Good communication, constant (keep in touch)
- Expectations: Clarify tasks and expectations
- Start early
- Ask for instructor support
- Ask TAs from other sections
- View instructor and experienced TAs as teaching mentors
- First week is hectic, be prepared, ask for clarification
- Correct typos
- Provide feedback and ask for help

## **Time Management**

- Mental and physical health
  - Exercise
  - Pub night with friends
  - Naps
  - Free time
  - Fishing
  - Reading
- Time sinks: TA, research, classes, proposals, grants, papers, meetings, discussion groups, readings, parenting, social aspect
- Prioritize: deadlines, family, may shift with mental state
- Obstacles:
  - New research area/techniques (learning time)
  - Optimize time
  - Unforeseen problems
  - Build empty space or early deadlines; flexible
  - mid-ground on number of commitments (get involved but know limits!)
  - multiple tasks: do small tasks first to feel good and fewer left – less daunting
  - time activities and compare to number of expected hours
- Accessible with boundaries
- TAing will take over
- Make time for:
  - Research
  - Courses
  - Grant proposals
  - Family
  - Fun
  - Sleep
  - Food
  - \*Don't make time for some things!



- Schedule time
- Multitasking: TAing intercepts your day
- Know how/where you work best
- Know your skills and limitations
- Check lists/keep track of time
- Work with other TAs
- Set priorities
- Flexibility
- Balance/coping: Sleep, awareness, downtime, prioritize family, music, outside/body, understand yourself
- Prioritize: funding, thesis, research, courses, TAing, volunteering, etc
- Strategies: write it down (lists, calendar)!
  - Break tasks down into components parts
  - Phone alarm/reminders
  - Weekly/daily/monthly lists
  - Boundaries
- Poor ideas:
  - Netflix
  - Procrastinating
  - Saying “yes” to everything
  - Not writing it down