

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

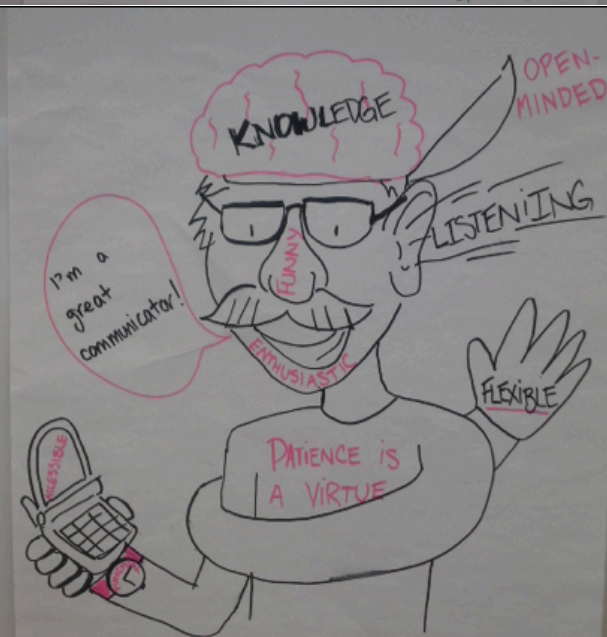
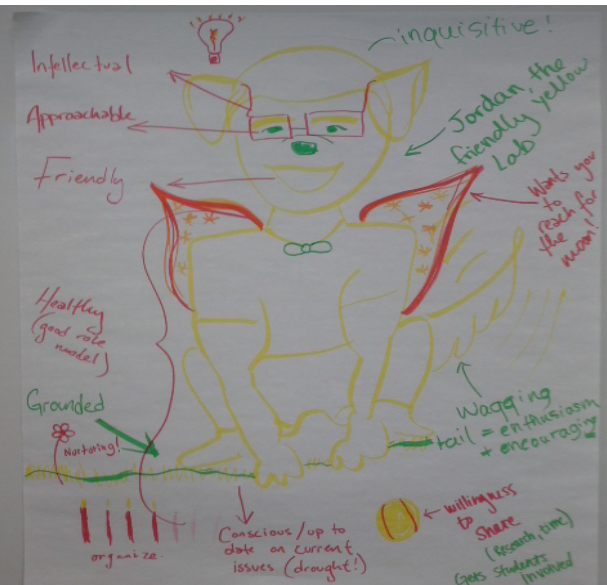
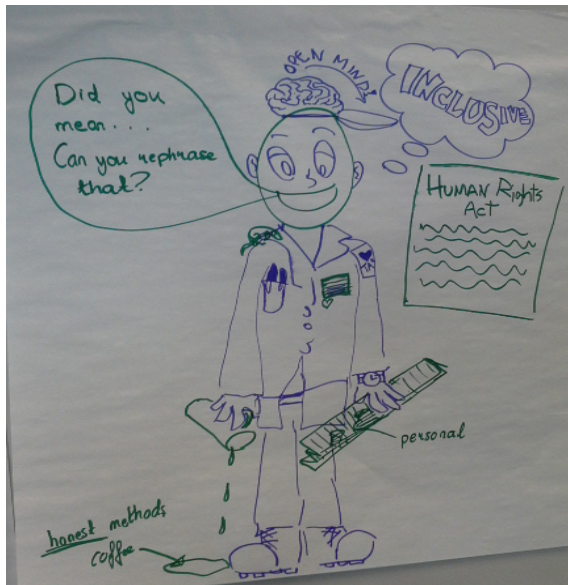
What makes a good teacher:

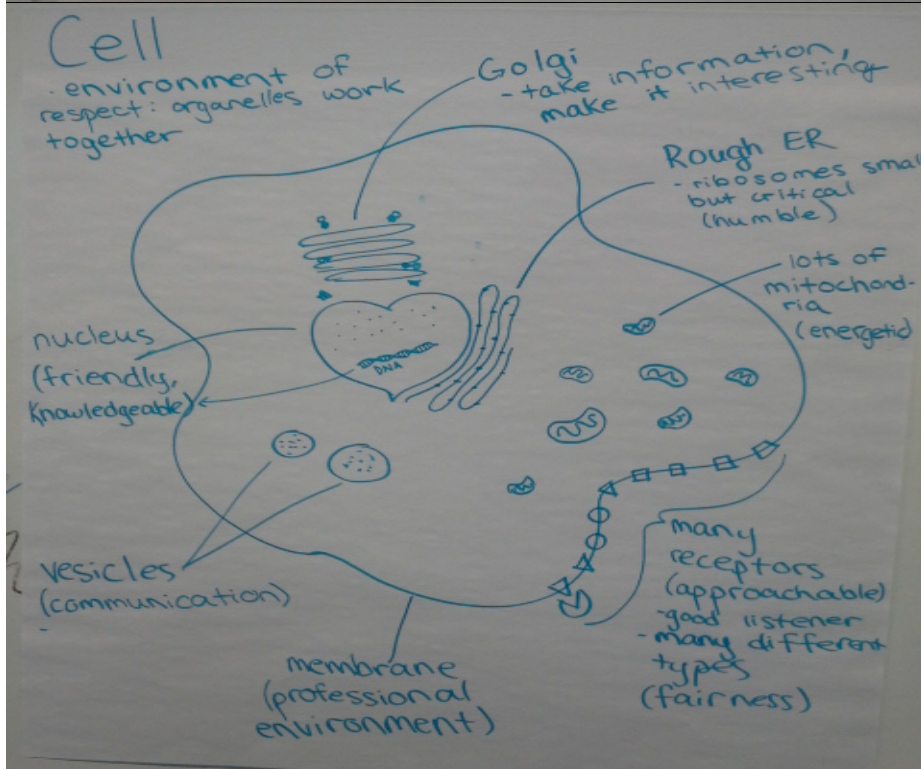
- Friendly, polite
- Enthusiastic, excited, genuinely having a good time, encouraging, builds student confidence (supportive)
- Shows video of some amazing thing to stimulate curiosity, inspiring
- Gives lots of helpful feedback (gives positive feedback ways to improve)
- Patient, wants students to succeed
- 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:
 - Research vs TAs, inside versus outside class, lab versus lecture TAs, office hours (how get students come?, advertise, bring other work because it is slow)
- Ideas:
 - Knowing what you're going to teach and what is expected
 - Have outline of class period (30 in to prep class at least)
 - Set standards for class/lab time so students know what to expect
 - Email can get out of hand if you are not careful. Set boundaries and stick to them!
 - Know ahead of time what will take a lot of time (plan your lab work around that)
 - Know the big picture – big versus 'little' concepts
 - Identify areas of flexibility in class time
- Grading:
 - Know the dates of grading
 - Familiarize yourself with the rubric
 - 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