Preparing to Teach
—Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning—
Agenda

• Your role as TA
• Questions to Ask Your Supervisor
• Preparation
• Presenting Yourself
• Creating a Constructive Atmosphere in your Classroom
• Leading Discussions
Have you taught before?

A. Yes  
B. No
Know your role

Discussion Sections are part of a larger course. They usually meet once a week for about 50 minutes and have a relatively small number of students.

Coordinate with the Instructor
- Sit in the lectures
- Prepare for discussion section
- Attend TA meetings

Teach Discussion Section
- Clarify & complement lecture content
- Lead discussions of readings and other course materials
- Lead students through hands on activities and projects

Assess Student work
- Keep grades on all the student work
- Keep records of class participation
- Be prepared to grade papers and exams

Ask Questions
- Ask your instructor if you are in doubt
- Stick to the policies that have been outlined by your instructor
Know your role

Lab Sections are usually part of a larger course. Labs often meet for 3 hour blocks, but it varies by course.

| Coordinate with the Instructor | • Sit in the lectures  
|                              | • Prepare for discussion section  
|                              | • Attend TA meetings |
| Ensure Lab Safety            | • Coordinate with the department on your lab duties  
|                              | • Be prepared based on lab demonstrations |
| Assess Student work          | • Keep grades on all the student work  
|                              | • Keep records of class participation  
|                              | • Be prepared to grade papers and exams |
| Ask Questions                | • Ask your instructor if you are in doubt  
|                              | • Stick to the policies that have been outlined by your instructor |
What Should I Ask My Supervisor?

• Am I required to attend lecture?
• Should I hold weekly office hours?
• What is the preferred format for lab or discussion section?
• Will the course instructor or supervisor provide specific learning objectives, class plans and/or activities?
• Is student interaction a main goal of the section?
• Do I need to assess class participation?
• What assignments will I be grading?
• Will rubrics (grading guidelines) be provided for me?
• Will I have access to a HuskyCT (Blackboard) site for the course?
Preparation

• Visit the classroom ahead of time
• Cooperate and collaborate
• Have a solid plan in place
  – With a back-up, just in case
• Go over your lesson plan with a friend or fellow TA
• Anticipate problems & determine solutions
  – Do homework assignments & in-class exercises yourself BEFORE giving them to students
Presenting Yourself

Do

• Do tell students what you would like them to call you
• Do say a little bit about your educational background & professional academic interests
• Do be yourself, but your most professional & enthusiastic version

Don’t

• Don’t be nervous about being nervous
• Don’t share too much personal information
• Don’t forget about your body language
• Don’t be afraid to admit that you don’t know something
Create a constructive atmosphere in the classroom

- Convey your passion and enthusiasm for the subject
- Create a welcoming environment
- Foster a sense of belonging and respect
- Encourage high performance
- Promote active engagement
• Have students fill out a questionnaire
• Meet one-on-one with students
• Learn from your students
• Establish a standard of grading
• Incorporate peer review
• Use formative assessments of teaching

Classroom specifics

• Show up early for class
• Take roll and learn students’ names
• Start with a (student) summary of last class
• Write the plan for the class on board
• Have students stand up and stretch or play short games in longer classes
• Wrap up the class (What did we learn?)
• End class on time

http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/building-student-engagement-classroom-specif#sthash.ujrQvbGm.dpuf
Facilitating Discussion

• Begin asking questions the 1st day of class
• Establish criteria for a good discussion early on
• Ask open-ended questions that engage the interest & curiosity of the students
• Start the discussion with a common experience
• Listen and respond to the students
• Give students time to think and answer
• Allow enough time. Expect that warm-up, reflection and input will take time
• Have your students be responsible for bringing discussion issues to class

http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/faqs/presenting/presenting.html
Keep Everyone Involved

• Use small group or pair discussions
  – Call on small groups to share their discussion points with the entire class
• Have students write down responses and reflections before starting the discussion
• Talk to quiet students outside of class
• Use HuskyCT discussion tools
Continue your efforts beyond the classroom

• Manage your office hours
• Reach out to students who miss a class
• Be responsive to e-mails and calls from students
• Give plenty of student feedback
• Consider permitting homework counter-offers

What group dynamics can teach us about classroom learning

• Every participant in a group is responsible for the outcome of the group interaction
• When people feel psychologically safe in a group, their participation levels will increase
• The leader of any group serves as a model for that group
• A group will set its own norms of behavior and will expect conformity to them

Discussion Section Tips from Vitae
For more information, contact

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