

A large, detailed bronze statue of a dragon, resembling a Chinese dragon, stands on a dark stone pedestal in a university plaza. The dragon has its mouth open, showing sharp teeth and a forked tongue. In the background, a modern university building with a mix of brick and glass is visible under a clear blue sky. Several people are in the plaza: two men sit on a bench to the left, and a man and a woman are in the foreground, looking at a smartphone together. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

THE ART OF TEACHING: A HANDBOOK OF DISCOVERY

THE GRADUATE COLLEGE PRESENTS

**A HANDBOOK
ON TEACHING
AND LEARNING
FOR NEW TAs
AT DREXEL
UNIVERSITY**



Graduate College, Drexel University
3141 Chestnut Street • Main Building, Suite 301
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone 215.895.0366
www.drexel.edu/graduatecollege
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WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?

Good luck and coincidence are not the major ingredients for success. Though they can contribute to a person's achievements, there are other factors that are usually more significant. What are they? There are a few types of behaviors that are common to most successful teaching assistants. These include planning and managing time efficiently, embracing changes with a positive attitude, learning how to solve problems and learning from mistakes.

Rather than telling you how to be successful, we will let you read what students have written about their excellent teaching assistants. From the TA Excellence Award nominations that students have submitted in support of their favorite teaching assistants, you will learn what's really important to them and what makes a teaching assistant successful.

“Vicky was one of the most amazing TAs I have had for a course throughout my entire academic trajectory, not only in a graduate course but going back to my years as an undergraduate as well.

Her passion for teaching and helping all students in our Data Analysis course was evident from day one. She emphasized the fact that statistics is an area that makes sense to individuals differently by coming at it using different approaches and methods and therefore attempted to teach us multiple ways to solve a problem. She was always willing to go above and beyond to help us learn and understand the material we were going over in our lecture courses and made herself available both online and in person, even while applying to graduate doctoral programs across the country during the winter term. She absolutely is the best TA I've ever worked with and without a doubt deserves to be recognized for the effort she has put into this course.”

“Alex was by far the most helpful instructor that I have ever had.

He loves his job and works extremely hard to benefit students. I always look for the opportunity to connect with Alex because of this. He is an incredible resource.”

“Mr. Cohen is a phenomenal teacher! While his disability of being blind is apparent, he has gone the extra effort to remember everyone's name. The class consisted of about 40 students or so and there are professors who have less still do not know our names by the end of term. He has inspired me even more to get my PhD.”

“How could I ever explain Chris to someone who hasn't experienced his palpable energy? He is hands-down the best teacher I have ever had at Drexel, if not my entire life. Every single day he would show up to class with high energy and passion. He inspired me to care about physics in a way that reminded me of being a little kid in elementary school and being excited to learn something new. I am not a very studious student, and I had never taken physics before in my life, so I was nervous about my first physics course. Chris worked with me to get me up to speed and helped me so much I ended up doing really well. In addition to being pleasant, he was clear and stopped to answer students' questions in detail. I never felt like my question was a nuisance or was distracting from the class. In the event that a student did not grasp his explanation, he always invited you to stay after so he could draw it out better. He seemed to have good relationships with all of his students, knowing all of our names and even specifics about us. I've never had a teacher, let alone a TA, who was so engaged with his students, passionate about the subject, and personable to boot.”

TRY THIS.
*What are the common traits of a successful TA?
What will be your legacy at Drexel?*

TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISE: EGG DROP

Do you like a good team building exercise? We have a special challenge for you!

This exercise requires 4 to 6 people to work together in an environment that fosters teamwork and brainstorming. Are you ready for the challenge?

First, break into teams. Each team consists of no more than six people. The goal is to design and build a structure that will prevent their raw egg from breaking from a high drop. Second, you must finish the challenge in the allotted time. If more than one team is successful, then the team that uses the least amount of straws wins. The egg that can survive an 8-foot drop successfully completes the challenge. You will also win some cool prizes from the Graduate College if you can complete the challenge.

MATERIALS:

- Raw eggs (one egg per group), cardboard, masking tape, several thin straws (40 per group), paper clips, newspaper, and paper towels for cleanup

SET-UP:

- Participants: 4 to 6 people per group
- Required Time: 25 minutes
- Obtain the required materials. These are resources to be used by teams to try to protect their raw egg
- Use the straws and other materials to protect the egg
- Find a private space to discuss your ideas so that you are not very close to each other (to prevent copying ideas)

WINNING THE CHALLENGE:

- At the end of the time limit, come back to the Graduate Student Lounge. We will go to a secret stairway to drop the egg. After dropping all prototypes, open them up and figure out which eggs have remained intact. The winning team is the one with the least number of straws used.

DEBRIEF AND REFLECTION:

- What is the goal of this team building exercise?
- How this is related to teaching in the classroom?
- What would you do differently in the future?

PART 1:

WHAT IS YOUR SUPER POWER?

“I am a teacher’s assistant.
What is your Super Power?”
- Author unknown

Teaching Assistants (TAs) have been an integral part of Drexel University's academic instruction for decades. Faculty, professional staff and undergraduate students could not imagine the classroom without them. They work with undergraduate students in different capacities in engendering a supportive learning environment. In many instances, teaching assistants aid with the course material, nurture the development of critical academic skills, promote a higher-order of thinking and provide ongoing feedback to students in the classroom.

THE VALUE OF THIS SURVIVAL GUIDE

This advisory guide is designed to provide TAs with effective teaching strategies and tips to endure the 21st century classroom. Rather than providing you a list of prescriptive approaches, you will need to identify the instructional approaches and strategies that you feel most comfortable with and implement the new ideas and suggestions within that framework. There is nothing more rewarding than knowing and seeing the evidence that you have had an impact in a student's life.

A FEW WORDS OF ADVICE

Uncle Ben, a fictional character in the Marvel comic series "Spider-Man," says that "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility." Just like Spider-Man, new teaching assistants can be daunted by their sudden change in responsibility.

In the event that you need advice or support outside of your academic department, you can turn to different academic departments and administrative offices for assistance. From start to finish, The [Graduate College](#) is committed to providing each graduate student with a quality education and the kind of support, resources, services, and programs that will contribute to a graduate student's success. Every term, the office of [Information Technology](#) (IT) schedules workshops on various aspects of technology. In addition they are happy to assist anybody with software and hardware issues. Research librarians at the [Drexel Library](#) are extremely helpful in answering any questions you have about the resources you need to enrich your courses.

**"The Graduate
College is
committed
to graduate
education
& graduate
student
success."**

TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS

International teaching assistants can outreach to different administrative offices for specific concerns. [The International Students and Scholars Services](#) (ISSS) for information about visas, policies and regulations of the United States Department of State. [The English Language Center](#) (ELC) provides confidential, individual consultations on teaching as well as a support group for concerns related to the classroom.

At Drexel, we are very fortunate to have students from around the globe participating in our graduate programs and enriching the social and academic life of the university. While they make significant contributions to research and teaching at many colleges and universities, international students may have additional needs. International students can expect some level of cultural shock upon arriving in America. They may fear that you will not be able to understand them or that they will not be able to understanding you. As you acquire more experience speaking English, your concerns will lessen.

Try this: Give your students a chance to get accustomed to your accented English. Students are exposed to many things that are novel to them, including different language accents. There are New England and southern accents among Americans. Begin slowly. Tell students what country you are from and why you are here at Drexel University. If students understand a little about your culture and background, they are more likely to respect you and be receptive to your teaching.

Make it clear to the class that they should let you know if they do not understand something you say. Be patient when this happens and do not be offended or act defensive about these communication breakdowns.

American students are different from the students in many other countries. Their dress and manner may be quite casual. Classroom behavior may be informal, with students sometimes questioning or disagreeing with the instructor. This is acceptable behavior and should not be regarded as a challenge to your authority.

Lastly, you will make some mistakes along the way. Try to laugh at them and make them work to your benefit. Demonstrate that you care about your students and this country. You may be able to minimize problems you will encounter with language and with the American culture.

“To gain acceptance among your students, let them know that you care about them and their success in the course.”

WHY THE BEST TEACHING ASSISTANTS CAN WEAR MANY HATS

In the book *Education and Identity* by Arthur Chickering, the author says that “The function of college is transportation. It offers rapid transit from adolescence to adulthood, from dull or poorly paid jobs to more interesting or better paid ones, from slum to suburb, from lower to middle or upper class. Its function is to help the student get from where he or she wants to be.”

We, as teachers, have an obligation to help the people we teach have the best ride possible in getting from one place to another.

AS A TEACHING ASSISTANT, YOU WILL WEAR MANY HATS:

• Educator

Educate your students by imparting knowledge and understanding

• Subject Matter Expert

Familiarize with content knowledge in the area you are teaching

• Communicator

Convey concepts and facts clearly and respond to email in a timely manner

• Motivator

Make course material interesting,
show enthusiasm and encourage students to learn

• Evaluator

Provide feedback on their learning throughout the course and
grade the assignments in a timely manner

• Listener

Listen to students both verbally and non-verbally

• Facilitator

Coordinate class interactions such as leading and controlling
discussions are important to two-way communication

• Counselor

Provide guidance on how to be successful in the course as well as with future careers

• Role Model

Act accordingly to influence students. Your behavior influences students

• University Representative

Represent Drexel and your department to the world.
This is a heavy responsibility, but someone has to do it.

PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Teaching assistants are expected to maintain the same standards of professional ethics as any faculty member at Drexel University. You must come to class on time and prepared to teach. When grading, teaching assistants should establish clear, firm, and objective standards, and assign grades based on standards. It is important that you develop a sense of academic standards as quickly as possible, explain to them clearly at the beginning of the course and apply them.

Consistently throughout the term, clarifying your expectations for an assignment is an important key to creating an effective grading system. A grading rubric is helpful in describing the various levels of student performance for each task-specific set of criteria.

SUGGESTIONS: HERE ARE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT LEARNING:

- Assesses what is actually taught in the classroom
- Provides ongoing feedback for improving student learning
- Actively involves both instructors and students
- Uses multiple and varied measures
- Provides useful, timely feedback to students

THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR

Despite their reputation, Drexel Dragons need not breathe fire to resolve a conflict. The University expects all members of its community to uphold the highest values of academic integrity. In upholding these values, the University is committed to investigating any allegation of violations of academic integrity against a student. Violations include, but not are limited to: plagiarism, cheating, fabrication and academic misconduct. Sanctions for violation of academic integrity are administered through the [Office of Residential Living and Student Conduct](#) in conjunction with the [Office of the Provost](#) and other University offices are deemed appropriate. It is generally the responsibility of the faculty members overseeing the academic activity to report the violation to the Office of Residential Living and Student Conduct and Community Standards to determine the appropriate sanction. A student who believes he/she has been wrongly sanctioned has a right to an appeal process. Please refer to [Drexel University's Student Handbook](#).

Want More?
Stevens, D.D. & Levi, A.
(2005). Introduction to
rubrics: An assessment tool
to save grading time,
convey effective feedback,
and promote
student learning.
Sterling, VA: Stylus.

RESPECTING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Drexel University is dedicated to fostering an environment for living, learning and working that is welcoming, inclusive, respectful, engaging and diverse (WIRED). We encourage you as a teaching assistant to view yourself as part of this mission and take affirmative steps to make your classes and other micro-community spaces, where all those present feel confident that they have an equal opportunity to succeed. Checking out the [WIRED Guide](#), for instance, is a good place to start learning about understanding and respecting difference. In addition to building an inclusive community, you are also responsible for respecting individual rights. As such, you must immediately report incident of discrimination or harassment, including sexual and gender-based harassment and misconduct. You must also, of course, refrain from such conduct yourself. You should report all incident of which you are aware, even if they are unrelated to your class- for example, if one of your students tells you that they have been harassed by another student, professional staff member, or instructor. Such reports should be made to the [Office of Equality and Diversity](#) (OED) so that the individual(s) affected can be provided with information, resources and options. You can click [here](#) for information about your reporting responsibilities, or reach out to OED directly.

You should also know that you have a responsibility to refer, in writing, individuals with disabilities who request accommodations related to disability to OED's [Disability Resources](#) team to those students can begin the process of receiving reasonable accommodations. If you are unsure of how to refer a student with a disability to Disability Resources, [template emails](#) are available, along with a host of other [resources for instructions and supervisors](#). If a student has already registered to receive reasonable accommodations, that student will be able to provide an Accommodation Verification Letter (AVL) listing the accommodations they are entitled to receive. AVLs are provided to faculty members and other relevant personnel each term via the ClockWork Systems. Apart from providing the accommodations on the AVL, you should treat your students with disabilities the same as you would treat any other student.



PART 2:

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO LEAD EFFECTIVELY?

“It’s the teacher that makes the difference,
not the classroom.” ~Michael Morpurgo

Whether you are leading a lecture, recitation or laboratory section, the first day of classes is very important for you and your students. According to Wong & Wong (1998), your students will receive tons of information during first week of classes but they will not likely to remember all the details. They will, however, more likely to remember your initial impressions about the class and the classroom environment. It may be helpful to talk about the following topics in the first class: the importance of the class, your position in relation to the course, the content of the course and learning support inside and outside of the classroom.

Try this: Students often remember the best teaching assistants who took the time to remember their names. Here are some strategies to accomplish this task:

- Download the class roster with photos and familiarize their names
- For the first class, ask students to tell you their name and one interesting thing about themselves
- Draw up a seating plan of the classroom and write down the students' names. Often, they will return to the same seat
- Study students' faces, distinct features such as clothing style and haircut and other visual cues to help personalize each student
- Before answering a question, ask students to tell their first name

Want More?
Wong, H.K., & Wong, R.T.
(1998). The first days of school:
How to be an effective teacher.
Mountain View, CA: Harry K.
Wong Publications



WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Learning style, according to Howard Gardner, are the ways in which an individual approaches a range of task. Gardner has listed eight intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic. As we understand learning styles, it becomes apparent why multimedia in a classroom is much more appealing to learners.

Most people who are involved with college level teaching are able to learn well by reading, listening to lectures and taking and reviewing notes on complicated subjects. However, some people learn best by hearing instructions; they are auditory learners who thrive on good lectures and discussions. Others learn best by seeing, whether text or images; they are visual learners who may work best on their own. Still others learn best by manipulating objects; they are kinesthetic learners who may excel in laboratory classes. What is your learning style? Take a short assessment [here](#) and find out.

WHICH LEARNING PATH WILL YOU CHOOSE?

In most traditional lectures, students rely on the instructor to do all the work of preparing and investigating course material. This is known as passive learning. At most, they take notes or ask questions. In contrast, active learning involves students in problem solving, discussion, research, hypothesis generation and other activities designed to make them pursue learning. One of the pioneers of active learning and active training, Mel Silberman, writes, “When learning is active, the learner is seeking something in answer to a question, information to solve a problem, or a way to do a job. Learning can’t be swallowed whole. To retain what has been taught, students must chew on it.”

Try this: Here is a sample list of activities that you might assign your students to do to become active learners:

- (1) Create a stimulating question – Chicken or egg: which came first?
- (2) Solve a problem
- (3) Conduct an experiment
- (4) Participate in a poll or survey like the show American Idol
- (5) Brainstorm a concept or application together

Want More?
Silberman, Mel. Active learning: 101 strategies to teach any subject. Allyn and Bacon: Boston, 1996.

THE POWER OF TEAM WORK

Collaborative learning and cooperative learning are terms used interchangeably to refer to the practice of having small groups of students work together on a project. Generally, everyone in a group receives the same grade. Students are thus encouraged to divide the work equally and to co-teach each other. Two trends drive the adoption of collaborative learning at the college and university level. First, extensive reports on the effectiveness of a small group learning. Second, the need to prepare students to participate in the workplace.

Group of four to six students are formed, often by random assignment. The academic task and evaluation of the group's work must be clearly specified. The group's goals should be itemized into work that involves individual accountability. For instance, one person may do the library research, another the web research, another writing up the results, and still another may deliver an oral report on the team's findings to the class. It is very helpful to give students a pathway to resolving group conflict that can include dismissing an unproductive or destructive team member, who then must present an individual project of comparable difficulty.

Just remember, collaborative learning fosters critical thinking, social skills and responsibility for one's own and others' learning.

REISMAN'S DIAGNOSTIC CREATIVITY ASSESSMENT (RDCA)

All around the world, organizations share a common challenge in today's market. They constantly need to acclimate, progress, produce and invent new products to endure in this competitive environment. Adaptability is driven by organizational creativity, which has been defined as the skills and dispositions needed for engendering novel ideas and products across the organization. In higher education, the role of creativity is important for educational leaders such as yourself. It is the factor whereby one produces the ideas that other students will follow.

There is a widely held perception that creativity cannot be measured nor can it be defined. Dr. Fredricka Reisman, a prominent and emeritus professor from School of Education at Drexel, strongly believed that this is not the case. To determine the creative strengths of your students in the classroom, it is important for leaders to administer the Reisman's Diagnostic Creative Assessment (RDCA). The Reisman Diagnostic Creativity Assessment measures an individual's self-perception on eleven major creativity factors based on Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking.

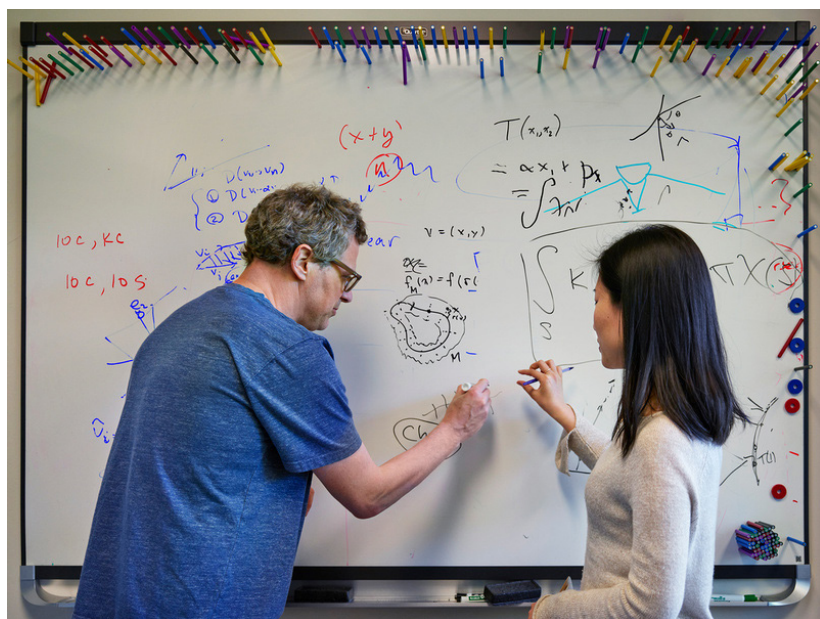
Want More?
Download the free app titled
**Reisman Diagnostic Creative
Assessment RDCA Lite** from the
[Apple Store.](#)

THE CENTER-OF-GRAVITY APPROACH

For centuries, the central method of instruction in higher education has centered on the instructor. The measure of teaching excellence was the quality of the lecturer. In the modern days, the focus has shifted to the ability of the instructor to motivate students and design learning activities that facilitate learning. The emphasis now is on “outputs,” the competencies demonstrated by the students. Your instructional method should gravitate toward your students.

Try this: In general, teaching is a cyclical process of planning, presenting, evaluating and planning. Here are some basic moon-walk approaches for learner-centered teaching:

- Set realistic teaching goals for yourself. Consider, for example, reviewing the syllabus for your course and considering the amount of class time you will have for each topic, decide on the most important points to make and the supporting research to cite, as well as problems or activities that will help students to understand concepts or master skills.
- Set reasonable learning objectives for the students. Everything you teach should relate to the outcomes of the course.
- Present material in a useful manner and choose a level of explanation that is neither too simple nor too advanced for the class.
- Measure your effectiveness using both informal and formal assessments at the end of class and/or beginning of the next class. For instance, each student can write 1 to 3 sentences on a piece of paper about their learning experience at the end of class or conduct a warm-up exercise with them to reflect upon the course materials from the previous class.
- Start all over by planning for the next time you teach the material you have just covered.



“Even if there is no gravity on earth, your instructional method should gravitate toward your students.”
- Tsz Kwok

WHAT ARE YOUR METHODS OF CONDUCTING A CLASS?

As you already know, learning is not linear. It is important to use a variety of instructional methods to allow your students to actively engage with the course material. It is time to put the ancient scroll away and engage students actively in the course. To help all your students gain the most from your classes, recitations and labs, you should aim to provide opportunities for them to understand ideas and concepts that cater to their learning styles.

Try this: Below are some ways to engage your students in the classroom. You should experiment with a variety of them. It is important to see what works best for you, what works best for your students, and what works best for the material.

Discussion – a small group of people meets to discuss a certain problem and come up with solutions to a problem. Some examples are debates, brainstorming, structured controversy and simulations.

Case-study – students analyze a real or imaginary situation that is written as a history. Some examples are quizzes, journals, observations, student polls, interviews and films/videos.

Role-playing – role-play consists of a spontaneous dramatization of a real situation by two or more people. Some examples are debates, classroom talk show and fantasy courtroom.

Project or problem-based learning – students work on solving real problems in the field of study using real tools and methods. Some examples are lab and recitation classes, problem solving, rhetorical questions, case studies, student presentations, simulations and brainstorming.

Want More?

Povlacs Lunde, Joyce. "101 things you can do in the first three weeks of class." UNL Graduate Development. 2004. University of Nebraska at Lincoln. 1 Feb 2018 <https://www.unl.edu/grad-studies/current/teaching/first-3-weeks>



TIME MANAGEMENT OR TIME PLANNING?

Hermione Granger, a fictional character from *Harry Potter*, received a time-turner from Professor McGonagall, so that she could attend more classes in her third year than time would allow. Unless you have a time-turner device, you cannot manage time. You can, however, plan your time more efficiently. Being a full-time graduate student, there will not be enough time to do all the things that need to be done unless you plan and use your time well.

Try this: Draw up some rules for yourself at the beginning of the term. You may not always be able to keep them, but you should try to adopt them as general guides. The following tips and strategies can help you use time effectively and avoid feeling overwhelmed.

- Set realistic goals by writing specific, measurable outcomes you want to achieve.
- Use a “To Do List” and categorize your items into highest, medium and low priority.
- Establish place habits and keep everything in its pre-determined place.
- Design and personalize your environment to help with concentration.
- Cluster common tasks and do similar tasks in the same time block.
- Delineate time blocks to work on projects requiring concentration.

DELIVERING A GOLD-STANDARD LECTURE

Although you are not competing for an Oscar or a Golden Globe award, you can uphold a gold-standard class. There is nothing as bad as a teaching assistant who is obviously not prepared and attempts to “wing it.” We have offered tons of strategies and tips thus far to help you prepare for your class. Are you ready to present the course material? Remember, effectiveness in the classroom depends on being prepared and well organized. Prepare a lesson plan for each lesson and be quite explicit about what is to be covered, including estimated time for each activity.

You may want to start with a lecture with a mini lesson. There are three important reasons why this method is appropriate at this stage of the course:

- The students may not have read any material nor do they have sufficient knowledge to have a meaningful discussion.
- The students are not yet comfortable in speaking in front of their peers or in answering questions.
- The lecture method at this point will be easier for you. If prepared carefully, it will allow one-way information from you, putting you in control. It reduces difficult questions until you get to know the student better.

Want More?
Rabow, J. (1989). *Teaching Sociology*, 12(2), 258-259, Retrieve from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/stable/1317487>

WHAT IS IN YOUR PRESENTATION?

There is nothing worse than reading verbatim from a prepared lecture. You will immediately cause students to lose interest and may even cause them to fall asleep. Remember, education is like transportation. You need to move around the classroom, stop and give them a break to reflect upon the course material. Just like our stomachs, they need time to digest the content and breakdown the information. Purposeful movement and gestures will keep students' attention better as well as break time. In general, it is not a good idea to sit down, but if you must, do not sit for the entire duration.

Try this: Students generally requires a balance between coverage of course content, explanation and a level of engagement from the teaching assistant. Consider the followings:

- Make eye contact with everyone, smile and display enthusiasm
Talk with the students, not at them.
- Humans have short-attention span. Give them a break to digest the material and absorb the content.
- Talk slowly but not in a monotone or mumble.
- Give them an overview at the beginning of class and finish class on time.
- Conduct a warm-up exercise before a lesson. Find out what students already know and what they want to know.
- Observe other instructors and analyze their effectiveness and adopt those ideas to your classroom.
- Use statements that highlight and emphasize the important key points in each section.
- Periodically relate concepts to anecdotes and analogies.
- Summarize the lecture materials and give them a preview of the next class.
- Give a formal and informal assessment at the end of class to unveil their understanding.
- Evaluate your effectiveness as a teaching assistant.

Want More?
Bligh, Donald (2000). What's the
use of lectures? San Francisco, CA:
Jossey Bass Publishers.

PART 3:

HOW WELL DO YOU ASK QUESTIONS?

“Ask the right questions, and the answers
will always reveal itself.”
~ Oprah Winfrey

Conversation flows like a river stream when they move from topic to topic to speaker to speaker in a natural manner. When you are leading a lecture, recitation or laboratory, never ask questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no” answer. Consider, for instance, “Did you have a good day at school? Instead, you may want to say, “What was the best part of your day at school?” Depending on how you ask the question, it may reveal something about the person’s feelings and thoughts on the subject. Discussions are important to student learning. They offer students an opportunity to explore the diversity of views about an issue and to reach a higher-order of thinking of the course material. To encourage students to participate in the discussion, it is important to work out how you are going to get the discussion started. You may want to try a provocative question like, “Do you live to eat or eat to live?”

Try this: Asking questions is one of the most effective ways of starting discussions and pushing conversations forward in tutorials.

- Give reticent students a chance to think about the question.
- Ask the question, pause and then call on an individual.
- When no one answers the question, do not answer the question yourself! Rephrase the question in case they do not know what you mean.
- Call on different people to answer the question.
- Ask “what if” questions to challenge students’ understanding.
- Be supportive of students with the wrong answer. You can reward them by saying “Thank you for trying, but not quite.”

CAN YOU DIG A LITTLE DEEPER?

Effective teaching assistants keep a discussion going by asking questions that require more than superficial answers. Like a paleontologist, they dig deep into the dirt to look for dinosaur bones. Learning can be viewed in a similar manner. By probing, the teaching assistant requires the student to go beyond the first response. The teacher’s cue is the student’s response. Once it has occurred, you, the teaching assistant, instead of advancing to another question, can probe the student’s response further. Consider, for instance:

TA: Would you say technology in America is better or worse than it was ten years ago?

Student: Better.

TA: Exactly. Why is that so?

Student: Because there are more resources that are available for us.

TA: That’s right, but it is only part of it. Can anyone else give some more reasons?

Want More?
Use questions that include word like “exactly” to probe further. For example, what exactly do you mean by this? Who, exactly, is involved in this project? Visit [Mind Tools](#) for more questioning techniques.

WHY COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE SO IMPORTANT?

In teaching, communicating a point is only successful when both the sender and the receiver interpret information the same way. By successfully getting your message across, you convey your thoughts and ideas effectively. When communication is not successful, there is a breakdown in communication. To ensure comprehensive understanding, try out the following techniques.

Seeking Clarification - The teaching assistant may ask the student for more information or clarification by saying:

- What exactly do you mean?
- Please rephrase that statement
- Could you elaborate on that point?
- What do you mean by that term?

Increase Critical Awareness - The teaching assistant wants the student to justify his/her response by saying:

- What are you assuming?
- What are your reasons for thinking that is so?
- Is that all there is to it?
- How many questions are we trying to answer here?
- How would an opponent of this point of view respond?



Refocusing the Response - If a student has given a satisfactory response, it might seem unnecessary to probe it; however, the teaching assistant could use this opportunity to refocus on related issue.

- If this is true, what are the implications?
- How does Joe's answer relate to Tom?
- Can you relate this to at a personal level?
- Let's analyze that answer further.

Prompting the Question - The teacher gives the student hints to help the individual to solve the question.

TA: What is the square root of 94?

Student: I do not know.

TA: What is the square root of 100?

Student: 10.

TA: What is the square root of 81?

Student: 9

TA: What is the square root of 94?

Student: It is between 9 and 10

Redirecting the Question - While this is not a probing question, it helps students to get into the discussion quickly. The teaching assistant change the interaction from one student to another.

TA: Who are the main characters in Harry Potter?

Student: They are Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger.

TA: Taz, do you agree? Or "Taz, can you elaborate on Naveen's answer?"

Communication is meant to fulfill a mission by conveying information to your students so that they understand something or carry out a task.

To accomplish these goals, it must be clear, comprehensive and correct.



Try this: Form groups according to your academic discipline. The faculty in your major department has decided to do a thorough review of its curriculum, and would like to involve students. The department chair has asked your group to determine the extent to which the courses in your major prepare you to communicate effectively. Here are some questions you might focus on:

What do the professors in the department think is the best approach to helping students learn how to communicate?

How do they incorporate technical communication into their course?

To what extent do the course descriptions in your department describe the communication skills that are part of a professional's set of skills?

To what extent do the syllabi for required courses describe the class activities and assignments that call for technical-communication skills?

What approach is used at other, similar colleges and universities?

Write a memo to the chair of your major department describing and evaluating your department's attempt to teach technical communication. What aspects do you think are effective? How might the department do more to teach students the importance of technical communication to a professional career?

Want More?

Markel, Mike (2016). Technical Communication. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.



PART 4:

IS YOUR GRADING SYSTEM FAIR AND CONSISTENT?

“Never discourage anyone who continually
makes progress, no matter how slow.”

~Plato

Many teaching assistants have some responsibility for grading student performance through weekly quizzes, essays, mid-term and final examinations, laboratory reports and presentations. You will evaluate your students' understanding of course concepts through these platforms. As we have learned more about how people learn, we have discovered that frequent, well-designed evaluations not only tell the teacher what a student knows but can also be a useful part of the learning process for a student. Assessment and feedback from you help students know what they have learned and what they need to learn.

Assessment is intrinsic to the educational process. As a teaching assistant, you need to assess students' knowledge at the beginning so you can be sure they have the prerequisites to understand your lesson. Students learn best when they have many respectful, helpful evaluations from instructors and peers. Overt negative criticism is not so useful and may hurt the student's self-esteem in the long-term. It is vital that you develop a sense of academic standards as quickly as possible, explain them clearly at the beginning of the course and apply them consistently throughout the term.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF TESTS?

Love them or hate them, tests play a major role in determining your student's final grade. Just like the different learning styles, there are different types of exams.

Short-answer tests – are best at evaluating memorization and analysis skills.

Essay exams – have the highest educational value while it is very time consuming. Students systematize information and express their understanding at length.

Multiple choice tests – are challenge to create but can do a good job of evaluating memorization and application levels of thinking.

Numerical or logical tests – reveal understanding of material and the ability to apply it.

Completion questions – check for recognition of key terms and concepts.

Matching questions – test recognition of the relationships between pairs of words or between words and definitions.

Take-home exams – allow students to work at their own pace in their own place but some disadvantages like information sharing. It is important to discuss the implications with students.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MARK AND A GRADE?

There is a distinct difference. A mark is a level of achievement against specified criteria for an individual assessment item. A grade, on the other hand, is the overall level of achievement for a course of study. When you are preparing for marking and grading, it is important to consider the followings: (1) be prepared to devote a reasonable amount of time to grade; (2) make sure that you know the expectation from the course instructor; (3) acquire a rubric from the instructor to ensure grading standards are in line with the course; (4) be aware of guidelines and structures about the assignment such as citation requirements, format of the paper and basic content; and (5) familiarize yourself with the principal sources of the assignment. Before you start marking student work, you should read their papers to get an idea of the range of quality. You must always be absolutely honest and consistent. You must be fair and reasonable and maintain grading principles you can defend, if disputed. Below are your general guidelines for grading:

Plan – an assessment should be built into the course since its inception. Always consult with the course director on varieties of assessment and then plan the percentage of the final grade each assignment or test is worth

Explain – tell your students the scheme for grading, what you want your students to achieve and how you are going to assess their academic progress

Record – maintain good records of your grading of each student's work through the term and several years in the event that the student comes back and challenges a grade, an incomplete or a recommendation. Archived records allow you to justify or re-evaluate the student work.

Try this. Here are some characteristics of effective assessment:

- Assesses what is being taught in the course.
- Provides supplement materials for improving student learning.
- Actively involve the course instructor and students in the process.
- Use multiple and varied measures for a diverse of learners.
- Provides useful, timely feedback to students.

Want More?

Drexel has a common scheme for all undergraduate faculties. The letter grades are given for individual courses, and grade points are used to compute GPAs for each student at the end of each term, on both a term and a cumulative basis. Please visit the grading policy on the [Provost website](#).

USING GRADE SHEETS

Many teaching assistants have found that grading sheets can speed up the process of evaluating the student papers and yet still allow for specific and individualized comments. As a teaching tool, grading sheets save time in the grading process, communicate your expectations to students, help you to decide what and how to teach, help students understand how their work is graded and make the process more consistent and fair.

Try this. Take a few minutes to reflect carefully about that factors you consider when assessing an assignment. Consider, for example, how would you assess an essay? You may want to consider organization, grammar, accuracy, references, depth of analysis and bibliography.

Want More?

The Provost Office at Drexel has comprehensive resources in designing a grading rubric. Check it out [here](#)!



PART 5:

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT RESOURCES AT DREXEL?

“One should use all available resources to solve difficult problems.
One of our most powerful resources is the insight of our colleagues”
~Peter Agre

At Drexel, we are committed to graduate studies and your academic success throughout your lifetime here. We treasure all of our students as we strive to assist them be fully prepared, confident and knowledgeable citizens of this world. As a valuable teaching assistant at the university, you play a vital role in the education of undergraduate and graduate students at Drexel. In particular, undergraduates often get their first experience to core courses from teaching assistants. In this regard, many students view teaching assistants as the face of their department and the university. The university is committed in serving you by providing you with valuable resources.

As a new TA, it is important to seek out opportunities for ongoing growth and development in your teaching. The Graduate College is devoted to your professional development. Before the start of fall term in the new academic year, the Graduate College hosts a mandatory orientation for new incoming teaching assistants across campus. The orientation consist of fun workshops led by experienced teaching professors and assistants. It is designed to prepare you for your teaching role at Drexel. The rudimentary structures of good pedagogical practice involve: (1) learning about and discussing new strategies and approaches to different aspects of teaching and learning; (2) holistically collecting feedback on your teaching from a diversity of sources to reflect on and assess your effectiveness in the classroom; and (3) making incremental changes and improvements to your teaching on an ongoing effort.

In addition to the TA Orientation, all incoming teaching assistants will automatically enroll in GRAD T580. The course is offered in the fall term of each academic year. This is a free, one-credit course consisting of fun workshops and assignments, where students will meet at least three times in the fall term. As a token of appreciation, the Graduate College provides free pizza and refreshments! Do you like pizza?



**HERE ARE
SOME VALUABLE
RESOURCES AT
THE UNIVERSITY.**



Academic Advisors – assist students with planning their schedule, register them for courses, change their major, add/drop/withdraw them from a class, and review their academic progress toward graduation.

Academic Policies – are regulations generally apply to all students at Drexel and provide a framework within which schools and colleges may specify further conditions or variations appropriate to students in their courses or programs.

Course Catalog - provides enrolled students with the information they need regarding their chosen academic path and helping prospective students make important enrollment decisions.

Counseling Center – provides support to students with personal, physical, and psychological challenges that interfere with their ability to complete their academic goals.

Drexel University Information Technology - provides university-wide instructional, administrative, and research services using its robust computing and communications infrastructure.

Drexel Writing Center - helps all members of the Drexel community think through and develop their writing projects, primarily through one-on-one consultations with Peer and Faculty Readers.

FERPA Policy - protects the privacy of student education records for students who are at least 18 years old or who attend or have attended a postsecondary institution, even if they have not reached the age of 18.

Instructional Media Services - maintains media equipment in classrooms, trains faculty in the use of media-equipped classrooms, and creates instructional materials.

Office of Equality and Diversity - empowers individuals who have documented disabilities by working together proactively to provide reasonable accommodations. In addition, the office has a mediation program for the resolution of complaints of bias, discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and other issues.

Office of Diversity and Inclusion - ensures that the University complies with its own policies and with federal, state and local laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment based upon race; color; religion; gender; pregnancy; national origin; age; disability; sexual orientation, identity, and expression; and veteran status.

Residential Living and Student Conduct – expects that all students as well as student organizations will conduct themselves responsibly and in a manner that reflects favorably upon themselves and the University.

The Student Handbook - is written for students and they are responsible for knowledge of these policies, rules, regulations and standards of conduct.

Title IX - prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex at universities like Drexel. Sexual harassment, which includes sexual assault, stalking, and intimate partner violence, is a form of sex discrimination that Drexel's policies address.

Want More?

The Graduate College offers a series of professional development workshop known as the **Coffee Hour Seminar Series** throughout the academic year. If you attend at least four workshops in one academic year, you will receive a certificate for completion signed by the Dean of Graduate College.