Teaching and learning guide for teaching assistants

CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Navigation

To move through the book, you can use the ‘Next’ and ‘Previous’ buttons located at the bottom corners of every page. To jump to a specific part or chapter, you can open the Table of Contents at any time by pressing the ‘Contents’ button in the top-left corner of this book.

H5P activities

This book features multiple H5P activities for more opportunities for interaction and learning. These activities are designed for you to practice the concepts discussed in the book. For example, we provide a sample assignment description and you can try to start **developing criteria for a grading rubric with this activity.** If you are an instructor or making your own Pressbook, you can copy and edit any H5P activities directly into Moodle by pressing the ‘Reuse’ or ‘Embed’ buttons in the bottom-left corner of the activities.

Text boxes

Throughout the book, we are making use of different types of text boxes to help draw your attention to important pieces of information. We explain the types and purposes below:

Learn more

Learn more

Further resources to learn will appear like this.

Callout

> Callout text will appear like this.

Feedback on this book

We welcome feedback on this guidebook – should you have any feedback, you can **share it anonymously through this form here**.

Acknowledgements

This guidebook is a collaborative effort by members of Concordia's Centre for Teaching and Learning, including Josephine Guan, Naj Sumar, Carole Brazeau, Alicia Cundell, and Ariel Harlap. We extend our gratitude to our departmental and faculty collaborators for their valuable contributions to the content. Special thanks to Rachel Harris for her assistance with Pressbooks publishing.

Land acknowledgement

Concordia published its first version of the **Indigenous Actions Plan** in 2019. The plan was envisioned as a guide and tool to enable all Concordians to move the university towards a more equitable and inclusive future where Indigenous peoples, knowledges, research and scholarship are prioritized and celebrated. It was created in part to respond to the **2015 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).**

With this **living document**, Concordia has committed to taking steps towards **Decolonizing** and **Indigenizing** curricula and **pedagogy**. This means considering other systems of knowledge, perspectives, worldviews and ways of learning within curricula and pedagogy. This does not mean excluding, dismissing or replacing existing knowledge systems.

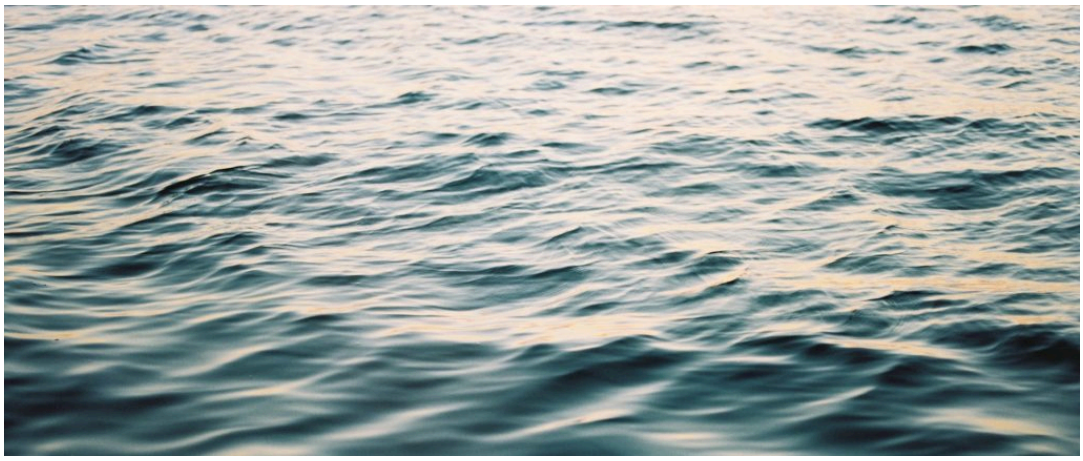

Photo by Parker Hilton via Unsplash

Many other universities across Canada **have launched and implemented similar plans**, but Concordia is unique in the fact that we have a **specific plan for teaching and learning.** This strategy and the **Office of Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Curriculum and Pedagogy** serve to guide the learning community at Concordia with:

- acknowledging historical context,
- ensuring cultural sensitivity and respect,
- incorporating Indigenous knowledge,
- establishing meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities,
- critically examining **Eurocentric canons of thought**,
- and integrating research and curriculum resources authored by Indigenous scholars.

Image of evergreen trees overlaying a wampum belt.

Graphic by eConcordia, image of Wampum belt: Nativemedia, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Common

As a way to move beyond a land acknowledgement, teaching assistants can reflect on their **positionality** in and out of the classroom, and invite their students to do the same. The **Office of Decolonizing and Indigenizing Curriculum and Pedagogy** with eConcordia have developed a series of online modules for Concordia staff and students to learn about the History and Resiliency of the Rotinonhsión:ni (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy. The modules serve as educational primers for Concordia community to access and learn about the Rotinonhnsión:ni people at their own pace. To access the modules, **click here.** You will be asked to identify whether your role is Employee or Student.

About the Centre for Teaching and Learning

The **Centre for Teaching and Learning** (CTL) at Concordia University provides support and resources to the teaching community. We use evidence-based approaches to support excellence, opportunity and inclusion for all the academic community.

To cite this work, please use:

APA: Centre for Teaching and Learning. (2024). *Teaching and learning guide for teaching assistants.* Montreal, QC: Concordia University. Retrieved from **https://opentextbooks.concordia.ca/ta-guide**.

Chicago: Centre for Teaching and Learning. *Teaching and learning guide for teaching assistants.* Montreal. Montreal, QC: Concordia University, 2024. **https://opentextbooks.concordia.ca/ta-guide**.

MLA: Centre for Teaching and Learning. *Teaching and learning guide for teaching assistants. Concordia University*, 2024, **https://opentextbooks.concordia.ca/ta-guide**. Accessed [today's date].

Accessibility statement

This resource has been designed using the following accessibility features:

- All images which are not decorative have authored alternative text. Decorative images have empty quotes.
- Infographics or complex diagrams have downloadable descriptive text in an MS Word file.
- Properly structured pages and use of headings.
- This book is available in PDF and for eReaders in EPUB and MOBI formats.
- Use of interactive (H5P) content types that have WCAG 2.1 AA support.

PART I

GETTING STARTED

Photo of John Paul Foxe, a middle-aged white male with blue eyes and cropped light brown hair. He is wearing a navy blue button up shirt

Photo © Concordia University

Congratulations on your appointment as a Teaching Assistant (TA) at Concordia University!

My experience in teaching and learning dates back to my first appointment as a TA, while completing my Master's degree. I will never forget how nervous I was ahead of the first lab that I was leading. All these years later, I look back and realize now, that it was this experience that first inspired my love of teaching.

Your role as a TA is crucial to the success of our students. Your success is their success. In this section we will outline the **rights & responsibilities of your role** and basics to **prepare for the upcoming term** so that you are well equipped for your teaching journey. Our **inclusion and accessibility chapter** outlines the lens that we aim to apply to all of our teaching and learning work to welcome our diverse student body at Concordia.

Finally, I encourage you to work with the **various supports and contacts available to you** at the CTL, GradProSkills, your home department, and across the University. We are keen to help you to grow as a professional, so that you can give your students the best possible experience.

I wish you every success in this role and hope that this experience inspires you as much as it did me.

John Paul Foxe

Senior Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning.

Your role as a teaching assistant

Teaching assistants (TAs) are an integral part of the teaching community, often acting as a bridge between the students and the instructor.

Whether you are stepping into your first teaching assistant position or have been a TA in previous semesters, your experience in this role can extend beyond your time at Concordia. Teaching assistantships can help prepare you for a future teaching career in academia by practising clear and concise communication with students and assessment of student work. Teaching assistantships also help to develop transferable skills that are highly valued outside of academia. Leading labs, tutorials, or studios help develop facilitation skills, while the role generally provides an opportunity to develop leadership and interpersonal communication skills.

Photo by Yan Krukau via Pexels

In general, there are two different types of teaching assistant roles at Concordia: **Tutorial/ Studio/Lab Leader** and **Marker/Grader**. The main difference between the roles is the former can be responsible for teaching and grading, while the latter only focuses on grading. Although your role and responsibilities may vary greatly, there are several common and essential TA competencies. Teaching assistants should be able to:

- Exhibit respect and empathy for students
- Present information clearly
- Use effective discussion and questioning techniques
- Engage students with the learning materials by using **active learning** methods
- Facilitate student learning by conveying feedback effectively
- Construct valid and reliable assessments of student learning
- Provide fair evaluations
- Communicate and manage appropriate expectations for achievement in the course
- Conduct themselves according to high standards of professionalism and ethics

Essential TA competencies compiled from Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (2008), Prieto & Meyers (2001), and Schönwetter & Ellis (2009) via Fraser et al., (2017).

At the start of your role, it may be helpful to reflect on what prior experience you bring with you, what competencies or goals you'd like to work on during your position, and what you'd like to get out of this experience.

Rights and responsibilities

As an employee and student at the university, you are protected and guided by the **Code of Rights and Responsibilities,** which sets the standards of conduct for all members of Concordia. This applies to incidents that occur on campus, during an on or off campus university-sponsored activity or event, or during an activity or event that has a substantive link to the university. The Code also promotes equity, respect and diversity, and seeks to address behaviours such as discrimination, violence, and harassment.

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the Code for a complete list of behaviours.

Sexual violence

Any member of the University might be a witness to sexual violence or could be approached by someone wishing to disclose, report or complain about an incident of sexual violence. Any member of the University, especially those acting in supervisory and instructor capacities, who receives a disclosure alleging any form of Sexual Violence, has the responsibility to:

- consult the Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC), the Office of Rights and Responsibilities or Human Resources for confidential debriefing and advice on how to handle the incident that is disclosed; and
- refer survivors/victims to SARC.

Relationships and boundaries

Photo by Armin Rimoldi via Pexels

Becoming a teaching assistant may be the first time you are placed in a position of power over other students – your relationship to the students in your course is that of an instructor rather than a fellow student. You may spend a substantial amount of time working directly with students and have an impact on their academic success. When personal and professional relations become blurred, conflicts of interest can arise – placing both students and TAs in vulnerable positions. Giving some advance thought to where and how you will draw your professional boundaries will help you avoid these problems and will benefit your students in the long term.

If a personal relationship should develop (or be pre-existing), it is important to disclose this immediately to your supervising instructor to plan for and manage the conflict of interest. It is not recommended to engage in romantic or sexual relationships with students that fall within your responsibility as a TA. You read the University's **full guidelines on Consensual Romantic or Sexual Relationships here.**

As a primary point of contact to students, you may come across issues that are outside the scope of your role. You can be empathetic to students, but never try to provide advice or become involved. If you are ever made aware of such issues, refer the student(s) to the **appropriate resource on campus** or speak to your instructor.

Preparing for the term

When preparing for the term ahead, there are two crucial elements that will help you succeed: the course outline and meeting with your instructor.

The course outline

The course outline or syllabus is a road map to understanding the structure and deliverables of the course and the instructor's approach. It may contain key information including:

- The time and location of the class
- The learning outcomes of the course
- The materials that the course instructor will be using to support student learning (readings, slides, videos)
- The types and weighting of the assessments the instructor will be using
- The deadlines for assessment submission
- The course instructor's policies on submission of late assignments and class attendance or participation

When you receive a copy of the course outline, it is advisable to use it to plan your time during the semester. Consider placing important deadlines for the course into your calendar, if you use one, and checking to see if you have any scheduling conflicts with other obligations that you might resolve early in the semester.

Questions to ask your instructor

Photo by WOCintech via Unsplash

It is crucial to meet with the course instructor at the earliest possible opportunity to lay the foundation for a good working relationship moving forward. Meeting with the course instructor can help you both get on the same page about essential topics including the duties associated with your contract, grading expectations, and the learning objectives of the course. You are usually only allotted one hour for meetings and administrative matters, so it's best to review the course outline and prepare all your questions in advance of the meeting.

Important things to discuss in that meeting include:

Tutorial/studio/lab leaders

- Whether you will be required to keep up with class readings
- Whether you will be required to show up to, or lead, any class sessions tutorials, studios, or labs.
- Expectations for communication (frequency, method, time-sensitive or urgent matters)\
- Whether you will be required to hold office hours

- Confirming hours for the contract and how the instructor wants to be keep notified of your hours worked
- How to handle conflicts in classroom discussions
- If and where you should post any content on Moodle for students to access.

Markers/graders

- Expectations for how many hours you should spend grading.
  Note: Marking time is often allocated on a 'per student' basis. It is important to know how much time you should be spending per student on each assignment so it adds up to the allotted time you have been awarded in your contract. For example, if you are allotted 1 hour per student, and you are responsible for marking four assignments, a rough guide would be 15 minutes per assignment per student.
- Expectations for when grading should be completed after each assignment is submitted
- Whether you will be using a grading rubric to mark assessments
- Instructor's policy on grading, late work, suspected plagiarism or misuse of GenAI
- If and how you will post final grades. For example, the instructor may want it in a spreadsheet for them to review and post themselves, or they may require you to post it directly on Moodle.

Inclusion and accessibility

At Concordia, we have students from over 150 different countries. These countries represent diverse racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural experiences. Student diversity is a reality in every classroom across all disciplines. From sexuality to gender to class and ability, inclusive and accessible pedagogical practices welcome and respect this diversity without requiring instructors and TAs to be experts in every aspect of diversity.

Inclusive pedagogy

Inclusion is an important principle in teaching and learning. At its core, inclusion means acknowledging and honouring the reality that every student has a distinct background and experience (Hogan & Sathy, 2022).

Inclusive **pedagogy** is about:

1. **Course design,** which is about the design of the course, including its activities, materials, and assignments
2. **Classroom environment**, which is about establishing and sustaining the dynamics and culture of the learning space
3. **Course delivery**, which is about teaching and presenting course content

These principles can apply to your role as a TA in various ways. For example, course design principles include adapting teaching materials and methods to accommodate different learning preferences. Classroom environment principles include tutorial discussions where students use digital tools, such as student response systems, to facilitate participation. When it comes to course delivery principles, you could use examples to explain concepts and enhance students' comprehension of the material.

Applying an inclusive lens to your role as a TA can help answer questions such as:

- What role can a TA have in supporting students?
- What strategies can a TA use to create an inclusive learning environment?
- In what ways does the role of a TA differ from that of a an instructor in promoting inclusion for students?

Learn more

To read more on this, consult our guidebook: **Demystifying inclusive pedagogy.**

Accessibility

Many students with disabilities or illnesses may not be diagnosed or registered with the **Access Centre for Students with Disabilities** (ACSD). **Universal Design for Learning strategies** focus on designing all elements of a course with learner variability in mind from the start to reduce the number of retroactive adjustments needed throughout the term. Introducing flexibility from the start allows students to have greater control of their learning.

In cases where elements of a course may not have been designed with learner variability, the ACSD will inform instructors when a student needs accommodations – you can ask the instructor if you need to know as well. Examples may include but are not limited to assignment extensions, attendance and participation accommodations, note-taking accommodations, and accommodations regarding audio recordings of lectures.

If you are unsure how to accommodate a student, speak directly with them. Ask what would work for them or what previous instructors have done in the past to accommodate them. Do not discuss any private health concerns or diagnoses, focus on what the student needs to succeed.

Learn more

If you often create digital course materials such as PDF handouts or lecture slides, you may be interested in this self-guided learning series on **Making Learning Inclusive & Accessible** (modules range from 10 to 30 minutes).

Indispensable contacts

These departments on campus can help you in your role as a TA:

Your instructor and department contacts

These are your first point of contact as they may have specific department-related knowledge and resources to guide you to. Your department may have additional training and handbooks such as safety training for laboratories, or how to lead a critique for studio arts.

When you first meet with your instructor, you should establish the best form of communication (method & frequency) to check-in about challenges or questions related to your role.

Centre for Teaching and Learning and GradProSkills

The **Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)** collaborates with **GradProSkills (GPS)** to provide training directly related to your job duties. GPS offers professional development workshops and resources to optimize your graduate school experience and help you achieve your professional, personal and academic goals. Their offerings on teaching, career development, and communication can support you as a TA. Sessions include:

TA Orientation

This 2-hour TA Orientation, typically scheduled in the first few weeks of the semester, is designed to orient you as you start your new role as TA. The orientation is hosted by GPS and the CTL, and is open to all disciplines.
Breakout session topics include:

- Building an inclusive classroom environment
- Grading and feedback
- Preparing to teach

TA training sessions

Throughout the semester, the CTL also offers longer sessions on specific topics such as navigating challenges in the classroom, preparing to teach, and grading & feedback. These sessions range from 60 to 90 minutes long.

Graduate seminar on university teaching

This intensive seminar on university teaching prepares graduate students for an academic teaching career. The estimated time commitment is 35 hours of instruction plus 15 to 20 hours for readings and assignments. An online section is also offered with synchronous contact hours and asynchronous activities on Moodle. **Visit the CTL webpage for more information on the GSUT.**

See the **GradProSkills Teaching page** for the latest calendar of upcoming training.

CREW Union

CREW is the labour union for all Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Research Assistants (RAs) at Concordia. To learn more about CREW and to get in touch, **visit their website.**

Library Services

For support related to your TA duties, you might be interested in the **Ask a Librarian service**. You may access this live chat service online or stop by the Ask Us! Desk (Webster) or the Reference desk (Vanier) for in-person help.

The library also has **Subject guides** available – the subject librarians create and maintain discipline-specific guides where you can find recommended databases, article search tools, how-to guides, websites, and more.

Human Resources

For any questions related to your contract that your department cannot address, **contact Human Resources by email.**

IITS

Instructional and Information Technology Services (IITS) provides technical support in-person, online, and over the phone to students, staff, and faculty at Concordia. You can receive help by **submitting a ticket** online.

If you will be leading a tutorial or lab and need a key to access the classroom console, your instructor will need to fill out a request form on your behalf. It's important that they do this as soon as possible so you can pick up your key before the first scheduled class.

IITS also provides training on how to use Teams, Moodle, and the Student Information System (SIS), also known as My Faculty Centre. **Consult their training page** for upcoming workshops.

Office of Rights and Responsibilities

If you feel that a member of the Concordia community has engaged in harassment, discrimination, physical violence or threats, contact the **Office of Rights & Responsibilities** to discuss a situation you have encountered or witnessed.

For sexual violence or misconduct complaints, please contact the **Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)** as a first step.

Test your knowledge

Read the example scenarios in the H5P activity below and select the most appropriate department to contact in each case.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://opentextbooks.concordia.ca/ta-guide/?p=40#h5p-2

PART II

LEADING A TUTORIAL OR LAB

Photo by ThisisEngineering via Unsplash

TAs play a crucial role in enhancing students' understanding of course concepts. Tutorials, laboratories, and studios are typically smaller class sections that allow for more personalized and one-on-one help. Leading one of these classes can you give a first look into all of the elements of teaching – in and outside of the classroom.

In this section, you will find the information you need if you are leading a class this semester. First, we will examine **what qualities make for good teaching**. Next, we'll go through a few **checklists to make sure you have everything you need before class.** Then, we'll dive into the elements of **planning for a lesson**, covering the variety of classes that may be taught at Concordia with sample lesson plans and instructional activities. We'll then offer prompts to help you **reflect after class** to improve on your teaching, and finally talk about what **building a positive classroom environment** looks like with community guidelines and what to do when conflicts arise.

What makes for good teaching

As a TA, this might be your first foray into teaching. Fortunately, good teaching is a skill that you can build and improve on and not just something you inherently *have* or have to *figure out*. Chickering & Gamson (1987) offer seven research-backed principles of good teaching practices for undergraduate classes:

Encourage contact between students and educators

Photo by ThisisEngineering via Unsplash

Establishing **rapport** and an open line of communication is the biggest factor in building student motivation and engagement in the classroom. As you develop your teaching practice, look towards adopting a **student-centred teaching approach**.

If feasible in your context, you may want to try the following:

- Get to know your students (their names, goals in/out of the course, and experience of the course). See also Building a positive classroom environment.
- Personalize feedback on student assessments
- Share your experiences with the course material

- Check in with students you know are struggling with the content or are falling behind

Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.

We often think about the relationship between the instructor and students, but cannot forget about the relationship *between students*. Examples to establish and foster this relationship can include:

- Encourage multiple ways of discussion besides large class discussions, which may only centre a few voices. Consider smaller group discussions, asynchronous discussion forums on **Moodle**, or learning groups throughout the term.
- Facilitator small group work whenever possible.[1]

Encourage active learning

Photo by ThisisEngineering via Unsplash

1. Facilitating group work can be a challenge. Here are some tips from the University of Waterloo to help group work run more effectively.

Learning is not a spectator sport. Provide opportunities in and out of the classroom for students to interact with the content by discussing, questioning, reflecting and relating to their experiences.

Examples:

- Explore the different activities and communication tools available on Moodle to help you facilitate interaction between students and the content. For example, JazzQuiz on Moodle or 'Present' mode on Microsoft Forms allows you to conduct live and anonymous polling for students to check their knowledge.

Learn more

For more active learning strategies, consult our CTL **page on Active learning.**

Give prompt feedback

Examples:

- Give incremental feedback on drafts throughout a project, rather than all at the end. This can also take various forms rather than written feedback. For example, feedback can be provided verbally or through group discussions.
- See more tips for managing your workflow to give prompt feedback in the Grading & feedback section of this book.

Clarify time on task

Time on task means how much time something is estimated to take to complete. Give students a realistic expectation of time necessary to complete a specific task.

- Remember, you generally will complete work faster than students, as they may be learning the course topics for the first time. A good rule of thumb is to time how long it takes you to complete, and multiply it by three.
- You can use workload calculators such as the UOttawa workload estimator.
- Provide clear deadlines in your course outlines, assignment descriptions and on Moodle

(if applicable), and ensure they are consistent.
- Provide reminders before the deadline if the project is longer than a few weeks or during a busy time of the academic year.

Communicate high expectations

Expecting more will yield more – high expectations are important for everyone, including students who are typically considered 'under-achieving' or 'poorly prepared.' Good teaching includes finding the right balance between having high expectations and being understanding that students have various baselines and motivations for learning.

Examples:

- Provide rubrics for assignments ahead of time with clear & measurable objectives tied to a grading scale. More on developing a rubric here.
- Provide samples of previous good student work (ask the instructor for this)

Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

Good teaching recognizes that there is no one method of learning that fits all students. Flexibility in your teaching allows students to adapt the learning to what works best for them.

Examples:

- Learn more about your class and their needs by conducting an informal and anonymous survey at the start of the term.
- Make sure your course content on Moodle is accessible so that students can download them into a format that they need. You can use the Brickfield Accessibility toolkit file converter to more easily provide students with alternative file formats.

What do students say make a good teacher?

Results from a qualitative study by Cafarella (2021) in which university math students were asked what they thought the qualities of a good teacher were included:

- Learning our names and getting to know us and our struggles
- Being empathetic and caring about our success
- Using incorrect answers as a learning opportunity

- Trying to find different ways to explain or help us learn
- Interacting and asking questions while teaching
- Working on problems in class
- Being prepared for class

Preparing before class

Following are three checklists to help you prepare for teaching a class:

Materials

Ensure you have access to all the teaching materials you need to be successful

Examples of this could include a copy of the textbook(s) for the course, access to the Moodle page, the course pack or course reserves on **Moodle**, weekly slides or materials, etc.

If applicable, familiarize yourself with any course materials necessary to run any tutorials or labs that you are responsible for. You may wish to ask the instructor for a dedicated section on Moodle if you share documents in your class (ex. Slides, handouts, Moodle activities, solutions).

Get to know the learning space

Visit the room before the first day of class if possible and test the technology that you need (e.g., computer and projector).
If you need help setting up any technology in the room, reach out to **IITS.**

Think through any physical materials you may need

For example: dry-erase markers, adaptors for your laptop to connect to A/V, a timekeeper. For labs, ensure you are trained on the safety procedures and policies in your department.

Get to know your students

Review names

If your class list is fairly consistent, it is good practice to learn your students' names to foster a classroom community. You can pass out name cards and markers in the first class for everyone to write their names and pronouns. Name cards help everyone remember each other's names. You may also be able to download your class list through the SIS system on my Faculty Centre with photos.

Learn more

If you would like to learn more about the SIS system, **register for online training**.

Plan your lesson

Review the course outline

Make sure you understand the weekly schedule and bring any questions to the instructor. You want to have a good idea of what was covered in class by the instructor if your tutorial or lab follows their lecture.

This could include keeping up with the slides, materials posted on Moodle, attending the lecture if it's within your ability and time to do so). In some cases, your tutorial or lab will precede the lecture, in which you should check in with your instructor on how this should be handled.

Highlight the learning outcomes

The learning outcomes describe what learning goals students are intended to achieve after successfully completing the course. They are usually formulated as 'condition + verb + learning statement', as per this example, "By the end of this lesson/module, students should be able to describe the methods scientists use to explore and evaluate natural phenomena."

The outcomes should be measurable and observable. Plan for how you will be able to evaluate student progress and learning throughout the class. Usually, this is accomplished with a pre-assessment (i.e., what do the students already know?) and post-assessment (i.e., how do I know if students get it?).

Learn more

To learn more about learning outcomes and how to write them, explore our **Teaching Academy micro-module.**

Use instructional techniques & activities

There are many other ways to teach besides traditional lecturing. Research has shown that **active** and collaborative learning promote higher engagement and deeper learning in students (Deslauriers et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2014). Try to vary the engagement methods and configurations throughout your lesson. In the following chapter, we provide various sample lesson plans and instructional techniques to give you a sense of the flow and timing of a lesson.

Planning the lesson

Teaching an engaging and impactful class takes preparation and practice. While the specifics may vary based on your unique teaching style and type of class, every class has common stages requiring careful planning.

In this chapter, we'll cover the various types of classes you may lead as a TA, their purpose, and provide instructional techniques[1] and a sample lesson plan for you to reuse and adapt.

On this page...

General teaching tips

- Establish tips for **success** – this includes clarifying how students will be graded and assessed, and what participation means in your section: keep in mind varying levels of comfort with public speaking as you build the classroom culture.
- **Greet** your students as they arrive
- Share an **agenda** of the class's activities on the board
- Maintain **eye contact** when speaking, make sure to scan the room with your eyes.
- Speak clearly and project your **voice**[2] – some rooms come with a microphone if needed.

1. For more instructional strategies, **The K. Patricia Cross Teaching Academy** has an extensive library of resources with video explanations and a downloadable guide that work across disciplines. You can filter by activity type to find one that suits your class the best. These activities can be adapted to better suit your discipline, context and students.
2. Public speaking is a skill that needs to be developed and practiced, so don't worry if it doesn't come naturally at first! For more guidance you can consult these tips from Student Success Centre for Delivering an oral presentation or some courses offered by GradProSkills on Public speaking.

- **Move** around the room, especially when students are working on their own or in groups. Don't forget about those sitting in the back!
- Check for **understanding**, Ask students if they have any questions or challenges – they may not speak up at first. You can also try answering questions strategically so as to not provide the answer right away.

Tutorials

Tutorials are generally meant as a space for students to diver deeper into content presented earlier by the instructor and practice concepts. This is a great opportunity for formative feedback from peers and the TA to better understand the material and correct any faulty thinking. Although tutorials will run differently depending on your discipline, the most common tutorial types are: discussion-based, problem-solving, review and Q&A, and practice or studio tutorials.

Discussion-based tutorials

These tutorials focus on a deeper exploration of course content through discussions and debates.

A sample lesson plan for discussion-based tutorials

This lesson plan works for a class size of about 30-50 students, for class time of about 90 minutes.

Activity	Duration	Description
Welcome & admin	5 mins	Welcome students, share announcements, review class agenda including
Pre-assessment	5 minutes	Use the 3-2-1 technique to check students' understanding of the instructo the instructor's lecture, two things you found interesting, and one questio Post each pair's answers in a shared document.
Review	15 minutes	Review the 3-2-1 activity responses together. Answer questions or provide
Activity Part 1	30 minutes	Using the Jigsaw method, TA proposes five topics for groups to form as 'e the 3-2-1 activity. Students take 20 minutes to review their topic and prep
Activity Part 2	25 minutes	Continuation of Jigsaw method. Groups reconfigure to have one represen each other, presenting for about five minutes with time for a few questio
Post-assessment	Remaining time	'One-minute paper' – reflection question. Use Microsoft Forms. This can b give students time to set up, then set a timer for one minute for response

Download the sample discussion-based lesson plan as a Word document.

Preparation needed

Shared document for 3-2-1 activity responses, Microsoft Form for One-minute paper

Other instructional activities

You can replace the *Jigsaw* activity in the lesson plan above with other instructional activities such as:

- Support a statement
- Analytic teams
- Send a problem (use this for scenarios and arguments)

Problem-solving tutorials

These tutorials are common in math, science, business, and engineering and focus on problem-solving processes and quantitative/qualitative reasoning.

A sample lesson plan for problem-solving tutorials

This particular lesson is recommended for case studies and scenarios where multiple approaches to the problem are feasible.

Activity	Duration	Description
Welcome and admin	5 minutes	Welcome students, share announcements, review class agenda
Activity 1 – Structured Problem Solving	20 minutes	Present a problem that requires students to follow a sophisticat the students to follow. Wood's problem-solving model is a good outlined step.
Review	15 minutes	Review the Structured Problem-Solving responses together. An
Activity 2 – Send a Problem	30 minutes	Each group receives a different problem, discusses it, generates Activity 1, and records their best solution. Pass onto next group t remaining 5 minutes, the group receives their original problem
Post-assessment	Remaining time	Groups take turns reporting back to the whole class.

Download the sample problem-solving lesson plan as a Word document.

Preparation needed

10 problems with solutions, and explanations, diagrams, etc. to help support them. Shared document (print or digital) to record student solutions.

Other instructional activities

You can replace the *Structured problem-solving* or *Send a problem* activities with other instructional activities such as:

- Case studies
- Fishbowl

A sample lesson plan for problem-solving in math

This lesson plan is suitable for a problem-solving tutorial with mathematical equations for about 10-50 students for class time of 90 minutes. Please note that the time needed to solve different kinds of problems may vary and certain types of problems might require more practice and others. The lesson plan below gives approximate times, but you should adjust the times according to the problem type and the level of support needed by students. This lesson follows the *I do, we do, you do* model of teaching.

Activity	Duration	Description	C
Welcome and admin	5 mins	Welcome students, share announcements, review class agenda including learning outcomes, review the problem type and its importance or relevance in the field (i.e., why and when they will need to use it, including subsequent courses and future jobs).	W
TA demonstrates how to solve problem	10 mins	Work through a problem on the board or screen. As you do this, talk through each step and decision you make to solve the problem.	W ir
TA and students work together to solve a similar problem	15 -30 minutes	Work through another similar problem, but this time, at each decision point of the problem, ask the students to identify the next step and share their rationale. If students do not know, you could give them a choice, for example “Do we subtract or add X?” or ask a yes/no question: Do we subtract X? Tip: If you notice students need a little more help and guidance, do another problem as a class before moving on to the next step.	W (p
Students work together in pairs to solve a similar problem	15- 30 minutes	Provide students with one or two similar problems and allow them to work in pairs or groups of three to solve the problems. Before giving them any more problems, review the problems as a class. Circulate and check in on students as they are working on the problems and provide guidance as necessary.	G st
Students work on problems alone	Remaining time	Provide students with similar problems that they can work on in class and for homework. Walk through the solutions as a group for the first solution after you have provided enough time. Circulate and check in on students as they are working on these and provide individual guidance as necessary.	Ir

Download the sample problem-solving math equations lesson plan as a Word document.

Preparation needed

5-10 similar problems with solutions.

Review and Q&A tutorials

In these tutorials, students ask questions about the course content and assignments, review key course content in preparation for tests or exams, and consolidate their learning in the guiding presence of their instructor or TA.

A sample lesson plan for review or Q&A tutorials

This lesson plan is for a class of about 30-50 students, class time of 90 minutes.

Activity	Duration	Description
Welcome and admin	5 minutes	Welcome students, share announcements, review the class agenda includi learning outcomes, introduce or refresh the topic
Activity 1 – Note-taking Pairs	20 minutes	Students bring their individual notes for each module to review in Note-tak pairs. Student 1 summarizes one section while Student 2 listens, corrects, a adds information if needed. Students alternate roles until complete. Studer note areas needing clarification.
Review	20 minutes	TA answers questions or makes clarifications from Note-taking Pairs activit
Activity 2 – Invent the Quiz	30 minutes	Each group is assigned a section of the quiz and is responsible for creating test questions and a corresponding answer sheet. Groups submit these to
Post-assessment	Remaining time	TA evaluates the questions submitted and make necessary corrections. Aft TA shares the practice quiz and answer sheet.

Download the sample review/Q&A lesson plan as a Word document

Preparation needed

List of topics needing review, common questions and errors throughout the term or from previous terms, some post-class work assembling the practice quiz

Other instructional activities

You can replace the *Note-taking Pairs* or *Invent the Quiz* activities with other instructional activities such as:

- Think-Aloud Pairs Problem-Solving (TAPPPS)
- Test-taking teams

Practice tutorials/studios

These tutorials are common in the Arts and when students have time to work on practice work or assignments. TAs are generally responsible for providing demonstrations of technical skills, discussing conceptual projects and facilitating critiques.

A sample lesson plan for practice tutorials or studios

This lesson plan is for a class of about 30-50 students, class time of 90 minutes.

Activity	Duration	Description
Welcome and admin	5 minutes	Welcome students, share announcements, review the class agenda includi learning outcomes, introduce or refresh the topic
Activity 1 – Concept Mapping	10 minutes	Based on the lesson's central concept, the class discusses and drafts a concept map. First, TA demonstrates how to concept map. Students then brainstorm related concepts based on what they learned, identify and diagram concept links to add to the conceptual map.
Practice	40 minutes	Students begin individual work. TA walks around giving guidance and demonstrations to individual students or small groups.
Critique	Remaining time	Group students for small group critique. TA shares the list of guiding questions to use for each student's work and provides reminders on how to critique. Each student gets about five to seven minutes. TA walks around to help with critiques. [3]

Download the sample practice/studio lesson plan as a Word document.

Preparation needed

Physical or digital materials for concept mapping and demonstration.

Other instructional techniques

- Paper Seminar
- GradProSkills occasionally hosts workshops on facilitating critiques in the Arts

3. Small group critique can be a great alternative to a full class critique, which can heighten anxiety and lower attention span. Another alternative critique format is anonymous critique. Click here to read more on how to facilitate effective, yet sensitive critiques.

Laboratory classes

Laboratory classes (commonly known as labs) allow students to experience course concepts first-hand and provide an opportunity to test methods used in their discipline. Potential goals of lab classes include (from Committee, 1997):

- Apply concepts learned in class to new situations.
- Experience basic phenomena.
- Develop critical, quantitative thinking.
- Develop experimental and data analysis skills.
- Practice proper use of scientific apparatus.
- Practice estimating statistical errors and recognizing systematic errors.
- Develop reporting skills (written and oral).
- Practice collaborative problem-solving.
- Exercise curiosity and creativity by designing a procedure to test a hypothesis.
- Gain appreciation for the role of experimentation in science.
- Test important laws and rules.

A sample lesson plan for a lab class

This lesson plan is for a class of about 30-50 students, class time of 90 minutes.

Activity	*Duration*	*Description*
Welcome and admin	5 minutes	Welcome students, share announcements, review the class ag including learning outcomes, introduce or refresh the topic
Pre-assessment – Think-Pair-Share	5 minutes	TA provides a prompt for students to reflect on individually. Aft few minutes, students share their response with a partner. Optionally, student pairs can share with the whole class after.
Demonstration	20 minutes	TA demonstration of the lesson's topic, including any lab safety procedures and overview of the steps/tasks of the lab.
Practice	40 minutes	Students work in small groups. TA walks around and assists. Students to take notes throughout the lab (can use a techniqu as **Guided Notes**). TA gathers one to two small groups togethe answer questions and provide further demonstrations if neede
Post-assessment	Remaining time	Students submit reports to TA. TA provides feedback to the wh class on frequent occurrences observed.

Download the sample laboratory lesson plan as a Word document

Preparation needed

Prompt question, guided notes template, lab materials & procedures

Reflecting after class

Photo by Kenny Eliason via Unsplash

As you are developing your teaching practice, it is good practice to take time to write notes after each class you lead. The note-taking can help you identify strengths and areas for improvement. In your notes include:

- The class's level of understanding of the content and if anything needs to be reviewed next class
- Any unanswered questions for which you need to consult the instructor
- Reflect on the timing and delivery method of various activities, any areas for improvement to try next time (e.g., give students more time to work individually before gathering in groups)

The University of Waterloo has a page on **useful frameworks for reflection** that you might helpful to structure how you reflect on your teaching.

Building a positive classroom environment

In the classroom, TAs contribute to creating a positive learning environment through their various roles, including teaching, student assessment, and behaviour management. When thinking about the classroom environment, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that our students have different lived experiences and perceptions of the world.

Positive student relationships can have a significant positive impact on learning outcomes (Varma, 2016). Interactions, such as sharing perspectives, knowledge, and personalities, can cultivate empathy and build **rapport**. This enhances the ability of students to appreciate diverse perspectives and opinions. TAs play a unique role as support systems for student learning. They provide students with an opportunity to learn from someone familiar with the course content and with experience navigating the university.

On this page...

Hurtado and Carter (1997) highlighted the importance of belonging in shaping a student's academic and social experience in higher education. This includes how students view their relationships with peers, their self-comparisons, and their interactions with instructors. Positive interactions, such as receiving support from TAs, can have benefits for a student's sense of belonging as they navigate their university journey.

First, TAs can foster a positive environment by building relationships with their students. For example, a TA can learn the names, pronunciations and pronouns of their students (Hogan & Sathy, 2022), depending on class size. This builds trust and strengthens relationships with students by being attentive to who they are as individuals. TAs can promote respect and empathy by modelling these gestures, helping students develop social skills and emotional intelligence.

Large class sizes are common in university—but their size can overwhelm students, foster competition (Hanushek, 1996), and discourage asking for help. This might mean students feel unable to ask questions or participate in class. To create an inclusive environment, it is essential to normalize students asking questions. When students avoid asking questions out

of fear of judgment or criticism, they can fall behind their peers. TAs can encourage questions, thank students for their questions, and be responsive with help through email or one-on-one support. This shows students that confusion around course content is normal and that TAs are available to help.

It is crucial to avoid making comments that imply a concept is easy to understand. This can create a sense of competition and make students who don't understand feel like outliers (Tari & Annabi, 2018). It also places the blame on the student rather than considering other factors impacting comprehension, such as teaching style or topic complexity. Instead, TAs can humanize themselves by acknowledging the challenges of the content while emphasizing that it is possible to grasp with effort and support.

Community guidelines

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Community guidelines help to provide structure in the classroom and clarify expectations for how students will interact with you and their peers. The purpose of sharing the guidelines is to help build and inform community between students. You can use these as sample community guidelines when leading a class. This can be introduced in the first class and opened to students to suggest their own. When discussions become heated, remind students of your community guidelines.

- Use “I” statements when sharing in discussion
- Ask for clarification if you are confused or unsure
- Do not interrupt one another
- Challenge and discuss *ideas*, not your classmates
- When possible, reference course content or additional sources when sharing opinions
- Build on one another’s comments during discussions
- When speaking, be as specific as possible, avoiding generalizations

Heated, Offensive, and Tense (HOT) moments

Although it is challenging to predict what might lead to conflict between students, it is crucial to prepare for such situations. To effectively handle these moments, it is important to understand the different types of challenging situations that can arise. The HOT Moments framework, which categorizes these situations as **Heated, Offensive, and Tense**, can be a useful tool (Navigating Heated, Offensive, and Tense, n.d.).

- **Heated** moments often involve disruptive behaviour like yelling or accusations.
- **Offensive** moments, on the other hand, involve insulting statements directed at individuals or groups, such as inappropriate jokes.
- Lastly, **Tense** moments are more difficult to identify and often non-verbal, but might involve a sudden silence in the room or students hesitating to continue a discussion.

It is important to remember that your instructor can be a resource in navigating such situations. One proactive approach is to initiate a conversation on this topic early in the semester. **You can seek your instructor’s guidance** on how to handle these scenarios, their preferred level of involvement or information, and learn what support they can offer. Most instructors have invaluable experiences in managing classroom conflicts and can provide practical advice specific to the course.

Another approach to a HOT moment is to observe students interactions during your labs or tutorials. This can include identifying dynamics between students, such as how they communicate with each other. By doing so, you can gain insight into how students interact and identify any patterns or changes. It is advisable to maintain a record of these observations by taking notes on each session. This record can prove valuable if you need to discuss any concerns with your instructor.

It can be useful to reflect on your comfort around addressing HOT moments. Here is a set of questions to consider that may help shape your approach and response:

- What types of topics are you...

    - Most comfortable handling?
    - The least comfortable handling?
- How do I feel about the dynamics between my students right now?
- Have my students shown that they can handle complex topics together?
- When students bring up difficult topics, is your impulse to...
    - Stop your students from saying it?
    - Change your students' mind?
- Engage with your students?

You cannot control opinions, but you can filter them through respect and create a space safe enough for different views to be expressed.

Learn more

Naj Sumar, our Educational Developer specializing in Inclusive Pedagogies, developed a **series of micro-lectures to support you with dealing with challenging moments in the classroom.** This series of videos is based on the above HOT moments framework and goes into a spectrum of different HOT moments that can happen and strategies to address them.

We also host workshops on navigating challenges and building and inclusive classroom environment through **GradProSkills.**

Teaching sensitive topics

To anticipate potential sensitive or controversial moments, you can ask yourself certain questions.

- Are there any upcoming course content or topics that might be controversial?
- Was there any tension in the previous class that could carry over into the tutorial or lab?

Using these questions for reflection can help you plan how you might like to address this with students.

When teaching sensitive subjects, it is advisable to incorporate a high level of structure, such as an **organized lesson or tutorial plan**. This approach involves providing boundaries for discussions, predictability for students, and maintaining a timely schedule (Hogan & Sathy, 2022). For example, you can prepare discussion questions beforehand to limit the discussion topics, and present a timed agenda. Additionally, setting clear learning goals for con-

troversial topics can help structure and clarify what students are expected to gain from the discussion. This can prevent students from being distracted by the contentious nature of the topic and, instead, enable focused learning.

PART III

GRADING & FEEDBACK

As part of your role as TA, you may be responsible for assessing student work. Assessment is an integral part of learning as it provides feedback to the student on how they are doing.

Assessment can generally be classified into two types: formative and summative. When assessing student work, understanding the differences between formative and summative assessment can inform the level of feedback you provide. The table below compares these assessment types:

Criteria	**Formative Assessment**	**Summative Assessment**
When it occurs	During and throughout the course	Often at the end of the modu 'sum' of learning
Purpose	Provides information on how the student is doing relative to course expectations	Provides information on how mastered information (in rela learning outcomes)
Elements	Can involve descriptive feedback and opportunities to improve upon or re-submit work	Can be periodic in nature, su midterm and final
Grading	Often is not graded	Is graded for evaluative feedl
Examples	Tutorial activities (e.g., discussions, practice problems), participation activities, reading reflections, paper outlines and drafts, and proposals for future work	Final exams, final papers or l artistic works

In this section, we'll introduce **how to grade** including what rubrics and grading criteria are and how to assign grades. Next, we'll look at **how to write good feedback**. We'll then go over some tips on how to efficiently **manage your time while marking**. Finally we'll cover what **academic integrity and misuse of Generative AI** might look like and what to do when you suspect it while grading.

Grading

When it comes time to grade, it is important to know the approach that you will take. Typically your instructor or course coordinator will have a process established. This can include their approach to rubrics or grading criteria, assigning grades, and what to do when common issues arise such as grade review requests or when multiple TAs are marking in the same course. If not, you can consult this chapter to help guide you in your grading process.

On this page...

Rubrics and grading criteria

The best tool to calibrate grading using a set of criteria is a rubric or marking guide. Using a rubric helps to focus feedback and make grading as objective and consistent as possible, especially if there are multiple TAs assigned to a course. Before you start grading any assignment, we recommend you ask the course instructor if they have prepared a rubric.

A rubric specifies evaluation criteria to improve reliability or consistency when grading. Best practice is that the rubric is shared with students when they receive the assignment instructions to ensure transparency. It will also allow you to easily respond to student questions about their grades and justify your assessment decisions.

What if there's no rubric?

Although rubrics are becoming increasingly common for summative assessments in university-level coursework; not all instructors use them. To guide your grading and feedback in the absence of a rubric, the assignment description provided by the instructor and the learning outcomes of the assignment are your main points of reference. By cross-referencing the language used in both of these materials, you can start to formulate your own set of grading criteria or checklist.

Determining grading criteria

- **What are the requirements of the assignment** (i.e. specific parts to be included) and what specifically are you looking for when you grade the assignment? These will be aligned with the learning outcomes you are evaluating with the particular assessment. For example, if you are grading a traditional academic paper, you might be looking for: a good thesis, strength of arguments, use of supporting evidence, cohesion, etc.
- **What is the value for each grading criteria?** Will all components be weighted equally? (i.e. *Strength of the argument*, *Use of supporting evidence* might be valued at 5 points while the *Thesis* might be valued at 1 point). For example, *Writing* may be weighted heavily in a language-focused course, but weighted less in a course that is not.
- **What are the grading standards?** What separates an A from a B, or an excellent paper from a fair one? Can the instructor provide you with examples?

For more on rubrics, see our CTL assessment resource on **Developing rubrics.**

Practice exercise

Read through the sample essay assignment description for a Political Science course below and write **three criteria** that you would grade this assignment. You can cite phrases directly from the assignment description if you believe it to be relevant. Press 'check' to validate your answers and to read an explanation.

Thank you to Dr. Ceren Belge for sharing the sample assignment.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: ***https://opentextbooks.concordia.ca/ta-guide/?p=122#h5p-4***

Assigning a grade

Grading scale

When it comes time to assign a grade to the assessment, be sure to refer to your department's grading scale. The grading scale, or 'grading norms' is a number or grade value applied to various levels of achievement, ideally with descriptors for instructors and students to align their expectations. Grading scales often vary by department, so your instructor will usually provide you with the one to reference when grading.

Here is a sample grading system from the Theological studies department. Pay attention to the language that describes each grade value as an aid to help you differentiate between levels when grading:

Letter grade GPA	Description
A+ 4.3	**Outstanding.** The A+ in the grading system allows for truly outstanding work to be recognized. Normally achieved by a small number of students.
A 4.0	Excellent skills and great originality. **Superior** work in both content and presentation.
A- 3.7	**Excellent.** The student has an insightful grasp of the subject matter. Academic work demonstrates clear and persuasive argument. It is a well structured text that features solid introductory and concluding arguments. There are few presentation errors.
B+ 3.3	**Very Good** performance. Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques. Student has the ability to learn independently and to use relevant evidence to develop logically valid arguments. Some minor but noticeable errors in presentation may detract from the otherwise high quality of work.
B 3.0	A **good** grasp of the subject matter. The student's paper is clear and well structured. Minor components of an answer may be missing.
B- 2.7	Good level of knowledge. Has the ability to go beyond the simple reiteration of the material presented in class. Papers are articulate and **fulfill the course requirements.**
C+ 2.3	**Competent.** The student's work is competent and demonstrates an adequate understanding of the subject matter. Academic work of an acceptable quality. Ideas are presented in a style that is at least coherent and orderly. Presentation errors that affect the quality of the work are present.
C 2.0	Fairly competent. **Acceptable** level of knowledge. Papers need structuring. Student has some difficulty in clarifying his/her thoughts.
C- 1.7	**Satisfactory.** Command of only the basic concepts of knowledge. Student has obvious difficulty structuring and developing ideas.
D+ 1.3	**Marginal** performance. Superficial grasp of the subject matter. A sense of organization and development is often not demonstrated. Major components of a question may have been neglected. Difficulty in expressing ideas.
D 1.0	**Minimal** grasp of the material. Ideas are not clear to the reader.

D-	
0.5	**Deficient** in many of the objectives of the course. Important skills not attained.
F	
0	**Failure**: Basic concepts and principles not learned. Essential skills cannot be demonstrated.

Grading with points

Some disciplines may grade using a points-based system. For example, an assignment may have multiple problems where each problem is assigned a maximum point value. The final grade is calculated by adding the student's score on all criteria and dividing that by the total maximum point value. Weighting for different criteria or problems do not need to be determined.

This grading scheme is typically pre-determined by the instructor or course coordinator. You likely will need to align on when partial points (i.e. half marks) are assigned.

Problem	**Maximum points**
1	2
2	2
3	4
Total points = 10	

Learn more

The Centre for Teaching and Learning typically hosts a Grading & feedback workshop online every semester through GradProSkills. **To see a list of upcoming workshops, visit this page** and filter by 'teaching'.

Grading on Moodle

Marking guides or **rubrics** can be set up in Moodle to facilitate more efficient grading. Rubrics provide performance levels for each criterion, which can increase consistency and save time. Marking guides, on the other hand, allow you to create a reusable bank of feed-

back comments, which is also a time saver. It is also possible, when enabled, to provide audio feedback on assignments via the Poodll plugin. Another important thing to note is that Moodle allows you to download all submissions, in one click, for review offline and to upload annotated papers in a zip file.

Common challenges when grading

You want to ensure your grading is fair and consistent

The biggest tool to help your grading be fair and consistent is by using a rubric or marking criteria from the outset. You can also try to calibrate your grading with other TAs or the instructor if possible, grade one question or problem at a time, and set consistent time limits for your grading to avoid spending too much time on one issue or student.

You're having trouble assigning a grade to an assignment

When you have a question or notice an outlier while grading an assignment, it is helpful to make a quick note to yourself, either on paper or digitally. This record-keeping helps catch recurring questions and priority questions for the instructor (e.g., I noticed several students who took *xyz* approach to this assignment and that made it difficult to assign them a grade. How should we move forward with those?).

There are several TAs responsible for grading

Keeping a list of notes while grading also facilitates identifying potential issues and outliers *between* TAs. If there are many TAs or if you are sharing the grading responsibilities with the instructor, comparing these notes can help you collaboratively reach a decision that impacts all affected students fairly.

You receive a request from a student to review their grade

Occasionally, you may receive a request from a student to review a grade that was assigned to them. Typically, this is the instructor's responsibility but **be sure to consult with them in your initial meeting** about who should address the student's request.

Feedback

Feedback can play a powerful role in student learning. It can help students identify gaps in their knowledge or faulty thinking, and help them to improve analytic and other skills for future assignments. However, to be beneficial to students it needs to be effectively communicated. Use the following principles adapted from Wiggins (2012) to make your feedback as useful as possible to students .

Qualities of effective feedback

Specific

What is the problem that has been identified? How can it be remedied? If the work is good, why is it good?

Aligned with course outcomes/evaluation criteria

Focus on giving feedback that helps students better meet the learning outcomes of the course and the goal of the assignment.

Feedforward

If you are providing feedback on a draft or formative assessment, give specific feedback for improving it for a more polished piece. However, TAs typically grade final assignments and might not have opportunities to provide feedback on drafts. Therefore, when giving feedback on a final version, focus on what could be improved in future assignments.

Prioritized & balanced

Try not to overwhelm students with too much feedback (especially if it's critical). Prioritize the most important two or three elements. Make sure there is a balance of things to work on and things the student has done well.

Timely

Aim to provide feedback to students as soon as possible.

Mindful

Try to use positive language to strike a supportive tone.

Examples of ineffective vs. effective feedback

Instead of saying...	Try...	Why?
"Vague"	"Which research finding are you referring to here?" "Can you provide specific details to show what you mean here?"	Being more specific with the feedback, pointing out which areas are unclear and what can be done to remedy it.
"Confusing" or "???"	"I lost the thread of your argument. Why is this information important? How is it related to your argument?" "You missed X criteria in your paper, which is one of the main goals of this assignment. Be sure to read the assignment description and rubric thoroughly for the criteria next time, and don't hesitate to ask me questions along the way if you are unsure."	Striking a more positive tone, outline specifically which evaluation criteria the student has missed out on. Prioritize what's important. By mentioning future assignments, this feedback is feedforward so that the student has an opportunity to apply this feedback.
"Good job!"	"This excellent example moves your argument forward." "An apt metaphor that helped me understand your argument about this historical metaphor."	The student met the goals of the assignment, but might not know why. This is an opportunity to remind them of the intended learning outcomes they've achieved.

Samples of feedback taken from Clarkston & Barker, 2014.

Managing your time

Assessing coursework is likely what will take up most of your time as a TA. Knowing the course assignments, due dates, and weighting of assignments (all found in **the course outline**) will allow you to budget the time relative to the amount of grading you will have to do in your role. Ensure you monitor and track the amount of time you spend grading and alert your instructor early if you anticipate you will need more hours or less work so that you are able to fulfill your work within the allotted hours outlined in your contract.

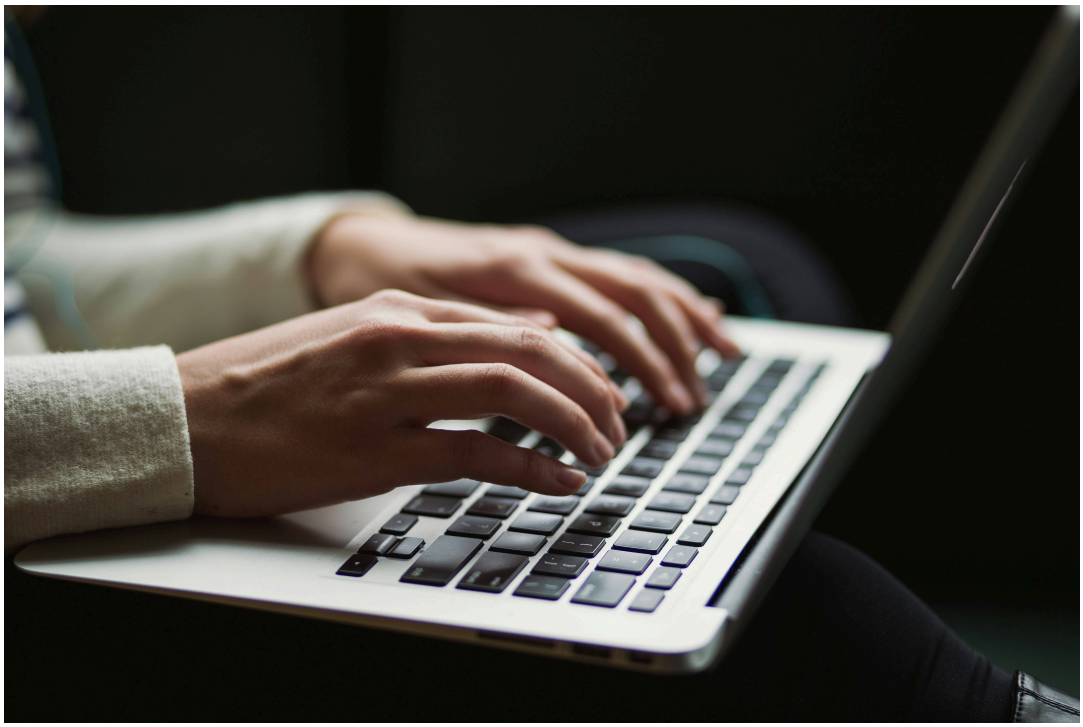

Photo by Kaitlyn Baker via Unsplash

Some tips to manage your hours include:

- Verify with your instructor if you have an allotted amount of time to spend on grading each student for the entire semester.
- Work with the instructor to schedule your grading time ahead of due dates.
- Be sure to take some time to re-read the assignment description, and if you can, read a few assignments *before* beginning to grade them to get a sense of the kinds of submissions students are likely to produce.
- Time how long it takes you to grade one assignment or section so that you have a better estimate of how long it will take to grade all the required assignments. Note: It

will take you longer to grade when just starting out, and you will get more efficient with more practice!

- Work in short, concentrated bursts (using, for example, the **pomodoro method**) to ensure you are being as efficient as possible with your time.
- Keep track of common feedback for the assignment that can be reused. This is something that the instructor would likely know.
- Try to prioritize your feedback if you find yourself writing a lot of comments for a specific student as too much feedback can overwhelm and demotivate them. Make sure your feedback is focused on aligning with the assignment or course's learning outcomes. See additional tips on our CTL assessment page here.

Sample grading workflow

An example grading workflow for a large class assignment could look like this.

1. Ask the instructor for *excellent*, *good*, *adequate* and *poor* examples before grading, or start to identify them on your own as references for your grading standards and criteria.
2. Skim a sample of submissions before diving into your grading. Looking at several at-a-glance will help you get a sense of common issues, calibrate your expectations, and determine your strategy.
3. Grade one question or topic at a time in one sitting, making sure to stay within the allotted time for each student. Focusing on one topic or criteria at a time can reduce **cognitive load**.
4. Set three goals for grading each student's work: highlighting what was done well, pointing out errors or areas of weakness that need correction, and providing ways to improve.
5. Indicate major issues with a specific example and explanation. Avoid over-marking and rewriting students' assignments.
6. Unless this is a language class, avoid correcting every grammar and punctuation mistake. Make a note of the major areas of concern and add a comment at the end of the paper. If you notice consistent issues that hinder clarity, a suggestion is to direct the student to writing support at the **Student Success Centre.**
7. Once you've reviewed all assignments, sort them into their corresponding groups (excellent, good, adequate, poor, or fail) to cross-check yourself and with other TAs, if applicable. This will help you stay consistent and decide on borderline cases.
8. Consult the instructor when you require help to determine a grade or write specific feedback.
9. Save your work the way you and your instructor have determined. Typically, the

instructor may review and publish the grades themselves.

Academic integrity and use of GenAI

This chapter explains what **plagiarism** or possible misuse of Generative AI (GenAI) could look like. Check with your instructor at the beginning of the term about their policy and process on academic offences and use of GenAI. If you suspect plagiarism, cheating, or misuse of GenAI in student work, notify the instructor and they will take appropriate action. As a TA, you are generally not responsible for directly reporting an academic offence to the **Academic Integrity office.**

Academic integrity

Concordia's Academic **Code of Conduct** defines academic integrity as "honesty, responsibility, and fairness in all aspects of academic life."

The most common academic offences are: plagiarism, unauthorized materials/devices during an exam, and collaborating with others on individual assignments.

As a TA, you can remind your students about this by defining it and discussing how to avoid it at the beginning of the course. The video below offers a deeper explanation.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: ***https://opentextbooks.concordia.ca/ta-guide/?p=108#oembed-1***

Academic Integrity – Student Advocacy Office video © Concordia University

You can also share resources such as the **Help & how-to guides** available online from the Library for students to cite research correctly to avoid plagiarism.

Turnitin

Your instructor might use Turnitin's OriginalityCheck tool when grading to check for possible plagiarism. This tool compares submitted work against a database of webpages, other student papers, and published scholarly work. This tool is embedded into Moodle and produces a report highlighting where the submitted work matches the other sources.

This video explains how the tool works.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: ***https://opentextbooks.concordia.ca/ta-guide/?p=108#oembed-2***

Turnitin OriginalityCheck Demo video © TurnitinAcademy

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Use of Generative artificial intelligence (or GenAI) such as stand-alone tools like ChatGPT and Midjourney or embedded in apps such as **Grammarly** or **Microsoft Co-pilot** is becoming increasingly common in and outside of the university.

Presently, there is no university-wide policy on the use of GenAI in the classroom. There are diverse teaching approaches and learning outcomes across the university that necessitate tailored, context-specific guidance for GenAI instead of university-wide policies.

AI Resources Hub

Concordia's Library has developed a new **AI Resources Hub** as a starting point to learn about AI resources across teaching, research and university operations. It includes resources on AI literacy and possible ethical uses for teaching and learning. You may be interested in consulting resources for both instructors and students.

The CTL has a set of guidelines to help faculty make informed decisions about its uses in their classes. It is up to the instructor to articulate their position on GenAI, including the constraints and misuse, clearly within the classroom, on Moodle sites, and in syllabi.

For example, an instructor may prohibit the use of any GenAI tool in a course focused heavily on developing students' writing skills. On the other hand, another course that is not focused on writing may allow tools such as Grammarly, but not ChatGPT. Another instructor may allow all use of GenAI if the process is shown, and the AI is cited properly.

Reminder

Every instructor and department's specific approach to policies and guidelines may vary. Be sure to check with **your instructor in your first meeting** on what to do in these scenarios.

PART IV

RESOURCES

The following are resources available to you for further professional development in your TA role, as well as supports for you and your students at Concordia.

Resources for TAs

- An insider's guide to being a teaching assistant by GradProSkills
- TA Orientation modules by UCalgary's Taylor Institute
- Teaching Academy: Making learning inclusive & accessible
- Graduate seminar in university teaching by CTL
- GradProSkills professional development workshops on teaching
- MyFacultyCentre SIS system training

Resources for students

- Student Success Centre learning resources
- Library Services
    - Library Research Skills Tutorial – Learn how to evaluate and analyze information sources, practice advanced searching, and improve your critical thinking skills with this online tutorial.
    - Help & How-to – Access citation style guides, tools to help you format and manage citations and avoid plagiarism, and information about copyright.
    - Workshops – Events at both campus libraries and online where students can learn how to use a variety of tools and technologies. There are sessions on research and citation skills, Zotero, 3D modelling, virtual reality, and more.
- Otsenhákta Student Centre
- Black Perspectives Office and Black Student Centre
- Access Centre for Students with Disabilities
- Equity Office
    - Their Active Listener service is meant to provide a supportive, non-judgemental space where Concordians (student staff, faculty) can feel listened to, understood and supported.

- Emergency & crisis resources
- Medical support services
- Counselling and psychological services
- Campus safety and prevention services

active learning

An approach to classroom teaching and learning that focusses on planning and guiding students through various activities that require learning by doing. Active learning activities include but are not limited to group work, discussions, presentations, and problem-solving.

cognitive load

the mental effort being used in your working memory to process information or complete a task

Decolonizing

Decolonization is "the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies and lands – it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous peoples' liberation"(Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005).

Eurocentric canons of thought

Refers to work that historically has prioritized and valorized European perspectives, often at the expense of non-European perspectives, thus perpetuating an uneven and narrow understanding of the world and its history.

Indigenizing

Indigenization is an ongoing process that involves integrating Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and practices into various aspects of the university, fostering a more respectful and collaborative relationship with Indigenous communities.

Moodle

The online learning management system used at Concordia. Typically, lecture slides, discussion forums, and assignments are posted here.

pedagogy

The approaches and activities of teaching.

plagiarism

The presentation of another's work as one's own or without proper acknowledgement.

pomodoro method

A time management technique designed to help break down larger tasks into smaller chunks — such as alternating 25-minute focused increments with five-minute breaks in between. Typically, after four rounds of work and break, you take a longer 15-30 minute break.

positionality

Positionality refers to where one is located in relation to their various social identities (gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, geographical location etc.)— the combination of these identities and their intersections shape how we understand and engage with the world, including our knowledges, perspectives, and teaching practices. As individuals and as instructors, we occupy multiple identities that are fluid and dialogical in nature, contextually situated, and continuously amended and reproduced (Alcoff, 1988).

rapport

A relationship built between people or groups that is based on mutual trust and understanding.

reciprocity

Reciprocity is a characteristic of a relationship in which both parties can mutually benefit in a way that they value.

student-centred teaching approach

It can also be referred to as 'learner-centred' teaching or pedagogy. This educational approach prioritizes the varied needs and interests of the learner and encourages them to take a more active role in the learning process through interactive, experiential and collaborative techniques.

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Versioning history

This page provides a record of edits and changes made to this book since its initial publication. If the change is minor, the version number increases by 0.1. If the edits involve substantial updates, the version number increases to the next full number. Due to the guide's continuous updating, the addition or removal of a resource is not recorded on this page.

Version	Date	Change	Affected web page(s)
1.0	August 2024	Original publication	N/A
1.1	January 2026	Updating pages with more information and links to new Concordia-specific resources	Building a positive classroom environment, Grading, Feedback, Managing your time & Academic integrity and use of GenAI