

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

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The demands on a teaching assistant may vary from one professor and course to another; however, the workload should not exceed 20 hours per week on average and should normally range between 10 and 12 hours per week, unless there is an exam scheduled. Here is an approximate outline of a 50% teaching assistant's workload in a lower division course during a typical week:

Conduct discussion sections	4 hours
Hold office hours	4 hours
Prepare for sections and office hours	2 hours
Correspond with students	2 hours
Meet with instructor	½ hour
Maintain records	½ hour

A more detailed description of these and other duties and responsibilities is provided below.

Meet with the instructors of the courses in which you will assist. Do this BEFORE the first lecture. Discuss office hours, syllabi, duties, etc. It is recommended that you set up a weekly meeting time with your instructor. You will find that everything runs more smoothly if you meet with the instructor on a weekly basis, if even for just a couple of minutes.

Conduct discussion sections. Here are some general guidelines for conducting successful discussion sections:

a) Sections provide a chance for students to ask questions and get feedback, which is not easily done in a large lecture. Generally, a TA is expected to go over homework and exam problems with students. This is an opportunity to demonstrate concrete applications of principles covered in class. The focus should be on the ideas behind the problems, with less emphasis on details of calculations and mechanical procedures. Encourage students to think about the methods they use, advantages of alternative methods, ways to check their answers, and the effect on a problem of changing the conditions.

b) Make sure the students can hear you clearly. Ask the class for quiet if necessary. Your presentations on the board should be neat and orderly. This is hard to judge near the board, so occasionally step back to get the students' perspective. Make frequent eye contact with the students.

c) Maximize student input. Ask the students what they like and dislike, to help you determine what is useful to them. Encourage questions—ask some of your own if students don't! Getting students to participate and do problems at the board is also encouraged. Although efficiency may be sacrificed, the students will learn from each other's mistakes. They will become more involved and less likely to simply copy down what you put on the board without understanding it. Furthermore, they will learn how to explain their reasoning clearly, using proper mathematical language.

d) If the first lecture of the quarter is on a Friday, sections do not meet on the previous Thursday; similarly, if the first lecture is on a Wednesday, sections do not meet on the previous Tuesday. If the first lecture is a Monday, ask the instructor whether sections should meet that week.

Make arrangements to cover absences. Being absent from your duties as a TA is only justified in the case of a math-related activity (such as presenting a paper at a meeting), or a family emergency. Your students depend on the relationship they have with you as their TA and expect that you will be available for them throughout the quarter. In the event that you are unable to conduct your discussion (or computer lab) sections, it is *your* responsibility to notify the instructor and arrange for another TA to cover your sections. If you will miss office hours, you should reschedule them, but try to avoid this because it can be difficult for students to keep track of. If you are going to leave town, you should notify Maureen Gorman in the department chair's office, who keeps track of faculty and TA absences.

Meet regularly with the instructor. As mentioned above, it is advisable to meet weekly with the instructor. These meetings should be brief; they often last less than 15 minutes. Regular meetings help you and the instructor to stay in touch and resolve problems promptly. Try to set up a regular meeting time with the instructor at the beginning of the quarter. As a minimum, you should stay in regular contact with the instructor via email.

Attend the instructor's lectures, if asked. Some instructors may ask you to attend lectures. Attending the lecture once per week should suffice for lower division courses, although it may be advisable to attend more often in an advanced upper division course since doing so could save on preparation time. It is useful to attend lectures occasionally in any case, since doing so allows you to see the instructor's style and perspective on the course material.

Prepare thoroughly for office hours and section meetings. Get the homework problems as soon as possible from the instructor. Be sure you can do all of them ahead of time, using the methods and notation presented in class and in the textbook. The textbooks for many classes, including the calculus sequences, have instructor solution manuals available; you may check these out at the Front Desk.

Hold office hours. You should allow a minimum of one (1) hour per lower-division section and two (2) hours per upper-division section. For Math 18 and 20D TAs, an hour in the MATLAB tutor lab can replace an office hour. Do not schedule office hours during the lecture. Consult the instructor to ensure that the instructor's hours do not conflict with yours, in order that students have a wide choice of hours to seek help. Some students, for example, have jobs and cannot attend morning office hours. Overflow rooms are available when office hours become too crowded. You might choose to hold extra office hours on exam weeks. You may also reserve a classroom through the Front Desk for review sessions.

Prepare homework and exam solutions. Many instructors like to have homework and exam solutions available on the web or at Soft Reserves. Make sure photocopied solutions are clear and legible. Be aware that pencil and certain pen colors do not photocopy well. **Homework solution sets for a selection of problems should be provided to the undergraduate Grader for the course, if an undergraduate Grader is assigned. Not all courses will have undergraduate Graders assigned.**

Keep records. Keep all the records for the students in your sections, even if the class has a Grader for homework. Do a careful job, following the instructor's procedures closely. You can get a roster of enrolled students from the front desk, and keep the grades in a spreadsheet that all TAs, graders, and the instructor can access. If your course is using TritonEd, you can store grades there, and students will be able to access them. It is advisable always to keep a backup copy of the gradebook. If your course has a Grader, promptly leave homework assignments in an envelope in the Grader's mailbox so it can be returned quickly. Even if Graders record homework or quiz scores, you are responsible for the records, so be diligent with double-checking. It is advisable to retain these records for one year after the course ends. This practice will prove valuable in the event a grade is appealed or a student asks for a letter of recommendation after completing the course. University policy requires that unclaimed examination papers be kept for one quarter, but homeworks and quizzes can be discarded after final grades have been submitted.

Proctor exams. Proofread exams for mistakes. Know whether students are allowed to use notes or a calculator during an exam. Arrive early at the exam location and make sure the students are seated with spaces between them. Normally you may answer questions during an exam to clarify the meaning of the problems but not to assist students in solving them. Watch out for cheating! Ask the instructor what specific procedures you should follow if you suspect cheating. Tell the instructor if you feel that you need the help of additional proctors in a large class. The Front Desk can help with such arrangements. *Note: Proctoring exams is one of your professional responsibilities as a TA. This means that if you are unable to proctor a particular exam, it is your responsibility to (1) notify the instructor well in advance, preferably by the 2nd week of classes, and (2) find a replacement.*

Grade. In a large course, some exams may require up to 20 hours to grade. Consult the instructor for guidelines on how exams should be graded. Work from your own (or the instructor's) solutions and design a tentative grading scale for each problem. It is extremely important to grade consistently from one student to another. **In some upper division courses, you may also be asked to grade homework. If your class has Graders, you should make sure that their grading is done in an effective and timely manner.**

Confidentiality. Federal and State laws and University policy provide important safeguards for maintaining the confidentiality of student records. As a TA, you are responsible for protecting the confidentiality of students' work. Consequently, students should be informed that homework and examinations can only be picked up from their TA during posted office hours and will never be left in hallways for students to pick up. Neither may students' scores or grades be posted in public places unless names are coded so that individual students cannot be identified. Posting grades using student ID numbers is not permitted. TAs are expected not to discuss individual students' academic work with persons other than the faculty member and other TAs teaching the course.

Interaction with instructor. Look for areas in which you can contribute to the class and offer your help when needed without waiting for the instructor to provide directions. As has been mentioned above, meet with the instructor weekly (or at least periodically) throughout the quarter and always stay in email contact. Ensure that the instructor knows how to contact you if you must leave town for a few days.

Interaction with students. Take a personal interest in your students. Not only can you provide valuable feedback for the instructor on students' understanding of the course material, but often you can be more helpful to them than the instructor because you have a more recent experience of what it is like to be in the students' shoes. You will likely spend a couple of hours per week responding to student emails and inquiries.

Final Exams. At the end of the quarter you will have to grade final exams and possibly compute weighted total scores on all course assignments for every student. Do an extremely careful job as the instructor will take your figures for granted when assigning letter grades. Many instructors will expect statistical information such as mean scores and distributions. You may also be asked for input in deciding the grades since you will know many of the students better than the instructor. You are expected to be constantly available to the instructor for consultation until final grades are turned in (usually Monday or Tuesday during the week after final exams). Even if the instructor gives you permission to leave town earlier, stay in contact until the instructor confirms that all desired data from you has been received. Confirmation is important: There have been incidents where the TA emailed a file and then left town, but the file was never received.

Evaluation. Department policy stipulates that the instructor of every course you TA complete an evaluation of your performance at the conclusion of every quarter. These are kept permanently in your student file for future reference by Department faculty and administration. Instructors are expected to comment on your strengths and weaknesses as a TA, and to say whether they would accept you as a TA again. Faculty are encouraged to visit your sections to assist them in providing these evaluations.

Training. Every first-time graduate TA is required to attend the department's training program run by the Faculty TA Training Advisor and the graduate student Senior TA. This program consists of six meetings held over the academic year as well as observations of your sections by the Senior TA.

Resources. You are encouraged to consult with the Senior TA (<http://www.math.ucsd.edu/~seniorta/>), Faculty TA Training Advisor, Graduate Vice Chair, other TAs, and/or the Center for Teaching Development (<http://www-ctd.ucsd.edu/>) for help, advice, or assistance in resolving problems or conflicts that may arise in your job as a TA. The department cares about your success as a TA!

John Eggers (Fall 2013)
TA Training Faculty Advisor