

TOP TEN TO-DOS FOR NEW GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

By Erik Arthun

1. Contact the instructor for the class you will be teaching, and set up a time for an orientation meeting. Having a clear understanding of what is expected of you will make for a smooth transition into the semester.
2. Contact former Graduate Teaching Assistants for the class you will be teaching. These students may have valuable input concerning your responsibilities as a GTA, and will often have answers to many of your questions or concerns.
3. Allow yourself 60 minutes of preparation time every day before class, and stick to it. Arriving at class unprepared adversely affects your students
4. Learn the names of as many of the students in your class as possible: take pictures, make a seating chart, etc. Knowing the names of your students is an important first step in the development of a productive student-teacher relationship.
5. Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of the class and list these on the board to be answered during the hour.
6. Set up frequent office hours (at least 1-2 hours per week), and maintain them throughout the semester. Give students your email in case they can't make your office hours. Organize and schedule study groups, tutoring and exam review sessions, and remind your students often about these educational resources. Expect increased interest and attendance right before an exam. Give sample test questions and sample test question answers. Being accessible to your students is an important part of providing quality education.
7. Model the behavior you would like to see from your students. If you want your students to be on time to class, and to come prepared, it is important that you come prepared and on time. You will help to set the tone for appropriate behavior in your classroom. It is also important to discuss your expectations of appropriate behavior, and if necessary remind the class of your expectations if those expectations are not being met.
8. Determine the curriculum of the students in your class. Is this class a requirement? Are the students in your class preparing for a career in this field? Knowing why your students are enrolled in your class will enable you to cater to their specific needs and give them the best educational experience possible.
9. Develop grading rubrics and use them when you are grading. Consider giving your students sample grading rubrics. Giving students a clear understanding of the quality of work expected of them will greatly reduce their anxiety concerning their assignments and grades. In addition, developing clear guidelines concerning student performance will enable you to assign grades fairly and consistently throughout the semester.
10. Consider developing a short mid-semester teaching evaluation to give to your students. Gathering student feedback in the middle of the semester will help you determine both your strong points and areas in need of improvement, allowing time during the semester for you to make changes and improve your teaching.

