

For TAs: Building a Successful TA Experience and Effective Partnership with Faculty



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RUTGERS-NEW BRUNSWICK
Institute for Teaching, Innovation,
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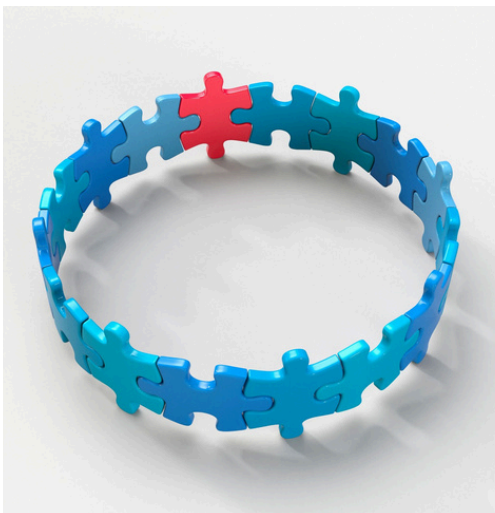
Introduction

As a graduate teaching assistant (TA), you are an essential partner in supporting teaching and learning at Rutgers. Depending on your specific TA assignment, your roles will range from a grader, recitation/discussion section leader, lab facilitator, to an independent instructor of record. This resource is designed for TAs who work with a faculty supervisor (often playing the role of a lead instructor) and/or a teaching team.

Establishing a strong partnership with your lead instructor becomes a key component of a successful TA experience as well as your professional growth. A healthy partnership is a two-way street in which all parties involved mutually benefit each other and grow together. Just like you, your lead instructor will likely balance multiple professional roles that extend beyond teaching, such as research and service work.

It is therefore important to understand their broad range of commitments in order to align your teaching support with their teaching. Clear communication, shared expectations and roles,

and a system of accountability help ensure that teaching responsibilities are carried out collaboratively as a team (Buskist et al., 2012; Gehringer, 2009; Marbouti et al., 2013; Richards et al., 2012).



Read more for practical guidelines on working effectively with faculty and developing confidence in your own teaching practice.

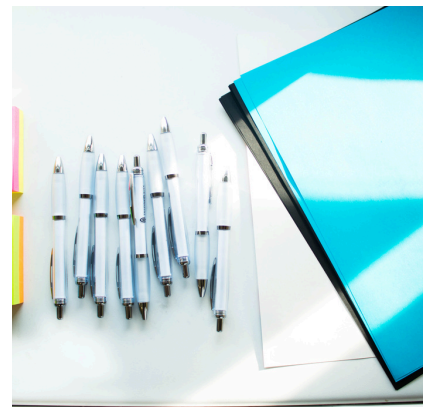
Before the Semester

1. Initiate communication. Reach out to the lead instructor early to request a meeting to discuss course expectations and your responsibilities.

2. Clarify roles and policies. Confirm your responsibilities as a TA (e.g., grading, holding office hours, leading recitation/discussion section, facilitating lab sections, etc.) and ask about important course policies on grading, attendance, academic integrity, accommodations, and communication with students. Also be familiar with relevant campus resources that you might need to refer undergraduate students to when they need additional support (e.g., [Learning Centers](#), [Writing Centers](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Office of Disability Services](#), etc.).

3. Familiarize yourself with course materials. Review the syllabus, assignments, and key deadlines.

4. Understand the contractual requirements for TAs. For example, TAs who are doctoral students are typically restricted to no more than 15 hours a week for their TAship. If international TAs want to take on additional paid part-time roles on campus, they cannot work for more than 5 hours a week in addition to their 15-hour TA appointment. You can find the union contract for teaching and graduate assistants on the [Rutgers AAUP-AFT website](#). Also consult your department/program chair or the graduate program director to learn about any existing onboarding norms or procedures that you should follow as a new TA.



During the Semester

1. Communicate regularly. Be proactive and schedule regular check-ins with the lead instructor and/or teaching team. If there are any ongoing issues (e.g., student concerns, grading discrepancies, grading disputes, etc.), consult the lead instructor promptly.

2. Be reliable and responsible for assigned tasks. Follow through on your tasks and manage time effectively. If you foresee any challenges in completing tasks on time, transparently share those challenges with the lead instructor and seek support.

3. Seek feedback and share feedback. Feedback-sharing strengthens communication and collaboration with the lead instructor and/or the teaching team. Ask the lead instructor and teaching team members for their input on your grading, lab facilitation, recitation/discussion sections, and other TA duties. Request a teaching observation which is often a great avenue for getting constructive feedback on your teaching practices. Also, if you notice areas for further improvement in the course, based on your interactions with students, ask the lead instructor what would be the best way to share your comments or suggestions. Because you are often the first line of contact with students, you have valuable insights into how students are experiencing the course and engaging with course content.

4. Be aware of the lead instructor's responsibilities. Just like you, your lead instructor will likely balance multiple professional roles that extend beyond teaching, such as research and service work. Understanding their broad range of commitments will help you engage in clear and timely communication with your lead instructor.

Respect established norms for contacting your lead instructor, such as the agreed-upon communication channels and response times, and plan ahead when you need feedback or decisions.

5. Engage in teaching development. This can help improve your sense of self-efficacy and preparedness to teach (Richards et al., 2012). Connect with peers beyond your program or department to find inspiration and a community of support. The following are some campus units that provide teaching support and teaching development opportunities.

- [Institute for Teaching, Innovation, and Inclusive Pedagogy \(TIIP\)](#)
- [Office of Teaching Evaluation and Research \(OTEAR\)](#)
- [University Online Educational Services \(UOES\)](#)
- [Learning Centers](#)

Document all of your teaching development activities (e.g., workshops attended, reflections on your teaching, teaching observations, sample evaluations, etc.) so that you can include them in your future teaching portfolio, often requested in applications for academic positions. Even if you are not planning on pursuing a career in academia, the skills that you develop from teaching (e.g., communication, collaboration, project management, flexibility, adaptability, etc.) are often important skills transferable to other career paths.



End of the Semester

1. Reflect on what worked well and what could be improved for future iterations of the course. If your lead instructor invites feedback, meet with them to share your reflections.

2. Document accomplishments. Save relevant teaching materials and professional development activities for your teaching portfolio that could serve well as evidence of effective teaching in your future job applications. Keep a folder where you organize these materials and information, which can become valuable job market documents and a source of encouragement throughout your PhD program. The following lists some example materials and activities worth documenting:

- Teaching materials you have developed or taught
- Reflections on your teaching
- Teaching development activities (workshops, conferences, seminars, etc.)
- Course evaluations (university-issued evaluation as well as personal feedback surveys you administered)

3. Express appreciation and acknowledge the lead instructor's mentorship and guidance. Also celebrate the teaching team's collaborative effort to coordinate the course you taught together. Wrapping up the semester well helps build lasting professional relationships.



If You Encounter Limited Guidance or Support

There might be times when guidance or support from the lead instructor seems limited. Navigating these situations is important for maintaining your well-being and successfully carrying out your responsibilities.

1. Follow up. Send follow-up emails if your initial communication goes unanswered. Request a meeting to check in on expectations and responsibilities. In all of your interactions, maintain courtesy and respect.

2. Seek guidance from your program/department. If communication remains difficult, reach out to your graduate program director or department/program chair for further support.

3. Keep regular notes and documentation. To ensure clarity and accountability, keep notes during meetings, send follow-up emails after meetings, and update shared documents as needed.

4. Connect with other campus resources. As appropriate and relevant, consult teaching support units (e.g., [TIIP](#), [SAS Teaching Team](#), [UOES](#), etc.) and other support units (e.g., [International Student and Scholar Services](#), [Offices of the Dean of Students](#), etc.), refer to the department/program handbook, or connect with your [graduate student union](#). Remember that you are not alone and there is help available.

Many challenges can be avoided by staying in close communication with your lead instructor throughout the semester. Regular check-ins help ensure that expectations are clear and allow small concerns to be addressed before they become larger issues. Be proactive and prompt in raising questions or potential red flags, such as workload concerns, unclear responsibilities, or challenges with students. Maintaining open communication and inviting feedback (e.g., through teaching observations) supports your growth and helps build a strong working relationship with faculty.

TIIP is here to support your teaching development. Don't hesitate to reach out to us at GradTeaching@rutgers.edu for a one-on-one consultation or visit <https://teaching.rutgers.edu> to learn more about our programs and services.



References

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