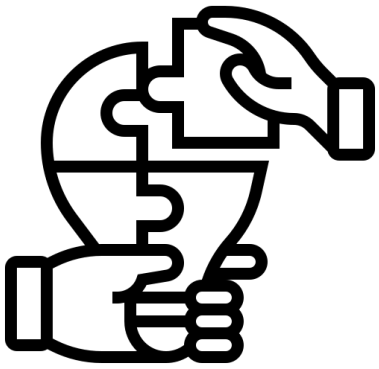
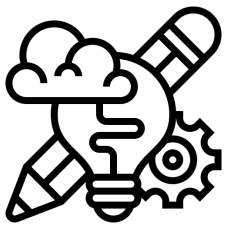
Teaching with TAs

Summer Institute



August 2025



Positive/Effective Strategies in TA/Faculty Relationship

Concrete approaches and actions that contributed to a positive Faculty-TA relationship
instructor was very organized. provided clear rubrics, instructions, deadlines for grades etc.
Directly asking TAs what they wanted to get out of the experience and taking active steps to help them meet those goals / expectations
Weekly informal check-in meetings with lab TAs to see what was working, if they had any suggestions, and to check on their workload/wellbeing
Implementing concrete changes to the course based on TA input — TAs felt comfortable to share their experiences and took great pride in having a direct impact on the course for the betterment of the student experience
[Insert your approach or action here]
Clear expectations, open communication, more like a colleague to colleague relationship where the parties learn from each other rather than a boss employee relationship.
Instructor asked for feedback
Clear expectations and rubrics. Regular TA meetings with the lab TAs
[Insert your approach or action here]
Providing professional development opportunities for TAs
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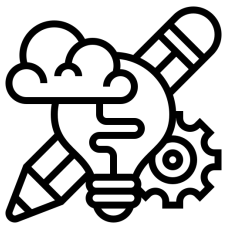

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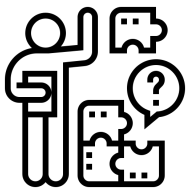


Addressing Challenges

Instructions

Introduce yourself (all in 5 minutes)

Round 1, 7 minutes, as a group:
1. Read the challenge
2. In column 1, post a strategy to address the challenge after it has happened.
3. Don't write anything in the column on the right

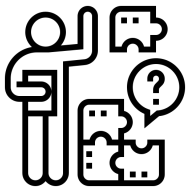
Round 2, 7 minutes, as a group:
1. Rotate to other challenges on other slides
2. Write down strategies to prevent this challenge before it happens

ROOM 1

Challenge - Time and Professionalism:

It is early November, your TA has informed you that he only has 12 hours of work **time** remaining. The final exam, and subsequent marking, is looming. Throughout the term, you've noticed that he set frequent, impromptu, virtual office hours and he shares tidbits of personal information about students that they've shared with him during office hours. He seems to have formed strong relationships with the students, but you wonder if the personal connections have come at the expense of his professional duties. The TA is in his final term at UBC and has already secured a job that will start in January.

Strategies to **address**	Strategies to **prevent**
• Ask the TA to use the remaining 12 hours for final exam marking • Have an open, respectful conversation about the need to maintain student personal information confidential as it is a TA's duty to uphold professional integrity • Ask the TA to submit the TA tracking hours document to check where their hours are have been used throughout the semester	• Asking the TAs to update their hours in a shared document weekly - if the hours are more than the expected hours, call for a meeting and discuss potential issues • Fill out the TA allocation of hours form before the term and discuss it with the TA before the term starts — more clear and granular breakdown of hours to clarify expectations • Clearly outlining expectations and "standards" for TA professionalism in their roles during the first meeting • Schedule a couple of meetings during the term to check in with the TAs regarding their hours (are they working more than expected already?) — also an opportunity to reinforce expectations around professionalism and address potential concerns before the end of the Term



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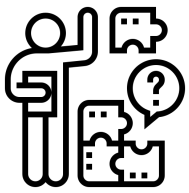
ROOM 2

Challenge - Marking:

Three students have come to you complaining about their **marks** on writing assignments. They claim that friends in the same class, but with a different TA, consistently receive significantly higher marks, even though they feel their reports are of similar quality. They think their TA takes marks off on minor points while the other TA gives instructive feedback about the same mistake without taking away points. You know that this TA is meticulous in his own work and insinuates that his TA colleagues are too lax.

Strategies to **address**	Strategies to **prevent**
• Ensure that the instructor has met with the TAs to go over the rubric and marked some assignments together to ensure consistency in marking. • If the students are persistent, offer to re-grade their assignment with the clear expectation that their marks could either go up, or down based on your marking.	• Assign each question to one TA — or dividing up parts of the written assignment • Set clear rubric and discuss the rubric with the TAs • Go through grading with the TAs to set examples • Explain the questions and the solutions to the TAs beforehand, so they are aware of possible different approaches to solving a problem • Planning ahead of time to have all TAs grade a few of the same papers so you can establish more consistent guidelines and clarify expectations (inter-rater reliability — "calibration" of grading) • Provide examples of assignments from previous years with detailed grading to demonstrate examples of standards for "exceptional" vs "poor" • Having the TAs mark different student assignments each time so there is no perception of one student getting an "easy" vs "hard" marker • Use Gradescope (https://www.gradescope.ca/)



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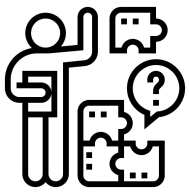
ROOM 3

Challenge - Language:

After three weeks of tutorial sessions, your TA confides in you that she feels that she is ineffective in leading the tutorials because students do not seem to be able to understand her English. She has tried speaking slowly and writing main points down, but the students just stare blankly at her when she tries to explain concepts. She's feeling overwhelmed and insecure about being able to do this role as well as she wants to. She is an international first year grad student who is away from home for the first time in her life. You've noticed that she seems to keep mostly to herself and never talks about participating in any activities or events.

Strategies to **address**	Strategies to **prevent**
● Verify that the TA's perception is accurate by surveying the students or having the instructor attend one of the tutorials and speaking with students afterward ● Schedule more regular meetings with all TAs so everyone can discuss their challenges — create a sense of community among the TAs to help this individual feel more comfortable ● Refer the TA to some resources (e.g., workshops through CTLT) to help them gain confidence, knowledge, and ideas for improving their teaching ● Pair the TA with a more experienced TA so they can learn on the job, get some first-hand feedback, etc. ● Schedule a 1-on-1 meeting with the TA to better understand their concerns and needs	● Humanize the TA to the students during class, ask them to be accepting, respectful, and welcoming. Ask the students to put themselves in the shoes of the TA: moving to a completely new country, not having friends/family, having to teach in a second language, etc. ● Proactively introduce the TA to other members of the university community, including international students, other TAs, and events that can help them socialize.



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ROOM 4

Challenge - TA Responsibilities:

You supervise four TAs who conduct lab sessions with first year students. One of the TAs comes to you upset regarding the behaviour of a fellow TA. She states that during labs, the other TA is basically "furniture" – he sits on a stool and works on his own coursework. He makes a big deal out of being interrupted and students have stopped approaching him for help, and turn to the other three TAs instead. In this lab, students are assigned to specific TA groups. The complaining TA feels she's doing her job and his too.

Strategies to **address**	Strategies to **prevent**
● Attend the lab and observe how all of the TAs are interacting — your presence alone might indirectly create some behavioural changes ● Reflect on whether you have clearly outlined and communicated YOUR expectations for the TAs ● Change the way that the TA responsibilities are divided to increase accountability (e.g., task-based rather than student-based groups) ● Schedule 1-on-1 meeting with TA to determine what other factors might be contributing to this behaviour and what you can do to support them moving forward	● Set clear expectations beforehand ● Open communication with all TAs together, and then individual communication to understand TA goals and motivates for their job. ● Set-up feedback loops ahead of time so that TAs and the instructor can talk about what's been happening in labs and troubleshoot potential conflicts that arise

Developing an Effective Working Relationship

On your own, jot down ideas that your like to implement to foster an effective teaching team.

Build Trust, what do you need to know to build trust?

- [insert what you need]
- [insert what you need]

How may you find what your TAs need?

- [insert your approach]

What does **effective communication** look like in your teaching team?

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What about your TAs?

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How may you **manage your time**?

What **support** do they need?

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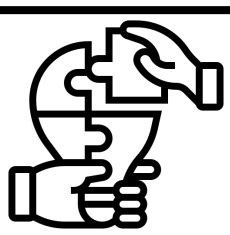
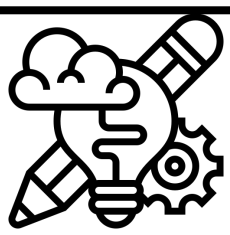
	Icons made by Eucalyp from www.flaticon.com
	Icons made by Eucalyp from www.flaticon.com
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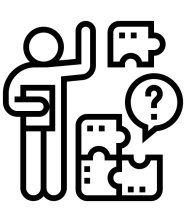	Icons made by Eucalyp from www.flaticon.com
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