UNC
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO
Graduate School

Handbook for Graduate Assistants, Graduate Part-time Instructors, and Graduate Teaching Assistants

2024-2025

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Introduction to the Handbook

The Graduate School at UNC recognizes and values the varied roles that teaching assistants and graduate assistants have in the overall mission of the university. You may, in any given day, be a classroom instructor, a student, a researcher, a mentor, a grader, a planner, and a representative of your discipline. Your assistantship may require you to have an out-front role as an instructor of record, lab assistant, or recitation facilitator, where you must know the content you're teaching, as well as the university policies that apply to every instructor and student. In other cases, your role may be more limited to assisting a faculty member, grading papers, or conducting research. It is not unusual for TAs and GAs to find balancing their many roles somewhat challenging.

Another challenge faced by graduate assistants and teaching assistants is grasping the limits to their rights and roles within the university. While graduate assistants and teaching assistants normally receive a set stipend for their contributions to academic or student affairs units on campus, they are not regular university employees. Those holding assistantships are students with agreements issued by departments, schools, and administrative units to perform specific duties as determined by those units. If a graduate or teaching assistant is unable or refuses to perform appropriate tasks assigned by the unit, then the student will be required to forfeit the assistantship. Teaching assistants may feel as if they are faculty because they plan lessons, teach classes, and grade assignments. They also keep office hours and deal with student concerns. Both tenure-track and agreement faculty have many responsibilities related to academic advising, research advising, research, course or program coordination, and service to the university as part of their agreements. Department/school faculty, in consultation with college Deans, determine what courses to teach and the best delivery mode of those courses. While they may request the input of graduate teaching assistants out of courtesy, the authority to set curriculum, course schedules, and delivery methods lies with the faculty. This authority is one expression of the university's shared-governance model.

Much of the information in this handbook about the learning and teaching processes, university policies, students' rights and responsibilities, instructors' rights and responsibilities, and university services is general and could apply to most any teaching assistant. There is also information about TA/GA agreements that you may find answers important questions about stipends, tuition waivers, work expectations, minimum grade point average, and more.

One of the more general principles you will find here is the idea that, in your teaching, you should always clearly define objectives—for both your students and yourself—oriented towards specific goals which you can share with your students.

For the sake of transparency and acknowledgement of sources, the Graduate School acknowledges that portions of the content and format of this handbook are adapted with permission from the University of Pittsburg's Center for Teaching and Learning.

Purposes and Goals of UNC

The University of Northern Colorado is committed to the following purposes and goals. To prepare a well-educated citizenry whose understanding of issues enables them to be contributing members of a rapidly changing, technologically advance, diverse society.

To prepare undergraduate students

1. Students will acquire a solid foundation of general knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.
2. Students will develop a variety of competencies in critical thinking, communication, problem-solving and current technology.
3. Students will develop an appreciation for diversity, citizenship, artistic expression, and a positive, healthy lifestyle through educational,
4. cultural, social, and recreational programs.
5. Students will develop a life-long commitment to scholarship and service.
6. Students will acquire depth of knowledge in a specialized scholarly discipline.
7. Students will acquire the knowledge and skills that prepare them for careers and/or advanced scholarly work.
8. Students will master methods of inquiry to acquire deeper understanding of their discipline.
9. Students will demonstrate knowledge of professional standards and practice.

To prepare graduate students in specialized fields of study

1. Students will acquire an appreciation for and ability to work in an increasingly diverse population.
2. Students will engage in scholarly activity, research, and creative endeavors to advance the knowledge and practices of the discipline.
3. Students will acquire advanced knowledge and skills consistent with the professional preparation and standards of the discipline.
4. Students will develop a commitment to scholarship and life-long learning.
5. Students will develop those competencies essential to assuming leadership positions in their professional fields.

As you plan for your classes or labs, you might ask whether your goals for your students match those of the university. How does what and how you teach map on to the outcomes for students in that course, a specific major, and with university outcomes as a whole?

It is also important to consider your personal and professional goals, especially when it comes to your role as a teaching assistant. This period of your graduate study is important to your professional development. As a teaching assistant, you may develop skills in teaching, communication, collaboration, classroom management, time management, research, group facilitation, evaluation of work, and even conflict resolution. Such skills will make you more competitive on the job market or help you advance in your current career.

This handbook is designed to assist your growth as a teacher and communicator. It is a resource to help you understand the basic points of your agreement, responsibilities, and rights. You will find links to policies you must know and understand, and the university offices that offer support with understanding disability services, student concerns, and Title IX investigations.

Your Assistantship: Understanding Your Agreement

Terms and Conditions of Assistantship Awards

Notice of Appointment

All newly appointed and re-appointed assistants usually receive a letter of appointment that specifies the appointment title, stipend amount, tuition and partial fee waiver information, effective dates of service, the supervising official in the program or department, and the full-time equivalence (FTE) of the appointment. Hiring schools/departments often send an offer letter to the student. Please note that if there is any discrepancy in language between the offer letter and the GA, TA, or GPI agreement, the agreement or this handbook takes precedence. While many academic units would like to offer students multi-year assistantships, all university-funded assistantship positions are dependent upon yearly university budget allocations.

Graduate Assistantships

There are four types of assistantships available to graduate students: **Graduate Assistant, Graduate Research Assistant, Graduate Teaching Assistant** and **Graduate Part-time Instructor of Record** (definitions of each are listed below). Each of these types of assistantships might provide a partial or full tuition waiver and a stipend. There are some stipend-only assistantships.

Applications for assistantships are available through your department. The deadline for submitting assistantship applications varies for each department. Contact your department early in the spring semester **before** the academic year in which you wish to be considered for a position. For information on specific positions in your program or college, contact your department chair or college dean.

Graduate Part-time Instructor:

A UNC graduate student enrolled in 3 or more credits who meets HLC requirements as an Instructor of Record for undergraduate courses without direct faculty supervision. The school/department must keep a record of the student's qualifications to serve as an instructor of record.

Graduate Teaching Assistant:

A student enrolled in 3 to 10 graduate credit hours in a UNC graduate program who is hired as the instructor of record with faculty supervision for an undergraduate course(s). The school/department must keep a record of supervision arrangements.

OR

A student enrolled in 3 to 10 graduate credit hours in a UNC graduate program who is hired to assist faculty with instructional support but who is not the Instructor of Record.

Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA): A student enrolled in 3 to 10 graduate credit hours in a UNC graduate program who is performing administrative duties and/or assigned program-related duties, which may include instructional support, but who is not the Instructor of Record.

Graduate Research Assistant (GRA): A full-time student enrolled in a UNC graduate program who is assigned to an individual faculty member or a group of faculty members for the express purpose of assisting in defined aspects of a research project.

Other terms you need to know

Instructor of Record: The individual responsible for all aspects of course instruction, evaluation of student work, and submission of student grades.

Full-time Equivalent (FTE): A value from 0 to 1.00 that expresses the level of an appointment, e.g., .25 is quarter time, .50 is half-time and 1.00 is full-time.

Equated Teaching Load: Teaching loads are expressed as credits per semester, where a full-load equals 15 credits. Although credits are typically derived from actual formal teaching assignments, credits may also be granted for assigned duties that are outside the formal course, e.g., laboratory supervision and leading discussion groups. These additional duties may be included in determining the teaching load. When load includes credits from both formally assigned classes and from related instructional duties, the load is considered an equated teaching load.

GPI, GTA, GAA, GRA Appointment Policies

Eligibility Requirement

To be eligible to hold an appointment as a GPI (instructor of record without supervision), GTA-A (instructor of record with supervision), GTA-B, GAA or GRA, a student must meet the following requirements:

1. The student must be admitted to a graduate degree program at UNC while maintaining good academic standing at UNC (at least a 3.0 grade point average) and not on academic probation. Students admitted with a lower than 3.0 GPA and academic provisions normally should not be hired in assistantship positions until they earn at least a 3.0 GPA or their academic provisions are met. If a hiring unit has outstanding reasons for hiring a student admitted with a low GPA, the hiring unit should discuss those reasons with the Graduate School. In cases where an

exception is given, the hiring unit will be responsible for monitoring the student's academic progress over the semester.

2. Any student with an assistantship must attend class, attempt assignments, and otherwise engage in all aspects of their degree program. If a student stops attending classes, withdraws from their courses (either officially or through nonattendance), and disengages from responsibilities of being a graduate student, then the individual cannot continue as a GA, GRA, TA, or GPI. A student who stops attending or withdraws from courses before at least 12 weeks into the semester could be billed for their tuition costs.

3. To be eligible for a tuition waiver or stipend, a student must maintain graduate status (enroll in 3-10 graduate credit hours per semester) during the period of the appointment. The graduate school will not pay for undergraduate credit hours. Students enrolled for dissertation hours only will be allowed to hold an assistantship for a maximum of two (2) semesters provided they are enrolled for a minimum of three (3) hours of dissertation each semester. To request an exception to this policy, the hiring unit must contact the Graduate School and then submit a petition for exception.

In general, the Graduate School strongly recommends that schools/departments limit the semesters that students serve in GPI, GTA, or GA positions to:

Masters students – not more than 4 semesters

Doctoral students (including Masters en route to Ph.D.) – not more than 8 semesters

Verification of Employment Eligibility

Beginning assistants must complete:

- an I-9 form (within three working days) to verify eligibility for employment
- W4 form,
- Direct Deposit form
- and Affirmation of Legal Work Status

A Social Security number is also required.
International students must have F-1 visas on file with the University before they may begin working in their assistantship positions. Any questions regarding visa requirements should be directed to the Center for International Education.

Agreement Procedures

1. After allocation of funds to the colleges, college leadership will allot assistantship budgets to graduate programs. GPI, GTA, GAA and GRA agreements should be

initiated by the supervising unit, usually assisted by a graduate support specialist or HR specialist. The agreement must indicate the dates of service, type and program area of appointment (GPI, GTA-A, GTA-B, GAA or GRA), salary, base salary, number of credits for tuition/fee waiver, funding FOAP, position description and basis for evaluation, and eligibility for tuition assistance.

2. The agreement will be sent to the student for his or her signature. The student will be notified that the signed agreement must be returned within two weeks or by the date specified on the agreement, or the offer will be withdrawn. The hiring unit should work with the college's HR Specialist. The student needs to inform the Financial Aid Office of the offer, and that the offer may be considered by these offices in determining other financial assistance awards.

Term of Appointment

1. Some Graduate Assistantships are available all semesters: Fall, Spring, and Summer (fiscal year).

2. Students who receive an assistantship during any semester (Fall, Spring, or Summer), and work at least half-time (.20 FTE), typically receive tuition waiver and stipend. However, stipend-only agreements may be offered by hiring units.

3. Assistantship can be by:

A. Semester

- Fall Semester (agreement dates are two weeks prior to the start of Fall semester to mid-December)
- Spring semester (first week In January to first week in May)
- Summer (a full assistantship is from mid-May to June 30 and July 1 to mid-August) but stipend paid June and July only.

B. Academic Year

Academic year (AY) agreement mid-August to mid-May or 34 weeks. Students on AY agreements work 17 weeks in each of the fall and spring terms. The student must report no later than the week prior to the start of the term (fall and spring).

C. Academic Year + Summer Agreement

- Fall, Spring, and Summer (mid-May to June 30) or
- Summer (July 1 to mid-August), and Fall and Spring

D. Fiscal Year

Fiscal year (FY) agreement: July 1 – June 30 student's schedule follows the UNC calendar, including working during spring, fall and winter break.

Assistantship stipends are subject to federal and state income tax. The student may be required to provide the University with other information necessary to allow prompt payment of your stipend.

Compensation (Stipends) and Hours

1. The University has established a standard base stipend schedule setting a minimum level of pay for all GPI/GTA/GAA/GRA, one at the master's level (student does not have a master's degree, does not have at least 30 hours of graduate work, or is not enrolled in a doctoral program) and one at the doctoral level.

2. Tuition assistance is typically based on a per credit hour basis. The Graduate School will pay tuition for 3-10 credit hours per semester, depending on the number of hours per week specified in the agreement. Any credit hours taken over 10 hour-limit will be the responsibility of the student. Academic schools and departments have some flexibility in the number of tuition waiver credits they offer in a student's agreement. Departments may also choose whether to offer resident or non-resident tuition waiver. If a non-resident student receives a tuition waiver at the resident rate, then the student is responsible for paying the remaining tuition. Students should read their agreements carefully and reach out to their program with any questions about tuition waiver, fee waiver, or stipend **BEFORE** signing the agreement.

3. GPI/GTA/GAA/GRA appointments are based on 17 weeks per semester of assistantship award. The typical standard is:

- 1 week prior to the start of classes
- 15-week semester
- 1 week after the conclusion of classes

Summer is based on 13 weeks to include:

- 1 week prior to the summer session
- 11 weeks of the summer session
- 1 week after the conclusion of the summer session.

Stipend is calculated based on minimum GTA-A/GTA-B/GAA/GRA stipends and by degree levels. However, in some cases, administrative units may be allowed to hire doctoral students in assistantships budgeted for Masters-level stipend.

4. Stipends are paid via direct deposit.

5. Students may hold a single appointment or combination of appointments. In either case, the total number of work hours may **not** exceed 20 hours a week for any semester.

Course Load and Tuition Waivers

As an assistantship recipient, you may be eligible to receive a tuition and partial student fee waiver for qualifying course work if the tuition waiver is specified in your agreement. The tuition and partial fee waivers are based on the number of **graduate (**3-10) credit hours noted in your agreement by the hiring unit.

- GTA -A/GTA-B/GAA/GRA appointments of 16 – 20 hours a week during a semester **may** receive tuition and partial fee waiver as specified in the student's agreement, usually 10 credits or less.
  Example: A FT graduate student enrolls in 10 and has a agreement specifying that 10 credits are covered by the tuition and partial fee waiver tuition. Remaining fees for graduate credit hours in excess of 10 credits is the responsibility of the student.

- GPI/GTA/GAA/GRA appointed 8 – 15 hours a week **may** receive up to 5 credits.
  Example: A HT graduate assistant who enrolls in 3 graduate credits would receive a tuition and partial fee waiver for 3 credits; enrollment in 6 credits results in tuition and partial fee waiver of 5 credits; and enrollment in 10 credits would result in 5 credits of tuition and partial fee waiver.

- those appointed for 3 – 7 hours a week are usually **not** eligible for tuition assistance during that semester, unless the hiring department has the approval of the Graduate School and includes tuition waiver credit information in the agreement. In cases where the Graduate School approves tuition waiver, it is normally limited to 3 credits.

- Consistent with federal financial aid guidelines, the tuition and partial fee waiver provided by this agreement is for coursework required by the student's degree and/or plan of study. Because graduate students often require flexibility to enroll in a course not required by the degree plan, the tuition and partial waiver will cover one 3-credit hour course per academic year so long as the student has not exceeded the number of credits covered by the agreement.

- Please note that the hiring school or department may offer, and students may enter stipend-only agreements.

What's not covered by the waivers:

- Tuition and fees for graduate credit hours in excess of 10 credits for full-time Assistants
- Tuition and fees for graduate credit hours in excess of 5 credits for half-time Assistants
- The cost of any undergraduate credits taken by the graduate student.
- The cost of health insurance, technology, library fees, course fees, and student capital fees.
- Graduate student study abroad.
- Tuition and fees for audited courses. Courses taken on an audit basis do not count toward meeting the minimum course load. If a graduate student chooses to audit a course or to change registration from credit to audit on a course, then the costs of that course is the student's responsibility. If the change is not caught until the end of the semester, the tuition waiver will be adjusted and the balance for the audited course will be the student's responsibility.
- Courses not required for the student's degree, with the exception of one 3-credit hour course per academic year agreement, as long as the student hasn't exceeded the number of credits covered by the agreement.

Min/Max Course Load

Assistants must enroll and remain enrolled throughout a regular semester for a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 10 graduate credit hours.

Residency

Units may budget assistantship positions that pay non-resident tuition waiver. Eligible domestic students can receive non-resident tuition **for their first year of an assistantship agreement only**. For subsequent years, **only in-state tuition assistance** will be given. If student receiving tuition assistance fails to change residency status with the university **prior to the second ye**ar of the student's assistantship agreement, then the **student will be responsible** for paying the difference between resident and non-resident tuition. The Registrar's website has information on the process of changing residency, including the necessary steps and forms.

Hours and Weeks of Agreement

Students on semester or AY agreements are expected to report for work one week before the beginning of classes each semester and continue working through the week after the semester ends (last day of classes). The semester for GPIs/TAs begins one week before the start of classes and ends on the Wednesday after finals week, when grades are submitted. A student who is the instructor of record for a course will be in breach of their agreement responsibilities if they fail to submit semester course grades. Failing to submit grades will result in termination of an assistantship agreement. Units may require students to attend additional training for their positions prior to the beginning of the agreement period.

If an office needs a student to work beyond this normal timeframe (with the exception of pre-semester training), then the alternative schedule should be negotiated with the student. For example, the student's agreement could be for a longer period of weeks, with the dates specified in the agreement, and additional stipend provided. Alternatively, the unit could establish the total number of hours a student is expected to work over the semester (e.g., 18 hours per week for 17 weeks = 306 hours per semester). If the number of weeks is increased, then the hours worked per week would be decreased (16 hours per week for 19 weeks).

Fiscal year (FY) agreements are from July 1 to June 30. The student's schedule follows the UNC calendar, including working during spring, fall and winter break, except when the university is closed between Christmas and New Year. Any unit hiring a student on an FY agreement must have sufficient work for the student during the summer months to meet the per week working hours specified in the agreement.

Holidays/Vacation/Sick Leave

Those holding assistantships do not accrue vacation hours. All assistantship holders may observe the University holiday schedule when offices are closed but may be asked by their units to work those hours in a shortened week or spread them over other weeks.

Students on assistantship agreements work during non-University holidays (Presidents, Columbus/Indigenous Persons Day, and Veterans Days).

Students on a fiscal year agreement may take **one week** of vacation during the fiscal year. This one week is in addition to the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, when the university is typically closed.

Effective 1/1/2021 in accordance with Colorado's Healthy Families and Workplace Act, all student employees will accrue sick leave. Colorado Senate Bill 20-205 requires all employers with 16 or more employees to offer paid sick leave in the amount of one hour for every 30 hours worked, to a maximum of 48 hours per year. Up to 48 hours of unused sick leave will roll over to the next year and unused leave will not be paid out. An employer may satisfy the accrual requirements by providing employees with sick leave that meets or exceeds these requirements. GA/TA/GPIs are provided paid sick leave under this policy. Students with assistantship agreements are given a lump sum of 24 hours in January to be used during the calendar year.

GA/TA/GPIs may use accrued paid sick leave to be absent from work for the following purposes:
• The employee has a mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition; needs a medical diagnosis, care, or treatment related to such illness, injury, or condition; or needs to obtain preventative medical care;
• The employee needs to care for a family member who has a mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition; needs a medical diagnosis, care, or treatment related to such illness, injury, or condition; or needs to obtain preventative medical care;
• The employee or family member has been the victim of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or harassment and needs to be absent from work for purposes related to such crime; or
• A public official has ordered the closure of the school or place of care of the employee's child or of the employee's place of business due to a public health emergency, necessitating the employee's absence from work.

When a Hiring Unit or GA/GRA/GPI/GTA Experiences Problems or Conflicts

Unfortunately, there are instances where a graduate assistant may experience problems in a work assignment or when hiring units experience difficulties with a student in an assistantship.

Improvement Plans

If a unit experiences problems with the work quality or behavior of a GA/GRA/GPI/GTA, then the assistantship supervisor and department chair/school director should meet with the student to discuss expectations, their concerns about the student's work or behavior, and what support the student needs. The supervisor should take detailed notes of the meeting. The department should create an improvement plan that has the expected behaviors (e.g., arriving at least 5 minutes before class starts; keeping a specified number of office hours; responding to student emails within 48 hours), a time when the group will meet again for review, and the date by which the student must demonstrate consistent improvement. If the student does not meet expectations within the specified timeframe, then the department can recommend agreement termination to the Graduate Dean/Associate Dean. The Graduate Dean/Associate Dean will review the situation and the unit's recommendation. The final decision on agreement termination lies with the Graduate Dean or designee, usually the Associate Dean.

The Graduate School recognizes that there is a significant power difference between graduate students and faculty. University policy does not permit harassment of students. If a student believes that they are experiencing some form of harassment, retaliation, bias, or unfair/unethical treatment, there are systems and individuals in place to offer support and

help. The Community Standards webpage hosts a confidential complaint portal: https://www.unco.edu/community-standards/. Students can also contact the Associate Dean of the Graduate School to share confidential concerns.
Note: All staff of the Graduate School are mandatory reporters of potential Title IX violations.

The Graduate School, in partnership with the Division of Student Affairs and the Office of Human Resources has a grievance process for grievances brought by GAs, TAs, and GRAs - specifically those grievances that are not already handled through the Office of Community Standards or the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance. Students who need to file a concern about their assistantship position will find the form on the confidential complaint page: https://www.unco.edu/community-standards/.

Ending an Assistantship

Resignation

If you cannot complete the period of your appointment, you must submit a letter of resignation to your assistantship supervisor, with copies to the school or department head and to the Graduate Assistantship team (susan.pryor@unco.edu; cindy.wesley@unco.edu). The resignation letter must clearly state the effective date of resignation.

The letter should be filed with the dean/division head and the Graduate Assistantship Office at least 10 working days before the effective date of your resignation. If you want to resign one assistantship position to accept a different assistantship, you must obtain a written release from the initial program or department. If you resign your appointment before serving 12 weeks (or 91 calendar days) from the first day of your Fall or Spring semester start date, then you will be assessed tuition for the term. Tuition payment is not required if you officially withdraw from UNC at the same time you resign your appointment. You will be required, however, to pay UNC fees and any withdrawal surcharges. Note: If your resignation is effective at the end of the fall semester, your termination date will be December 31.

No compensation will be paid for unused sick leave or vacation.

Termination with Notice

The stipend is not a scholarship award, but rather compensation for the performance of services. Failure to perform the assigned services, withdrawal from the university, failure to attend courses in which the student is enrolled, or failure to meet the above-described conditions may be grounds for termination of this agreement. Termination of the assistantship agreement will result in cancellation of stipend payments and forfeiture of tuition remission. If a student has not completed at least 12 weeks of the semester at the time of agreement termination, the student will be required to repay the tuition waiver amount and other charges, as noted in the University policy on withdrawal/cancellation of charges. If payments of stipend or tuition are accepted after the date of termination, the student is responsible for repayment of both.

If your work performance is not satisfactory and you fail to make improvements specified in the notice of deficiency/improvement plan by the time your performance is re-evaluated, your supervisor, the dean/director, or the division head may recommend to the assistantship program director that your agreement be terminated or not renewed for the next year.

The financial award specialist and the Graduate Dean or Associate Dean will review all recommendations for suspension, reduction in appointment and pay, non-renewal, and dismissal and make the decision on whether to terminate the appointment. Should the decision be made to suspend, reduce the appointment, reduce pay, or terminate your appointment, you will be given 14 calendar days' notice of termination.

Termination without Notice

Behaviors that may result in the termination of your assistantship without oral warning or notice of deficiency in performance include, but are not limited to:

- engaging in unethical conduct (see University Code of Conduct), including being found responsible for violations of academic integrity
- not fulfilling position responsibilities
- committing a criminal offense, even if this violation of law is off campus (see the University Code of Conduct)
- abandoning job duties (i.e., absence without approved leave for three working days or more)
- violations of university policies or federal educational policies (e.g., including FERPA and Title IX) or expected office/departmental policies (e.g., confidentiality)
- excessive absences from courses in which the student is enrolled
- engaging in a romantic (amorous) relationship with a student for whom the TA has assessment or teaching responsibilities, or for whom the GA has a duty of care.

Other Employment

In most cases, a student will not hold regular full-time employment while holding an assistantship appointment. Full-time employees of UNC may not hold an assistantship.

Because being both a graduate student and a graduate assistant will occupy most of your time, the Graduate School recommends that you not hold outside employment during your assistantship. Nevertheless, we do not prohibit you from holding part-time off-campus employment. It is up to you to determine how much time, if any, you can devote to additional activities and still make progress toward your degree and fulfill your responsibilities as a graduate assistant. Programs or units do have the discretionary right, however, to make appointments to students whose level of commitment suggests that they will be most likely to attain their educational goals while maintaining their graduate assistant responsibilities.

The assistantship policies do not prohibit students from working fulltime in another job during Thanksgiving Break, Spring Break, Winter Break, and the summer. International students, due to their visa status, are not allowed to work more than the 20 hours per on campus while school is in session. International students needing information about work eligibility should contact the Center Global Engagement.

Work Responsibilities

You will be supervised directly by a faculty or staff member of the program/unit that offers your appointment.

The assistantship supervisor:

- recommends candidates for appointment,
- determines the assistantship assignments, and
- supervises Assistants
- evaluates your work

Contact your supervisor for details about the assistantship.

As with any professional appointment, the amount of work time may vary slightly from week to week and changes to work schedules during special events or especially busy times may be negotiated with the supervisor; yet, no student is to exceed 20 hours per week per this agreement.

All assistantship agreements are contingent on university funding of the assistantship budget and/or the granting agency under which the assistantship is to be funded and on the Graduate School's approval of the agreement terms and position description.

Appropriate vs. Inappropriate Work for Assistants

The Graduate School recognizes that graduate assistants and graduate teaching assistants are in a vulnerable position. It is difficult for you to question the work assigned or requested by faculty or administrative supervisors. The following lists are provided to help you discern appropriate from inappropriate work assignments. The lists are not exhaustive; they are provided as examples.

A GPI/TA/GA may:

- Teach or assist with instruction in an undergraduate course
- Perform research tasks
- Complete administrative work
- Proofread articles or book chapters for faculty
- Tutor other students
- Help with recruitment activities
- Assist with program events
- Other activities that reasonably relate to the learning objectives for the position

A GA/TA may not:

- Offer unsupervised instruction in undergraduate or graduate courses
- Be required to do personal tasks for faculty or staff (babysitting, dog walking, picking up dry cleaning, etc.)
- Be required to do work for a faculty member that is not related to the faculty member's work at UNC. For example, graduate students should not be assigned administrative tasks to support a faculty member's outside consulting business.

Professional Development Expectations

Graduate students with any type of assistantship must complete annual training in Title IX (harassment identification/prevention), resources to assist distressed students, and other training identified by their unit as necessary.

Those with GPI or TA agreements, and GAs in positions with access to student data, must complete FERPA training offered through UNC's Human Resources Department.

What else do you need to know?

So far, the first section of this handbook provides information on many aspects of holding an Assistantship award at UNC. Below you will find additional information in a question-and-answer format:

May qualified graduate students be hired as adjunct instructors?

Yes. In cases where a student is well-qualified, an academic unit/college can agreement the student as an adjunct instructor for **undergraduate courses**. Graduate students cannot be the instructor of record for graduate-level courses without specific permission of the Graduate School and direct supervision by a member of the graduate faculty.

Is a graduate assistant also allowed to be an adjunct instructor at the same time?

No. Although UNC graduate students may teach as adjunct faculty at UNC, they cannot hold both adjunct and assistantship agreements at the same time.

Why are teaching assistants from different colleges paid different stipend amounts?

The stipends are based on the scale of pay for different colleges set by the university. It is simply a fact of the higher education marketplace that faculty in some disciplines are paid more than faculty in other disciplines. Typically, those in STEM fields are paid higher stipends than those in other disciplines or serving in administrative assistantships.

Are GTAs and GPIs considered faculty?

While teaching assistants and Graduate Part-time instructors fulfill important instructional and mentoring roles for the university, they are not faculty. Students, appropriately, do not have the same instructional load as most university faculty, nor do they have advising/research advising responsibilities, research productivity expectations, or committee and other university service requirements. **Teaching is only one component of a faculty member's agreement.** So, GTAs and GPIs are not considered faculty.

When and how often will I be paid?

Your stipend is paid on the last of each month.

Does the graduate assistant have to pay taxes on the stipend?

Yes, all compensation paid is subject to local, state, and federal taxes.

Should I expect the assistantship funding to meet all my living and academic expenses?

No. The purpose of assistantship funding if to offset the cost of graduate education. Northern Colorado has a high cost of living. Students often note that housing tends to be expensive. Also, students are currently responsible for their own health insurance costs and some university fees, as well as any tuition not covered by the assistantship.

Is a student required to show proof of English proficiency before being appointed as a Teaching Assistant?

Yes. International applicants for teaching assistantships at UNC who are not native speakers of English must submit Test of Spoken English (TSE) scores of at least 50. Some programs require an additional assessment of an applicant’s English language proficiency through a personal interview.

What happens if I drop a class?

If you drop a class, you should notify the Graduate School to ensure that there is no overcharging to your tuition waiver. If you have a loan or are receiving federal financial aid, your aid will be adjusted to reflect fewer hours. Typically, you will not receive a refund for the dropped class paid to you.

Can a student being admitted as a non-Degree student and receive a graduate assistantship?

No, a student must be admitted into a graduate degree seeking program.

Can a student be admitted into a certificate program and receive a graduate assistantship?

No, a student must be admitted into a graduate degree seeking program.

Can a student on an approved leave of absence hold an assistantship?

No. Students must be enrolled in course credit to hold an assistantship. Those on leave of absence or paying only the continuous registration fee are not enrolled in course credit. They cannot hold an assistantship.

Is my Assistantship award guaranteed until I complete my program?

Decisions about who receives an assistantship are in the hands of the programs or administrative offices. Some programs guarantee that their students will retain the same level of funding for multiple years. Other programs do not guarantee that students will hold the same assistantship and may change students from full-time to part-time (or vice-versa) assistantships depending on the funding that is available. Ultimately, all assistantship positions, even those “promised” for multiple years, are subject to annual budgets and funding availability.

If I have a part-time assistantship, can I apply for other scholarships and awards?

Yes, you may be eligible to apply for certain scholarships. Please see the Graduate School webpages for information on scholarships and a link to the Universal Scholarship Application: http://www.unco.edu/graduate-school/funding/scholarships.aspx

Where do I find information about additional GA openings?

Information about administrative GA openings and the general application can be found at this link: http://www.unco.edu/graduate-school/funding/student-employment.aspx

Some offices post open assistantship positions in the university's employment site, Handshake.

Who do I contact if I have questions about my Assistantship award?

The first person to contact is your program coordinator or department head. If that person cannot answer your question, then please contact the Graduate School.

Where can I turn for help if I feel I'm being harassed or discriminated against in my assistantship work environment?

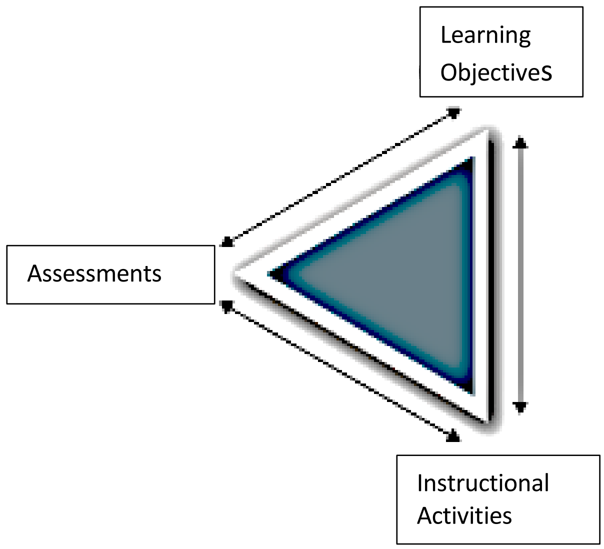
It is important that you have a confidential place to report your concerns. Assault Survivors Advocacy Program offers confidential services and support, as does the UNC Counseling Center. To report a concern about discrimination or harassment, contact the Title IX Coordinator or report your concern https://www.unco.edu/dean-of-students/share-concern.aspx online and a staff member will reach out to you.

The next sections of this Handbook provide helpful information on teaching and learning best practices.

Teaching and Learning Principles

The content of the handbook now shifts from the details of your assistantship agreement to the work of teaching. Whether you are a seasoned instructor or preparing to teach your first undergraduate introductory course, there is information in what follows that will assist you in preparing to teach and work with students.

The Alignment Model



Use of the Alignment Model ensures that that learning objectives, instruction, and the mode and content of assessment activities line up with each other.

The Alignment model is foundational to curriculum development and assessment. For example, in many universities, those proposing new programs must demonstrate how the program's learning outcomes align with the overall learning outcomes of the university. Similarly, the learning objectives for each course in a new program must map onto the programs learning outcomes. At a micro level, instructional methods, course content, and assessment activities in any given class session should direct students toward achieving the course learning objectives.

The model is fundamental to:

- course construction
- diagnosing and troubleshooting problems in course instruction and student learning
- creating fair and useful ways to assess student learning and development of skills
- course evaluation by instructors and students
- curriculum assessment

The alignment model emphasizes the cohesiveness among three course components:

1. Learning Objectives: The expectations you have for what you want your students to know and be able to *do* following instruction.
2. Assessments: The measurement of how well the students are progressing toward or achieving the objectives.
3. Instructional Activities: The content, its delivery, and the classroom activities used to support the students' progress toward the learning objectives.

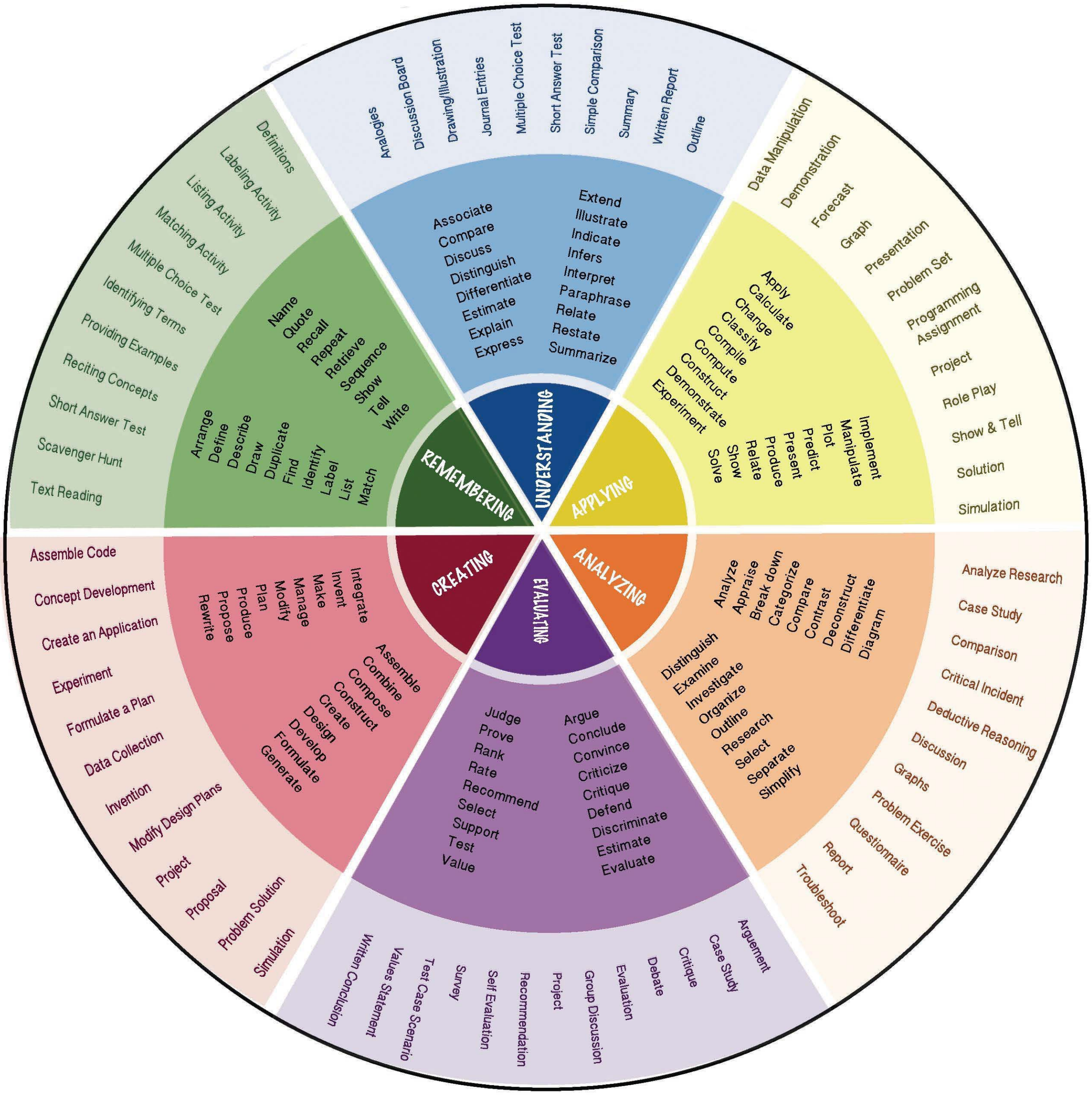
When a course is aligned, students know what knowledge and skills they are expected to develop, how they will be evaluated on their application of the knowledge, and how the teaching and learning activities you employ relate to your objectives.

It isn't uncommon for course evaluations to ask questions such as:

- The instructor clearly communicated the learning objectives of the course.
- The course instruction and learning activities helped me achieve the learning objectives.

These are certainly fair questions to ask about an instructor. They also give some insight into how well a course was conceived and constructed. If the course structure is flawed, it becomes all the more difficult to deliver the content in a way that engages students and helps them acquire the knowledge and skills outlined in the learning objectives.

Bloom's Taxonomy



Choose a learning level or objective from the innermost part of the circle, then choose a skill or skills from the middle ring of the circle, and then select appropriate forms of assessment from the circle's outer ring.

1. **Level:** **Remembering** Can the student recall or remember the information?

   Skills: *define, describe, identify, list, quote, recall, reproduce, sequence, write*

   Activities/Assessment: short answer test, multiple choice test, labeling activity, definition test; problems or activities repeating use of a memorized terms, definitions, theorems or specific methods.

2. **Level:** **Understanding** Can the student explain ideas or concepts?

   Skills: *classify, describe, discuss, estimate, explain, interpret, locate, predict, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase*

   Activities/Assessments: written report, short answer test, summary, discussion board or group discussion, simple comparison, drawing/illustration, journal entries

3. **Level:** **Applying** can the student use the information in a new way?

   Skills: *apply, calculate, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, experiment, illustrate, modify, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write*

   Activities/Assessments: problems requiring students to use more than one definition or theorem, case study discussion, forecast, presentations, artist study, role play, demonstration, essay exam

4. **Level:** **Analyzing** Can the student distinguish between the different parts?

   Skills: *appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, divide, examine, experiment, question, test*

   Activities/Assessment: artist's portfolio with notes, essay, complex comparisons, literature review, graphs, statistical analysis, analysis of research or data, poster presentation, essay exam.

5. **Level:** **Evaluating** Can the student justify a stand or decision?

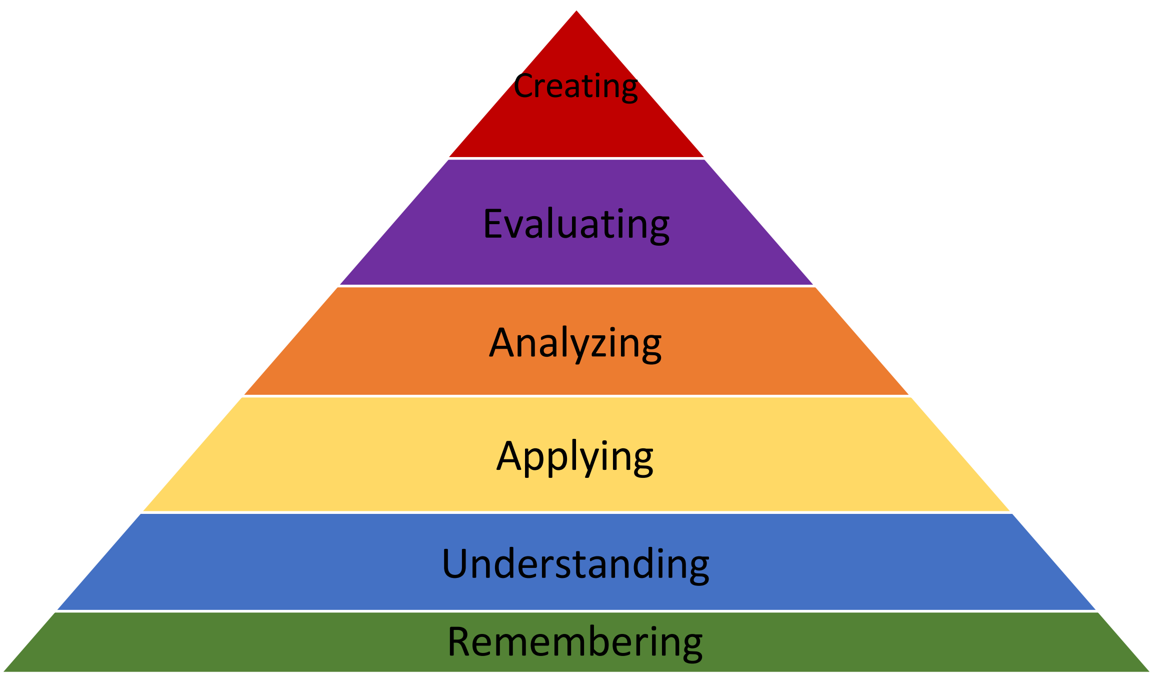
   Skills: *appraise, argue, defend, formulate, integrate, judge, measure, select, support, test, value, evaluate*

Activities/Assessments: Case study discussion or analysis, project, debate, interpretive performance (music, dance), artist study with evaluative discussion, artist portfolio with self-evaluation, critique of text/drama/music, test case scenario, math test with word problems, tests that require students to work out which formula to use (students make judgments about which information should be used)

6. **Level: Creating** Can the student create new product or point of view?

   Skills: *assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write, choreograph, paint, sculpt, compose, project, essays.*

   Activities/Assessments: Compositions, dramaturgy, screenplay, experiment, data collection, proposal, poster presentation of research



Definition of Learning

Students often ask a question that frustrates teachers: “Will this be on the test?” Learning is a process that involves much more than performing well on tests and assignment or earning good grades. Caring teachers want their students to learn, add to their knowledge, and apply their knowledge in ways that help their communities.

Susan Ambrose and her co-authors define learning in this way:

“Learning is a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning.”

There are three components to the definition of Learning:

1. **“Learning is a process.”**

   The assessment activities that students complete are important. Those activities measure some aspects of student learning and their progress toward course completion. At the same time, learning is an ongoing, formative process. Some aspects of learning cannot be measured adequately through exams, essays or grade reports.

2. **“Learning leads to change.”**

   The learning process can lead to changes in people’s core beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews. Some learning activities, such as study abroad and service learning, can result in life-changing experiences. Most forms of learning take time to help students develop the knowledge, understanding, applications, analytical and evaluative skills to create new frameworks for interpreting information and assessing their core beliefs and values.

3. **Learning is a process that students must own for themselves.**

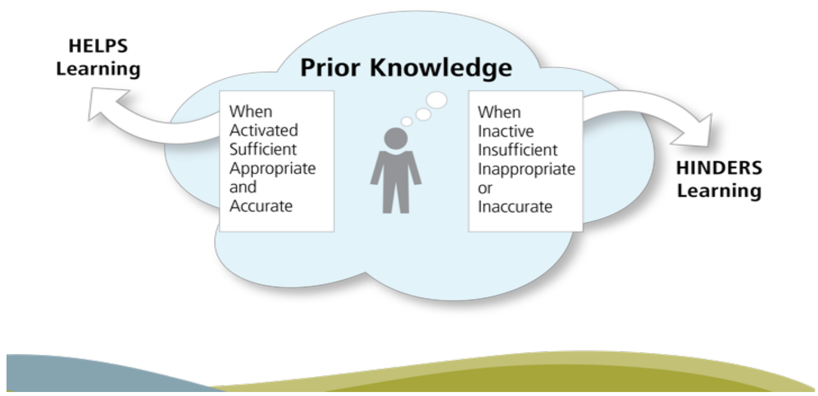
   If you have ever carefully planned a lesson, only to find that your students just didn’t “get it,” consider that your lesson should be designed not just to impart knowledge but also to lead students through the process of their own learning (Ambrose 2010:3).

Adapted from How Learning Works *by Ambrose et al. (2010), an engagingly written, evidence-based text, well-illustrated by practical examples, and a book well worth your time, as a TA and as a student.*

Seven Principles of Learning from Ambrose et al. (2010:4-5).

1. Students' prior knowledge can help or hinder learning.

Students do not come into the classrooms as blank slates. They have life experience, knowledge from prior education, and access to information through a variety of media. If their prior knowledge is accurate, it may form a solid foundation for additional learning. In fact, students may find points of contact between their experiences/knowledge and the content or instructional methods in a course to the benefit of their learning. One might think of a student from a STEM high school who already possesses advanced knowledge and skills in math. By the same token, inaccurate knowledge can inhibit new learning. [One example might be the music student who learned one version of choral or instrumental piece and now has difficulty relearning a different arrangement of the same piece.]



According to Michael Pietro, we owe our students learning settings that:

- Value and engage what students bring to the table
- Actively confront and challenge misconceptions

2. How students organize knowledge influences how they learn and apply what they know.

Outlines, lists, mind maps, illustrations – students have different ways of organizing information and finding connections between concepts. While memorizing factual information, multiplication tables, quotes from authors, or formulas may build a foundation of knowledge, higher levels of learning help students make connections between groups of knowledge. As they grow in the learning process, students increase their skills at analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of knowledge.

3. Students' motivation determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn.

Students are motivated to learn when they perceive what they are learning to have value and applicability outside the classroom, when they expect that they will be able to successfully achieve the course objectives, and when they feel that they are supported in the classroom environment.

4. To develop mastery, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned.

It is common for instructors to forget the steps and processes that they went through as they learned skills that they have since mastered, and hence now take for granted. As such, it is important for instructors to take the time to develop awareness of (a) the component skills and steps involved in any one larger task or skill, and (b) when to apply a particular skill.

5. Goal-directed practice coupled with targeted feedback enhances the quality of students' learning.

Students learn through practice, and learn better when their practice is oriented at a specific goal (being able to play a particular piece of music, for example, or to have a particular kind of conversation in a foreign language). Feedback, in order to be useful, must target concrete aspects of their performances.

6. Students' current level of development interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the course to impact learning.

The students in our classrooms are still developing, not only intellectually but also emotionally and socially. Research shows that creating a supportive and positive environment positively impacts their learning, whereas an environment that they perceive as negative can impede their learning.

https://www.missouristate.edu/assets/fctl/MSU_HLW_Keynote.pdf

7. To become self-directed learners, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning.

Effective learners are able to assess what they know and develop strategies for learning and incorporating new skills. Most of our students are not able to do this for themselves right now, so they look to us for evidence of their learning (i.e., test, lab, and paper scores). We can encourage our students to be more effective learners on their own by encouraging them to reflect on and evaluate their own learning process in our courses.

Course Design

There is a lot to think about and do before your first day of teaching.

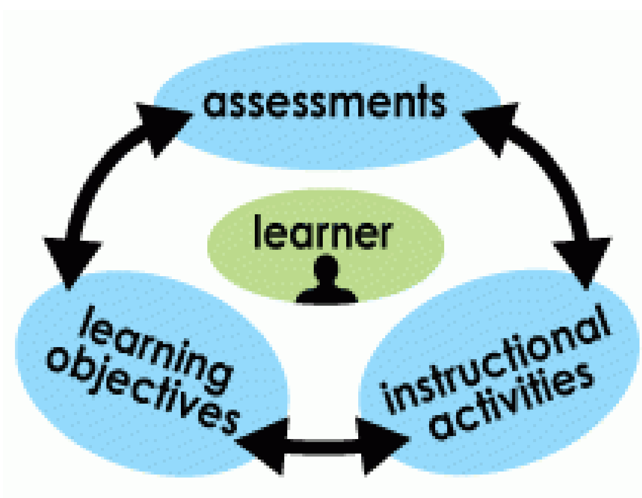
Whether you are teaching your own stand-alone class or leading a lab or discussion recitation for a large introductory class, there is a lot to think about and do before your first day of teaching.

Depending on the specifics of your TA assignment, some of this information may not be specifically applicable to you. For example, you may not be responsible for designing the entire course, or you may not have control over the syllabus. However, you can see how the information supplied in this chapter has been applied to the course you are currently teaching and use those observations in planning your own courses in the future. Additionally, this section may help you align your lessons, labs, grading, guest lectures, mentoring, and other contributions to the rationale for the course in which you are a teaching assistant.

Build on Teaching and Learning Principles

The Alignment Model

How and what your students learn is largely shaped by the way you design and teach your course. The Alignment Model encourages you to focus on the interplay of the three major course components as you design a course that keeps students focused on what they are expected to learn.



Learning objectives specify skills that students should demonstrate after the learning experience that they could not demonstrate before the learning experience. **Assessments** should contain no surprises for the students; instead they should enable students to demonstrate the skills first identified in the objectives.

Instructional activities should be targeted toward meeting the objectives, rather than covering a percentage of a chapter or book and should encourage students to practice skills and receive feedback prior to being tested.

Keep the Alignment Model and Bloom's Taxonomy in mind as you attempt to:

- Identify the skills your students should demonstrate
- Determine how students' progress will be evaluated
- Identify appropriate teaching and learning activities
- Select course materials.

Identify the Skills Your Students Should Demonstrate

What are reasonable expectations for achievable skills based upon students' current state of knowledge?

Teaching Assistants often work with introductory courses that are required for completion of the undergraduate degree, either because the course is in the liberal arts core or a requirement of a specific major. In developing expectations for the achievement of knowledge and skills by students, it is important to consider several questions:

"What role will the course I am going to teach play in my students' University education?"

How does the course fit into the curriculum?

Is it an introductory class?

Is it a prerequisite?

What knowledge and skills should a student who is not majoring in your discipline gain from taking the course?

What knowledge and skills should a student who is majoring in your discipline gain from taking the course?

What do your department and profession expect in terms of skills students should be developing?

a). Does your accrediting body define specific competencies that they expect students to achieve following graduation from the program?

b). How does the course help students develop those competencies?

c). How does your course and its objectives contribute to the overall program objectives?

Often your course objectives will consist of fairly simple statements related to your expectations for what you want your students to do by the end of the course.

You might refer back to Bloom's Taxonomy and use it as a tool to think about the learning process, appropriate goals for student achievement, and assessment of student knowledge and skills. The version of the taxonomy provided in this handbook also gives some suggestions for means of evaluating student achievement of the course objectives.

Determine How Students' Progress Will Be Evaluated

Your course objectives will determine how progress is evaluated. It is a common mistake for early-career instructors not to consider course objectives when developing tests or other assignments to assess student knowledge and skills. We often ask our students to compare, contrast, analyze, or explain on tests or in papers without first making it explicit that these are the skills in which they will be evaluated, then modeling these skills in our lectures or encouraging them in discussions and other activities. Students need to practice using the course material and think about the course content before being asked to demonstrate skills on an exam or other assignment.

Identify Appropriate Teaching and Learning Activities

Once you have established your broad course objectives and considered how you will evaluate progress, you need to think about the learning activities you will employ to enable students to achieve those objectives. The learning activities you use in teaching should provide students with an opportunity to develop the skills they need to demonstrate their mastery of the material. In addition to alignment with students' knowledge and skills, your teaching and learning activities should also demonstrate alignment in terms of course content, course structure, and instructional approaches (lecture, discussion, demonstration, etc.) and should focus on:

- Students' Current Skills and Abilities
- Course Content
- Course Structure
- Instructional Approaches

Students' Current Skills and Abilities

Students' prior knowledge, skills, and abilities will play a large role in your selection of activities. The students in your classes may come from a variety of majors, and their academic experiences may vary greatly; to teach your students and to meet your objectives, you need to assess your students. What skills and abilities do they have? What skills will need to be developed so that they will be able to comprehend, apply, and evaluate the material you will present?

Talking to experienced faculty members in your department is a good way to get a sense of what to expect from your students. Once you are aware of what your students already know, it becomes clearer what you will need to teach them.

Course Content

What material needs to be introduced in order for students to meet the course objectives? What knowledge is required for the students to gain mastery of the subject you are teaching? How will the students use the information you are giving them? Decisions about the content to be covered are discipline specific. Ask your colleagues for copies of their syllabi and course notes (or look for pertinent syllabi on the Web). Also consider the role of your course in both your department's and the University's curriculum. Some departments have specific guidelines (especially for introductory classes) that must be followed. Even if you are not bound by such regulations, you should think carefully about the material that traditionally has been covered and make informed decisions about what students need to learn.

The more content you try to cram into a course and the faster you attempt to cover it, the less students will be able to engage the material at higher levels of learning. As Howard Gardner has noted, "Coverage is the enemy of understanding." Ask yourself whether it is better for students to have insufficient knowledge of all the material covered in a given course or sufficient knowledge of half of that material. Rather than a predetermined amount of content, let your course objectives-- what you want the students to be able to do upon completing the course-- determine what you cover. Even in courses with coverage requirements (e.g., introductory courses forming a part of your departmental curriculum), make every attempt, whenever possible, to let your course objectives inform your course content. The same should be true for individual class meetings.

Course Structure

The structure of your course integrates the learning skills and course content that you want to teach. Presenting material in a logical and organized form makes it easier for your students to synthesize it and to recognize the interconnectedness of the content you are presenting. Recognizing such connections is one of the higher skill levels in Bloom's Taxonomy.

A strong organizational structure will also help you as you consider what material is appropriate for your class and how best to communicate your material to your students. Types of organizational structures include the following:

- **Chronological:** Organizes a sequence of events in time; for example, a history course that moves in temporal order (United States History to 1877)
- **Topical:** Deals with a limited number of topics and sub-topics (Civil War, World War II, Vietnam)
- **Conceptual:** Focuses on the concepts of a discipline (Historiography, Constructivism, Postmodernism)
- **Survey:** Provides extensive coverage of a topic, touching upon a wide range of content (World History)
- **Process:** Emphasizes skills and methods of a discipline (Archival Methods)
- **Regional:** Organizes subjects by geographical region (Africa, South America, Europe)

Every class must have some structure. The structure you choose helps you organize and select material and makes it easier for your students to learn. In addition to a dominant structure that organizes the class as a whole, you may also want to use a variety of substructures to meet certain course objectives. A literature class, for example, might follow a generally chronological organization introducing Chaucer before Chekhov, and Wharton before Walker. The lectures might reflect this structure. Concurrently, however, weekly class discussions may be conceptually sub-structured, focusing on how literature has addressed social class, cultural conflict, race, and alienation.

Instructional Approaches

Once you've identified your learning objectives and evaluation tools, you are ready to consider instructional approaches that will capture students' interest and help them to meet course objectives. Different instructional approaches include lectures, discussions, labs, foreign language labs, and problem-based recitations. Here is a useful table for aligning instructional approaches with your objectives. Bear in mind, however, that you will usually find yourself employing a combination of approaches.

Instructional Approach	Recommended for...
Lectures	Communicating theories, ideas, and facts to your students; supplementing readings; clarifying student misunderstandings.
Discussions	Encouraging practice and application of course materials; soliciting feedback.
Labs	Linking the theories explored in class with the actual practice of the discipline. Clarifying vague or confusing concepts.
Foreign Language Labs	Encouraging students to feel comfortable using the language publicly without fear of making mistakes.
Problem-Based Recitations	Fostering understanding of the larger theories, rules, or assumptions within a discipline by finding non-obvious solutions to problems.

Sample Learning Objectives

Below you will find a number of sample discipline-specific statements of objectives for student learning. They represent a range of levels of knowledge (as classified in Bloom's Taxonomy). It is helpful to remember, too, that not all of your objectives need to be discipline-specific. You could, for example, expect that your students would learn how to write a coherent, evidence-based essay. You could ask them to apply their knowledge from the course to a real-world situation. Or you could ask them to use sound debating skills.

Typically, a statement of learning objectives might begin with a phrase like, "Upon completing this course, students will be able to..."

Biology

- recognize that genetic data is contained in molecules of DNA. (Remember)
- apply their knowledge of the processes and tools of scientific inquiry to investigate problems in biology. (Apply)
- classify organisms into groups based on similarities and differences. (Analyze)
- evaluate various incarnations of evolutionary theory (Evaluate)

Chemistry

- recall a chemical formula. (Remember)
- predict the reaction of two elements. (Analyze)
- produce a new chemical compound. (Create)

Economics

- relate Marx's theory of "alienation." (Understand)
- compare microeconomic and macroeconomic approaches to particular cases. (Analyze)
- assess the efficacy of nation-states' domestic economic policies. (Evaluate)

History

- recite important historical dates. (Remember)
- interpret an historical event in light of its sociopolitical context. (Understand)
- evaluate different historiographical schools. (Evaluate)

History of Art

- label major historical artistic works. (Remember)
- classify a painting by artistic style. (Understand)
- critique the composition of a painting. (Evaluate)

Language

- recite 100 important vocabulary words. (Remember)
- recall the major declension groups of verbs. (Remember)
- use knowledge of Spanish to make basic requests. (Apply)
- compose an essay in German. (Create)

Math

- describe several diverse examples of mathematics. (Understand)
- solve problems using mathematics in unfamiliar settings. (Understand)
- explain why mathematical thinking is valuable in daily life. (Apply)

Sociology

- describe the evolution of sociological theory beginning with August Comte. (Understand)
- analyze the racial preconceptions underlying the Chicago School. (Analyze)
- evaluate the applicability of various theories of social movements. (Apply, Evaluate)

Theatre Arts

- recite a soliloquy. (Remember)
- perform a comedic scene using principles of physical comedy. (Apply)
- write a screenplay. (Create)

Select and Order Course Materials

Readings and other course materials enrich a class by providing in-depth information that could not be presented in class, as well as offering an alternative to the instructor's viewpoint. Moreover, these materials often form the basis for practice assignments that give students hands- on experience with the course content.

With the aid of some careful searching, you may find a wealth of resources available to use as course materials to supplement and reinforce what students are learning in class. Reading material, video, images, practice problems, instructional material (e.g. Khan Academy), templates for assignments, and more. As always, keep your course objectives in mind and choose only the most relevant materials that may aid students' learning. After all, your course is usually not the only course they have. If the workload for your course is overwhelming, students are likely to drop the course or do poorly in it because they stop doing the assignments.

Library Resources and Reserves

The library staff are available to help you. There are subject librarians who are familiar with resources in specific disciplines and may help you narrow your search for appropriate materials. They also offer library instruction to undergraduate classes and research advice for graduate students. If you plan to use selections from books or articles, consult with library staff about copyright rules on acceptable use. To ensure that your course materials are available in time for the start of classes, follow the University Libraries' (Michener Library and Skinner Music Library) process for course print or electronic reserves. See the following link for information and the required form: http://www.unco.edu/library/services/faculty_services.aspx#fndtn-tabPrintReserve1-d18e270

If you use online and electronic reserve materials, or expect students to access articles or media in the Library's journal databases, please don't assume that your students will know how to do this. It is helpful to give them "how to" information in the syllabus or on Canvas. In fact, you may want to take a few minutes of class time to show them how to access the course materials in Canvas or how to navigate the Library (or other) website to find what you've assigned.

When assigning material located on the Internet, keep the following rules in mind:

- Unless you have uploaded the documents to the course Canvas page, be aware that web addresses change, so any links you provide should be checked and corrected before a student discovers the broken link hours before an assignment is due.
- You should also know that text, articles, images, and other media found on the internet are governed by copyright restrictions.
- One final warning: consider the source of the materials you assign from the internet. Be certain of the scholarly provenance of the materials and check them for accuracy prior to assigning them.

Textbooks

Textbooks and other course readings can be ordered through the UNC Bookstore, which is run by Follett. The online portal for ordering textbooks is currently: https://adoptions.efollett.com/OnlineAdoptionsWeb/onlineAdoptions.html?storeNumber=1249&langId=en_US

As a graduate student, you know what it is like to live on a tight budget. Before requiring students to purchase several books or an expensive textbook, please consider:

- What is the cost of the books? Will students be able to purchase them?
- Which are *required* texts that students must purchase in order to do the course work, and which are *optional*; e.g., useful to students pursuing more in-depth work or needing a primer before taking the course so that the decision to purchase them is left to the student.
- Is the text one that students may find it helpful to keep for further reference; e.g. an important work in that field of study; a text that they will need again in a future course in the major.
- Can you place books on reserve at the library for some students to use (for a few hours at a time) without cost?
- Are there other materials that would provide the same information at a lower or no cost?

  In terms of your own budget, note that publishing companies often make instructor copies of books available to teachers free of charge. Ask your department about ordering instructor copies directly from the publisher.

This link will take you to the Canvas login page http://www.unco.edu/canvas. Canvas is the online course management system used at UNC. The Office of Instructional Design and Development (IDD) regularly offers workshops on using Canvas for teaching and grading purposes. There is also a short tutorial within Canvas that you may find very helpful.

If your primary mode of teaching will be online, then learning Canvas is essential. It would be wise to visit the IDD page on preparing to teach online courses: http://www.unco.edu/instructional-design-development/course-design/planning-your-course.aspx

Develop Your Syllabus

The syllabus is more than a calendar with policies and assignment descriptions. It is a careful plan for the achievement of skills and course objectives. A well-crafted syllabus is actually a plan for developing your students' thinking skills systematically while introducing new course material, so that ultimately the students will achieve the course objectives.

In many courses taught by TAs, there is a common syllabus developed by the department/program. If you are teaching one section of many, then you may not be the person responsible for constructing an original syllabus. Even when that is the case, the following information may be helpful as you work with the document you're given and consider how best to help students achieve the course objectives.

Before drafting a syllabus, the instructor should decide:

- The course objectives.
- Key skills the students need in order to meet the objectives. These subject skills may shape the topics and content of each class session.
- Logical division of the material, which again gives shape to the individual class sessions and to the semester's course calendar as a whole. This process should provide students appropriate building blocks and scaling of their thinking and knowledge.
- What assignments and activities (both summative and formative) are the best means of assessing if students are meeting and mastering the course objectives.
- The content you need to present and materials needed to assist your students in meeting the course objectives.
- The appropriate teaching strategies (pedagogy) to help your students learn and practice the skills that lead to achieving the course objectives.

Your first draft can be as formal or informal as you like, but your first draft of a syllabus should:

1. Divide the material to be taught into class topics. The topics, and the skills that fall within those topics, provide the foundation needed for your students to meet the course objectives. Divide the class material based on the structure you have chosen (chronological, topical, etc.) integrated with the academic calendar.
   Consider: What is the best way to use a natural break? Should it serve as a review session for an exam, or as a transition between one topic and the next?
2. Clearly state the course objectives
   Consider: Are the objectives measurable and aligned with your evaluations?
3. Describe your means of evaluating students
   Consider: Are there multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate success in meeting these objectives?

Are assignments, homework or tests planned to coincide with recently acquired skills or skills that build upon previous knowledge? (A lecture on political theory may be followed by a short paper assignment drawing on relevance to current politics). Will the students receive prompt, targeted feedback and have a timely opportunity (or opportunities) for more practice?

Be sure that you check the academic calendar to ensure you have an accurate listing of meeting dates and times.

Syllabus Components

Your syllabus should include:

Course Rationale

The course rationale is a brief statement that explains the purpose of the course and how its place in either the University's or your department's curriculum.

Course Description

This is your opportunity to share your passion for the discipline you are teaching and the course objectives you have set. In the course description you should express your how your course will be relevant for your students. The tone you establish in your course description will set the tone for the course. The course description should familiarize students with the following:

- **Objectives.** The handbook has already emphasized the importance of learning objectives - what knowledge and skills you want your students to demonstrate before completing the course. Objectives are so important that you may wish to consider distinguishing them from the rest of the course description (for example, at the end) under the heading "Objectives."
- **Content.** Describe the topics that will be covered and the themes that will be stressed.
- **Structure.** Outline the structure of the course and explain how lectures, discussions, or group work will be integrated into the course.
- **Relevance.** When students are unfamiliar with a topic or material, they may have a difficult time judging whether they are interested in learning about the topic and in deciding whether to add or drop the course. You might demonstrate relevancy in the description by posing question that the course will address.

Course Requirements

Your course requirements are the evaluations that students complete for grades. They can include quizzes, tests, projects, papers, presentations, participation or anything else that might be graded. Course requirements are NOT your class policies such as “one person talks at a time,” or “attack the argument and not the person.”

Policies and Evaluation

Clearly stating course policies and requirements avoids confusion, false starts, and complaints. Inform your students how grades will be determined. Remember, try to be as fair, objective, and transparent as possible and be sure that any policies you establish are consistent with those of the University and your school or department. You may have greater success convincing students of the importance of these policies if you indicate why they are so important to you and to the class. Course policies also provide an opportunity to establish the tone of the course; for example, firm but respectful, fair, and supportive.

Consider including the following material:

- **Attendance/Tardiness.** If you hate it when students show up late or miss class, let them know your policy and what penalty will be assessed. It can also help to tell them why attendance is so important.
- **Participation.** If your class includes discussions or in-class group work, describe why participation is important and how it is graded.
- **Reading.** What books have been assigned? How will reading assignments be integrated into the class? Will they be tested on the material? Do they keep a graded journal or submit critical questions related to the readings?
- **Written Assignments.** If students are assigned papers, lab reports, or other written assignments, they will appreciate specific guidelines including the number of pages, font size, and spacing. Lab reports and specialized assignments (such as diaries) may require even more detail. Explain to your students the goal of the writing assignment and how it will be evaluated.
- **Exams.** Let students know what the exams will look like (essays, multiple choice, and short answers), what type of material will be covered, and whether they will be cumulative or not.
- **Other Policies.** Each of the assignments should include the due date and the percentage of the grade allotted to it. You should include special instructions concerning missed exams, late papers, and academic dishonesty. You should also provide your policy on the use of cell phones and other personal tech devices during class and tests. For example, if students should not use their phones during class or have them out during exams, then put that in the syllabus. It is not recommended that you prohibit the use of laptops during class since some students may have DSS accommodations that specify the use of laptops for notetaking or other classwork.

Course Schedule

The course schedule offers a calendar of events, which may include the titles (and abstracts) of lectures, special events (films, field trips), assigned readings, homework, and exams. Typically, it provides a road map for students around which they may plan their work.

Be aware, that adjusting a syllabus after the start of the semester can create confusion. Therefore, do so only if it is absolutely necessary. Give your students plenty of advance notice (preferably in-class and via Canvas/e-mail), and clearly explain any changes.

Syllabus Checklist

The UNC Board of Trustees requires that, at a minimum, every syllabus includes:

- Course objectives/outcomes
- General strategy, topics, subject matter, materials and tasks to be employed to meet those objectives/outcomes
- Evaluation criteria and weight to be applied to each assignment/activity in determining the final grade
- List of tentative deadlines for accomplishment of assignments

It is a good idea to provide students with more information in the syllabus, so the following is a good checklist:

- ☐ Basic Information: Instructor and Course
- ☐ Course title, number, section
- ☐ Date (semester and year)
- ☐ Course meeting days and times, room and building Instructor’s name and title
- ☐ Instructor’s information
- ☐ office location & office hours
- ☐ Instructor’s telephone number, e-mail address, web page
- ☐ Course web page/Canvas page (if applicable)
- ☐ Course Rationale & Description
- ☐ Course Goals and Objectives
- ☐ Prerequisites for the course
- ☐ Instructional Activities and Materials
- ☐ Methods of instruction
- ☐ Textbooks, readings and brief description of these
- ☐ Where texts are available (campus bookstore? library reserve? online?)
- ☐ Other required purchases (lab supplies, thumb drives, software)

- ◻ Calendar of class dates, topics, readings, assignment due dates, exams dates
- ◻ Assessment of Learning
- ◻ Grade breakdown for the final grade
- ◻ Brief description of each major requirement
- ◻ Due dates for assignments and projects
- ◻ Grading standards and criteria (rubric for grading)
- ◻ Quiz and exam descriptions and dates
- ◻ Place, date, and time of final exam
- ◻ Expectations for in-class participation and group work
- ◻ Course Policies

  Policy regarding academic integrity/dishonesty/plagiarism

  Policy regarding attendance

  Policy regarding late assignments & make-up exams

  Policy on cell phone use in the classroom

  Statement on how disruptions in the classroom will be handled

  Policy regarding classroom recording
- ◻ University policies

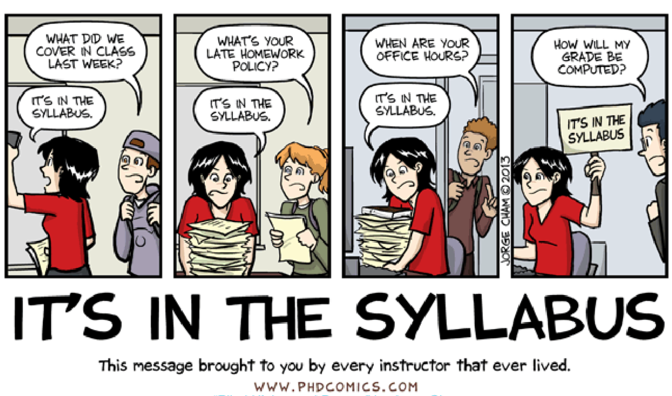
  Disability Support Services - Notice to students with disabilities of their right and responsibility to inform the instructor immediately should they need any academic accommodations

  Title IX statement

  Veteran Services Statement

  Academic Integrity highlighting penalties and linking to Student Code of Conduct

UNC hosts a webpage with links to syllabus resources. The language of various university policies may be copied and pasted into your syllabus. www.unco.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-resources.aspx



If you are teaching an online course, please see the following link for advice on how to prepare to teach your course: http://www.unco.edu/instructional-design-development/course-design/planning-your-course.aspx

Things to Do Before the First Day of Class

Now that you've designed your class and created your syllabus, have your class up and running on Canvas, and made course materials available to students, make sure that you have taken care of these other basic preparations:

- **Check Out the Classroom.** When the classroom is empty, spend a few minutes "practicing." Get a sense of how loudly you will have to speak, where the chalkboards are, and what media equipment is available. If you are teaching a lab, check out the storeroom so that you know where supplies are stored and become acquainted with the lab's safety procedures and equipment.
- **Meet with the Instructor.** If you are a teaching assistant, meet with the course instructor. Ask about the objectives for the course, the grading policy, and what your responsibilities will be. Ask for a copy of the syllabus and any other available course materials. If any parts of the syllabus are unclear, be sure to ask about them.
- **Familiarize Yourself with the Course Syllabus.** Whether teaching a recitation, a lab, or your own class, the first day is often dedicated to explaining the course goals and assignments. Anticipate questions and rehearse your answers. Are the books available in the library or the bookstore? Who does the grading? Are extensions granted for course assignments? How long is the second essay? Be prepared to explain and supplement the syllabus.
- **Gather Together Your Materials.** Assemble any notes, copies of the syllabus, and samples of the textbooks the students will have to buy. Get a package of index cards (some departments provide them for free) which you can use to have students record information about themselves.
- **Observe a Class.** If possible, observe an experienced teaching assistant or graduate instructor teach a class. Observation can be helpful regardless of your experience level, but is especially important if you have no prior teaching experience.
- **Set Your Office Hours.** Many teaching assistants are expected to hold office hours for at least two hours a week. Choose times that are convenient for both you and your students. Holding office hours on two different days and at different times will make it easier for students to meet with you.

  Plan for more than just explaining the syllabus. The first day can be used to set the tone for the class, student interactions, and energy level. The Eberly Center on Teaching and Learning at Carnegie-Mellon University suggests the following:

Orchestrate positive first impressions

First impressions can be long-lasting, and they are usually based on a thin slice of behavior. Before you even start teaching, your students will have already made some decisions about you, so it is important to understand what those impressions are based on and how to manage them.

- **Your attire.** Research shows that clothing affects several kinds of judgments people make, including but not limited to, credibility, likability, dominance, kindness, and empathy (Raiscot, 1986; Morris et al., 1996). More formal attire communicates expertise and confidence, less formal attire communicates approachability. Usually, it is easier to relax a more formal impression into a more relaxed one than the other way around. These considerations are likely to be particularly relevant for young instructors who are concerned about establishing themselves as authoritative.
- **The physical environment.** Students can make decisions about what kind of course yours will be by the way the chairs are arranged. Rows signify a more formal environment, while circles or u-shapes imply a more informal atmosphere, with more expectations of student participation. The words on the board also indicate how interesting the course is likely to be. In addition to the course information, consider having a thought-provoking question displayed as they arrive.
- **Your use of the few minutes before class.** Greeting the students as they enter the classroom communicates approachability. Franticly arriving right on time or even late communicates disorganization, and so on.

Help students learn about each other

The classroom is a social environment, so it is helpful to start the social dynamics in a productive way.

Icebreakers raise the energy levels and get students comfortable so that they will be ready to focus on the material, especially if you want to foster a collaborative environment where students will have to work in groups or dialogue with each other.

- Make sure that the icebreaker is appropriate for the course.
- Icebreakers work even better when they allow students to get to know each other in the context of the course material.

Set the tone for the course

The way you engage students on the first day sends powerful messages about the level of involvement and interaction you expect from them.
Inexperienced instructors sometimes make the mistake of lecturing at the students for a few weeks, then try to have a discussion when the first big unit of the course is finished, only to be

surprised at the lack of student participation. This is because students have already been socialized to just listen in the course.

The following strategies will help you set a productive tone:

- **Whatever you plan to do during the semester, do it on the first day.** For instance, if you plan to use discussions, have students start talking on the first day. If you plan to use groups frequently, put students in groups on the first day. If you plan to use extensive writing, have some kind of short reflective writing activity. If you want the students to be in charge of their own learning, start with an activity where they are the experts, and cannot rely on you for information. For instance, in a psychology course on myths about human behavior, the instructor starts with a brainstorming of myths about student behaviors in dorms.

- **Consider a "Homework 0" voluntary-mandatory office hour.** The assignment is simply to make an appointment with you at a convenient time, find your office and visit you there before the next class or two. This gets students to your office, breaks the ice with a short one-on-one interaction, and makes it much more likely that the students will come back for help when they need it.

- **Establish a culture of feedback.** Let students know you are interested in how they experience the course and in any suggestions they have. Let them know you will do formal early course evaluations, but that they should feel free to give you constructive feedback, even anonymously. You might not adopt every suggestion they have but you will listen and consider them. This starts to create a partnership in learning.

Collect baseline data on students' knowledge and motivation

This objective emerges directly from the second overarching goal for the first day of class.

- **Collect data about baseline knowledge.** This can take several forms:
  - Check that students have taken relevant courses in a sequence.
  - Give students an ungraded pretest that assesses knowledge and skills necessary for the course.
  - Also rely on students' self-reports about how confident they feel about particular knowledge and their ability to apply it.
- **Get a sense of students' motivation in the course.** Collect data about:
  - why students are taking your course
  - what they expect to get out of it, and
  - what challenges they anticipate
- **Decide what to do about different/inadequate prior knowledge.** Depending on how many students are lacking certain knowledge or skills, you might choose to:
  - tell them they cannot take the course

- tell them how they can bridge the gap on their own
- decide to devote one or two classes to a review of important foundational material

Whet students' appetites for course content[1]

Some instructors simply hand out the syllabus and dismiss class figuring that the enrollment has not yet stabilized and it does not make sense to cover material. While there is truth to that argument, the first day of class is a great chance to stimulate interest about the course and to activate relevant prior knowledge students have about the material. Here are some suggestions for activities that orient students to the content:

- **Directed reading-thinking activity.** Lyons et al. (2003, p. 87) suggest the following exercise:

1. On your own, list everything you can think of that might be in a book entitled [your textbook, or the name of the course if you don't have a textbook].
2. Get with a partner, share your ideas, and then put the ideas you both generated for step 1 into categories.
3. Give each category a name.
4. Get with another pair and together combine your ideas. Then arrange the categories as a table of contents for this book and write it on the chart paper each group has been given.

This activity gets students talking to each other, makes them realize they bring relevant knowledge to bear, and it makes them think about a possible overarching structure for that knowledge. If that structure is appropriate, you can capitalize on that, otherwise this exercise will expose some of the misconceptions students possess, giving you a chance to correct them. The activity typically takes about half an hour.

- **Collect data from the students about issues related to course content.** This exercise gives you knowledge about the students and is relevant in social science courses that involve research. A statistics instructor always collects data on the first day and uses the survey and the students' responses to illustrate points about survey sampling.
- **Have students generate hypothesis about a typical problem in your course.** This exercise can be used to foreshadow different positions and camps in your discipline. When appropriate, you can push the students to think about how they would test their hypotheses, getting deeper into methods of inquiry appropriate for the discipline.
- **Connect course content to current events.** Bring in newspaper or magazine clips that relate to your course. Whenever you can connect your field to current events, or pop culture, or student interests, you demonstrate relevance, which increases student motivation.

[1] You can find other good ideas for the first day of class at: http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/preparing-to-teach/10-ideas-for-a-great-first-day-of-class

- **Common sense inventory.** Nilson (2003) describes a "Common Sense Inventory" where students need to determine whether 15 statements related to the course content are true or false (e.g., in a social psychology course, "Suicide is more likely among women than men," or "Over half of all marriages occur between persons who live within 20 blocks of each other"). After paired or small group discussions, you can reveal the right answer. This works particularly well in courses where students bring in a lot of misconceptions (e.g., Introductory Physics).

Course Planning Timeline

As you design your class and create your syllabus, get your class up and running on Canvas, and make course materials available to students, it is helpful to keep a timeline in mind. Unfortunately, for most new TAs, starting on course planning 6 months ahead may not synchronize with when they actually find out what they are teaching. The following might be seen as an ideal plan or as a schedule to use for the second year of course planning:

Time Period (relative to start of classes)	**Tasks**
Six Months Prior	Define course goals. Determine course content. Think about appropriate teaching methods. Begin reviewing possible texts. Begin discussing course goals, teaching philosophies, course content, teaching methods, and course policies, as well as specific responsibilities with the instructor.
Three Months Prior	Begin to develop course schedule and syllabus. Develop teaching methods and tools. Determine how you will evaluate student learning: plan assignments and exams. Order text(s) and other materials, including films, videos, or software. If planning to use instructional technology or multimedia equipment, reserve a classroom that has all the necessary components. Contact guest speakers. Arrange field trips and other activities.
One Month Prior	Define course policies. Refine the course syllabus. Begin to compose lesson plans or lecture notes. Seek training on how to use instructional technology and multimedia systems; have any necessary additional software installed. Call bookstore to make sure books have arrived.
During and After	Take a few, brief notes after every class session; these notes will remind you of what went well and what you would like to change after the course has concluded. Review student evaluations.

	Refine the course design, responding to student evaluations and reflecting on your own evaluation of the course.

In addition to this timetable (adapted from the Teaching Center of the University of Washington at St. Louis), see the more detailed list of Things to Do Before the First Day of Class.

Course Delivery

As you teach your courses, look for opportunities to apply learning principles and to encourage active learning. The following sections provide you with some suggestions for how to do this through multiple forms of course delivery.

Apply Teaching and Learning Principles

- **Students' prior knowledge can help or hinder learning.**

  Do an introductory exercise to remind students of their prior knowledge and to assess its quality and quantity.

  This exercise will reorient students to your course content and encourage them to link content from class to class. Example exercises are: no- or low-stakes quizzes based on lectures or readings; opinion polls; brief discussions of real-world examples drawn from the news that relate to the course topics; or concept maps related to the days' topic.

  In addition to jogging the students' memories and activating their previous knowledge, such exercises provide an opportunity for you and your students to ask: "What do we already know, or think that we know, about today's topic? Does this prior knowledge help or hinder the learning we hope will take place in class today?"

- **How students organize knowledge influences how they learn and apply what they know.**

  Tell your students what the learning objectives for the class session are.

  Telling your students what your objectives for the day are motivates them by letting them know what is expected of them. Objectives can be general, i.e., "At the end of today's class, you will be able to discuss the current evidence for the roles of nature and nurture in gender roles," or specific, i.e., "At the end of today's class, you will be able perform a Chi-Square Test." However, they should be goal or action oriented. Objectives for the day should not be a schedule of events, i.e., "Today we will discuss the roles of nature and nurture in gender roles," or "Today we will do a Chi-Square Test," but, rather, should focus on what it is that the student himself or herself will be able to do at the end of the class.

- **Students' motivation determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn.**

Tell your students how this lesson relates to the previous lesson, give them a hint as to how it will relate to the next lesson, and relate the lesson and course material to real-world applications.

Linking the day's lesson to other lessons helps to build connections between what might otherwise seem like disparate course information, thus building the sort of dense, expert-level knowledge that is our goal. It also orients the students in the course, and helps them understand the purpose of the lesson at hand. Finally, giving real-world examples motivates students by letting them know how they can apply the knowledge they are gaining in your classroom —use news clippings related to your topic, and explain how new knowledge and skills can be used in the workplace or in navigating ones' personal life.

- **To develop mastery, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned**.
  Intersperse periods of lecture with periods of practice.

  If you are lecturing, be sure to provide a "break" in the lecture at least every 15 minutes, which is the average amount of time that students can focus on a lecturer before they either reach a point of information saturation or allow their attention to wander. Breaks in lecture are ideal times for students to practice what you are teaching them in the lecture. Practice might include actually performing a procedure, or a component part of a procedure; a short writing or concept-mapping exercise; or a period of question-and-answer or discussion to test student comprehension.

- **Goal-directed practice coupled with targeted feedback enhances the quality of students' learning.**
  Scaffold your students' learning in each lesson.

  Scaffolding refers to the temporary structure that supports people and materials as a larger, more permanent structure is built. Instructional scaffolding refers to techniques that support students and allow them to practice as they learn before they perform a procedure or display a skill on their own. Consider the larger goals and forms of evaluation in your class and include opportunities to practice accordingly. If your evaluation will largely be in the form of multiple- choice exams, include sample questions in your lessons. If your students will be expected to write a term paper in which they advance their own argument, include short writing exercises in your lessons in which they are asked to write an introductory or concluding paragraph or to outline an argument that you have made in class.

- **Students' current level of development interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual climate of the course to impact learning.**

At the end of the lesson, help the students to evaluate whether or not the lesson's learning objectives have been met.

This evaluation can take the form of a short practice quiz, asking students to perform a new skill, having students draw a concept map (and compare it to their earlier map of the same concept, if you used mapping as a warm-up exercise), or simply asking students whether or not they feel the objectives have been achieved. Such exercises cause students to consider whether or not they have learned (or, at least, started the process of learning) in today's class.

- **To become self-directed learners, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning.**
  Provide the students with a chance to give you feedback.

  Consider a short Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) at the end of your class. Generally, a CAT is a short exercise that asks students to either synthesize information from the lesson or provide feedback on the clarity of the lesson. Examples include: the "minute paper," in which students are asked to write down the most important point of the day's lesson, as well as the point on which they are least clear; the "one sentence summary," in which students are asked to summarize the lesson in one sentence; or short no- or low-stakes quizzes. CATs require students to think about the content of the lesson and also let them know that you as an instructor are concerned with their progress and the success of your lessons. Collecting and reading them allows you to understand how successful your lesson was and to identify problems and misapprehensions before exam time. (Ambrose 2010).

- **Encourage Active Learning**

  "The lecture is as effective as other methods for transmitting information. Most lectures are not as effective as discussion for promoting thought."
  —Donald A. Bligh, What's the Use of Lectures?

  In addition to your learning objectives, your choice of teaching methods will be influenced by factors such as your discipline, students' prior knowledge, class size, and nature of the subject matter. Lectures are particularly suited to large introductory classes and are also a good choice even in smaller classes when you need to a build a bridge between students' existing knowledge and new content. Discussions, on the other hand, encourage students to develop reasoning and communication skills by actively grappling with concepts and information. If you are teaching a foreign language, drill and practice in the language lab will help students master skills and gain confidence. In the sciences, laboratory sections and problem sets provide hands-on experience linking the theories explored in class with the actual practice of the discipline.

With any teaching method, you will want to find ways to engage students in activities that encourage them to think about what they are doing; assess their own degree of understanding and skill at handling concepts or problems; and transition from passive recipients of information to participants actively engaged with new information in a learning environment. In the following sections, you will find tips for fostering this type of active learning.

Teaching Methods

- Conventional lectures
- Activities in Which Students Work Individually
- Group Work
- Activities Which Promote General Class Discussion
- Activities to End a Class

Conventional Lectures

Perhaps few teaching methods are as overused and underrated as the traditional lecture. Lectures have the advantage of putting the instructor in control of content delivery. At the same time, lectures encourage passivity in students. Students who need more visual or kinesthetic forms of learning may find it difficult to absorb information delivered solely through lectures. Lectures allow for content control and efficiency of delivery. Active learning allows students to engage and own parts of the learning process. Many types of learning activities create a more inclusive learning environment for all students. You may find it helpful to integrate and balance lecturing content with effective learning activities.

For useful and creative suggestions for teaching with lectures, see the suggestions below and view the related articles and video material on the Washington University of St. Louis Teaching Center webpages: https://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/resources/teaching-methods/lectures/teaching-with-lectures/

- Post questions and handouts relevant to the lecture material in advance to "prep" your students.
- Consider posting skeletal, minimal-text PowerPoint presentations ahead of class via Canvas to help students organize lecture information.
- Begin class by having students brainstorm problems that remained unresolved from the previous lecture or raise questions from the previous class or their reading assignment. You can address these issues while introducing the day's topic. This is particularly useful if students know in advance that you'll be asking for their participation at the beginning of the class.
- Ask yourself which elements of the lecture you can ask your *students* to produce, either from their own knowledge or through guided inquiry, rather than simply tell them.

- Pause for a few minutes several times during an hour to allow students to consolidate notes and develop questions about the material being presented. Use clickers to assess students' understanding of the material.
- Pause and ask students to work in pairs to organize their notes and discuss key points of the lecture.
- During a pause, individuals or pairs can also develop questions based on points they feel are unclear. Ask students to write questions on 3x5 cards and hand them in. Address these questions in the final minutes of the class or use them as the starting point for the next lecture.
- Ask students to close their notebooks a few minutes before the end of class and to reconstruct on a blank sheet of paper as much of the lecture as possible—either in outline form or diagrammatically. This exercise in immediate recall forces students to review and consolidate key points and helps them discover areas for review.

Activities in Which Students Work Individually

- **Individual Exercises:** Labeling, rank ordering, multiple choice, problem solving, true/false and completion exercises provide an opportunity for the students to practice skills. Exercises must be completed in a set time period. The instructor either gives or discusses the correct answers.
- **Role Play:** Students are assigned the role of a character to play in a given situation. Without practice, they act out the events in the situation. Role Play may be used for situation analysis or to provide feedback to the students about their own behavior.
- **Questioning Strategies:** Questions which will be asked of the students are planned by the instructor prior to the class. Each question is written out and is related to a learning objective. In case of no response or incorrect responses, the instructor will also be prepared to ask easier or lower learning level questions which will lead the student to answer the original question.
- **Personal Vignette:** Given a topic or learning objective, the students are asked to relate it to their real experiences (personal or professional) by telling a brief story about it.
- **Progress Quizzes:** Short self-tests which are not graded. Answers are provided to the students.

Group Work

These are activities which involve students working in pairs or in small groups of three. A spokesperson from the group reports to the class at the end of the activity. For all group work, make sure to specify procedures fully and clearly—and check for student understanding—before commencing the activity.

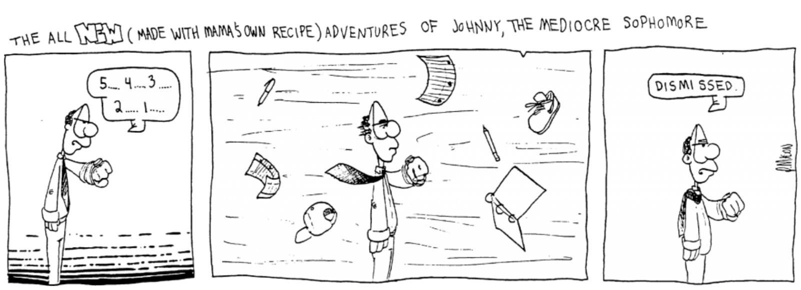
- **Buzz Sessions or Brainstorm Sessions:** A small group of students work within a determined time limit to answer a question to solve a problem and come to some conclusion.

- **Rank/Report:** Given a series of current items/issues, students rank the importance of items or issues and report the results with a justification.
- **Problems:** The group work on given problems within a specified time. The instructor discusses the correct answers at the end of the activity.
- **Complete Case Studies:** These are real world descriptions of problems with all accompanying data. Groups are asked to resolve the problem within a given period of time. Each group makes recommendations while the instructor acts as moderator.
- **Incomplete Case Studies:** Students work together to construct all or part of a hypothetical case which exhibits specified conditions.
- **Diagnostic Sessions:** Groups diagnose a problem, situation, process, etc.
- **Pyramiding (Snowball Groups):** This technique was originally developed at the United Kingdom's Open University. Given a problem, students first work alone, then in pairs and finally in foursomes (maximum) during which time they compare, refine and revise their conclusions and recommendations.

Activities Which Promote General Class Discussion

- **Controlled Discussion:** This is used after a lecture. Students ask questions and make comments. Instructor facilitates the process which goes on for a prescribed period of time.
- **Choices:** Given data on an event and several choices, students are asked to discuss all choices. They may select a choice, justify it, and give the consequences.
- **Debate:** This is an organized and civil argument moderated by the instructor.
- **Discussion of Handouts:** These are special documents, reports, pictures, etc. that are discussed.
- **Modeling:** Students are shown an ideal product, situation or person. Through questioning and discussion, they are able to explain why this is a "model" of what it is.
- **Simulation:** This presents cases, problems, scenarios, etc. in which the students must role play. A critical situation is discussed and analyzed and decisions are made about how to resolve the situation.
- **Read and Discuss:** This is a short reading followed by a discussion.

Activities to End a Class



- **Active Review:** After the instructor summarizes the class, students spend two to three minutes quietly thinking or reading through their notes and identifying any points of confusion. They clarify any points of confusion by asking questions of one another and the instructor.

- **The Silent Question:** The instructor asks students to respond to the following question: "A question I still have about this topic but have been afraid to ask is..." Students write their questions on a sheet of paper. Instructor addresses questions then if time permits, or at the next class.
- **Minute papers:** These are short writing assignments which can be completed in brief duration of time (e.g., one minute). They might address questions such as "What was the most important thing you learned today?" or "What was the muddiest point from today's class?"

James Lang describes the significance of end-of-class teaching strategies in his Chronicle of Higher Education series, "Small Changes in Teaching" https://www.chronicle.com/article/Small-Changes-in-Teaching-The/235583.

Evaluating Students

Learning is a multi-dimensional process. It is important to design assessments that allow students to express the knowledge and skills they are developing. A low exam score, or a poorly-written paper, is not necessarily proof that a student has not learned. If many students score poorly on the same test or paper, it might be evidence that the assessment was poorly designed or the material was not taught effectively.

To assign grades to your students, you will have to be evaluate them in some way. As a TA, you will almost certainly be responsible for grading, and in many cases, you will be at least partially responsible for designing exams and other methods of evaluation for your students. Although exactly what you will need to do will vary depending on the type of evaluation and on the course you are teaching, please bear in mind these general principles of evaluation:

- **The evaluations that your students produce – term papers, essays, reports, exam scores, etc. – may provide evidence of learning, but they are not the process of learning itself.** A low exam score, or a poorly-written paper, is not necessarily proof that a student has not learned; it is possible that they are just not able to communicate that learning. As such, you should design your evaluations of students with the following questions in mind: If my students have learned X, will they be able to communicate X using method Y? For example, if your students have spent much of their time in class involved in group discussion of texts, is a multiple-choice exam the best way of evaluating what they have learned? There should be alignment between in-class teaching methods and evaluation methods.
- **Scaffold the skills needed to complete the evaluation.** Your students should have ample chance to practice the skills needed for their evaluation. In a lab setting, for example, you should be sure that they have been taught all of the component parts of a procedure before being graded on the results of that procedure itself. When assigning term papers, require shorter written arguments or evaluations of sources to be turned in as practice before expecting them to write a term paper.
- **Use a rubric.** Students are more motivated when they know exactly how they are being evaluated. If half of a student's score on a paper will result from correct use of grammar and other mechanics of language, it is only fair that they know this ahead of time. A rubric, along with a clear algorithm for calculating grades, minimizes arbitrariness and the effects of grader subjectivity. This is important for student confidence in the grading process (see Academic Appeals below).
- **Provide multiple opportunities for evaluation in order to assess student learning.** You will not know how much your students have learned, overall, if you assess them based on only one or two exams. Provide students with as many evaluation opportunities, of as many different types, as is feasible.

Test Construction and Scoring

As Nitko (1996) and others emphasize, the following three principles are important to follow when constructing classroom assessments:

- Focus on your teaching and learning objectives:

  Does the assessment that you've chosen measure the skills and knowledge students should have at this stage of the course?

- Develop your assessments so that they elicit from your students only the knowledge and performance that are relevant to your teaching and learning objectives?

  Would a student who has mastered expected learning objectives be able to do well on this assessment?

- Create/Choose forms of assessment that don't inhibit or prevent the student's ability to demonstrate attainment of your learning objectives.

  Is this form of assessment the most appropriate and helpful means of evaluating the students' knowledge and skills?

- Consider using a variety of assessments over the course so that students with learning types of learning styles and abilities have a greater opportunity to do well.

  Are the forms of assessment that I'm using sufficiently inclusive? Will those with learning difficulties be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills with appropriate accommodations?

If you are aware of and try to follow the three principles, you will develop tests that have the desired properties referred to as reliability and validity, as well as the characteristic of inclusivity.

Planning Your Test

According to Dr. Carol Baker, the initial phase of test construction is the creation of a test plan – a blueprint for the test. It helps to ensure that the test will be a valid representation of your learning objectives and that the various content areas covered by the test reflect the emphasis you have placed on them in your lectures, readings and class discussions. By listing the content areas/topics and the percentage of emphasis each will have, you develop a structure for your test. You may also want to consider the level of understanding you want the students to have about each topic (refer to Bloom's Taxonomy). For example, do you want students to be able simply to recall information, or do you want them to comprehend or apply the information?

You can create a matrix by listing your content areas/topics as rows, and levels of the thinking process (such as recall, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize or evaluate) as columns. When you start to write or select items from other sources, you should follow your plan and the resulting sample of items will be representative of your course content and emphasis. This planning before the actual writing of test items is very important, but it can be simplified so that it does not become a burden for you. For example, you could use "recall," "comprehension," and "higher levels" as the categories of learning. Each time you teach the course, you can make adjustments and refinements to your test plan.

Developing a test plan also helps you determine the types of items you want to write for your test. Your choice between essay items and objective items depends on the types of objectives you have developed, the level of thinking you wish to test and, practically speaking, on your class size. Essay items are so named because of the need for a written response. The term "objective," however, refers to the scoring procedures used rather than to the type of response given. If a student receives the same score regardless of who scores the test, the test is said to be objective. You may want to combine several types of items in your test.

- Objective tests allow you to sample adequately from a large amount of course material, thereby increasing content validity. They are easy to score, but it does take time and skill to write effective items. Item formats include true/false, multiple-choice and matching. One common criticism is that these items often test only basic recognition, but test developers have demonstrated that effectively constructed items can also be used to test higher levels of thinking.
- Essay tests include items requiring short answers and/or more extended responses. It takes less time to develop essay test items, and they give students an opportunity to demonstrate skills of synthesis and evaluation as well as organization and expression. However, the scoring of essay items is time-consuming and must follow certain guidelines in order for the test to be reliable (i.e., others reading the essay would assign the same score as you). Remember that it is important to consider your test plan in deciding on the type of test items to use.
- Problems may also be used as test items, depending on your discipline. They may be categorized as either objective or essay items, depending on the scoring system that is used. If the problem is simple and you are scoring for a correct or incorrect response only, it would be considered an objective test item. However, many problems involve complex solutions requiring several steps and perhaps allowing alternative approaches to their solutions. These problems are more difficult to score and they present the same reliability challenges as the essay item.

Guidelines to consider when creating test items:

<u>Multiple-Choice Questions</u>

Suggestions for writing multiple-choice items include, but are not limited to the following:

- Select content related to important aspects of the course objectives.
- Have the question clearly present the problem and include all the words that would otherwise need to be repeated in each option.
- Avoid irrelevant information in the question or options, unless deciding what is necessary information is part of the learning objective.
- Have only one correct response.
- Do not provide verbal clues that might enable students to eliminate options or select the correct one.
- Make all options grammatically consistent with the question and also parallel in form.
- When there is a logical sequence in which alternatives can occur (such as time or numbers), use it to structure multiple-choice options; choice "A" might be 1800, "B" might be 1812, and "C" might be 1819.
- Formulate the correct option so that it is not consistently different in appearance from the incorrect options. (Often there is a tendency to include more information in the correct option.)
- Try to have at least four options per item unless doing so requires using implausible options.
- Be very careful in using "all of the above" and "none of the above." If students perceive one answer to be truer than another answer, they may be reluctant to select an all-or-nothing option. You want your test to reflect accurately your student's understanding of the material.
- If you use a negative ("Which of the following is NOT . . .") in the stem, emphasize it by capitalizing and bolding it so students will notice it.
- Vary the position of the correct answer in a random manner and have each position (A, B, C, D) represented as equally as possible. Some students may be thrown off a correct answer simply because there are too many "C" answers in a row.

Make sure that you give yourself enough time to write your test items. It takes time to write good test items, and it is helpful for you to review the entire test after several days have elapsed. It is a good idea to proofread and develop the answer key for your objective test before printing copies. This will allow you to catch errors that might otherwise require writing corrections on the board the day of the test or even having to drop items from your test (if, for example, you discover you have no correct answer or more than one correct answer). Check the numbering of the items as well to make sure it is accurate.

Avoid re-using tests. Even if the question sheet is not returned to students, they find ways of accessing copies of old test papers.

Essay Questions

When writing essay items, do the following:

- Keep in mind whether the learning objective you are measuring requires the higher-order thinking process of analysis, synthesis or evaluation. This will help you with the wording of the question. “Analyze the thematic structure of the text”; “Evaluate the validity of. . .”
- Write the question in such a way that the task is clearly defined for the students.
- Start the essay item with words such as “compare,” “contrast,” “give reasons for,” “give examples of,” “criticize,” “differentiate,” “explain how.”
- Be sure the essay question asks for the specific behavior that you want the student to display.
- Adapt the length and complexity of the question to the level of the students.
- Provide an indication of how questions will be weighted by giving the number of points for each question. (This allows students to plan their time.)
- With essay items, make a list for yourself of specific ideas that you will be looking for when grading the essay. This will help you evaluate whether the student addressed and understood key points. This will assist you in determining the total number of possible points for each question and will enable you to adjust if the weighting is not what you had intended.

Problem Questions

If you are developing problem-based test items, consider the following:

- Develop problems that test students on the strategies and concepts they have been taught in ways similar but not identical to the problems that they have covered in class or homework assignments.
- Don’t let the setting for the problem become so complex that your scenario will confuse students who know how to solve the problem.
- Review your problem to make sure that all of the students will have the contextual knowledge assumed.
- Work out the solution yourself to help you decide how conceptually complex it is. If there are a number of sub-problems embedded in the problem, you may want to provide some of the assumed information such as formulas.
- Think about how much time students will need to think through and solve the problem. (This will be longer than the time it takes you to solve the problem since you are much more familiar with the concepts being tested.)

Test Length

In writing test items, you should consider how long the test will take. Consider both the length of the class and the reading level of your students. You do not want students to feel rushed and frustrated because they were not able to demonstrate their knowledge of the material in the allotted time. Remember that you may have students who will require testing accommodations, such as being tested in the university's testing center, receiving additional time, or the test being printed on colored paper. Some general guidelines regarding time requirements for high school student test takers (as reported in Nitko, 1996):

Task	**Approximate Time per Item**
True/False items	20-30 seconds
Multiple-choice (factual)	40-60 seconds
Multiple-choice (complex)	70-90 seconds
Matching (5 stems/6 choices)	2-4 minutes
Short-answer	2-4 minutes
Multiple-choice (with calculations)	2-5 minutes
Word problems (simple math)	5-10 minutes
Short Essays	15-20 minutes
Data analysis/graphing	15-25 minutes
Extended essays	35-50 minutes

If you are combining multiple-choice and essay items, these estimates may help you decide how many to include. One mistake often made by first-time teachers is mismatching the length of the test with the time allowed.

Once your questions are developed, make sure that you include clear directions to the students. For the objective items, specify that they should select one answer for each item and indicate the point value of each question, especially if you are weighting sections of the test differently. Let them know if they must use only pencil for some portion of the test. For essay items, indicate the point value and suggested time to be spent on the item. For problems, indicate whether partial credit will be given or only the correct solution will be awarded credit.

If you are teaching a large class with close seating arrangements and are giving an objective test, you may want to consider administering several versions of your test to decrease the opportunities for cheating. Multiple versions have become quite easy to develop with the availability of word-processing software. You simply create versions of your test with different arrangements of the items. It is not even necessary to change the position of the correct response for each item. You can also print these versions on different colors of paper so that it is obvious to students that they have a different test than the person sitting beside them.

Test Administration

- Be in the room ahead of the students.
- Come prepared with extra pens or paper.
- Be present in the room for the whole of the test. It is unwise to leave the room during the exam.
- Be clear with students about the use of cell phones during the exam. If students are not permitted to look at their cell phones, then have a clock available or post the remaining time at regular intervals.
- If students are required to show their student i.d. card in order to take the test, make sure that you have notified them several times – in the syllabus policies, verbally, and on the course webpage.
- Do not allow students to take the test in a location other than the regular testing room, unless their DSS accommodations allow them to be tested in the testing center.
- Usually testing in the testing center for students with DSS accommodations require prior communication and arrangements, including sending the test through secure means ahead of time.

Scoring Essays and Problems

Grading essay tests and problems takes a considerable amount of time. You also need to ensure that your grading is consistent throughout the whole cohort of tests.

- A rubric for grading essays helps with the effort to be consistent and to provide constructive feedback based on the rubric and course learning outcomes. Your department may have such a rubric, especially for large introductory classes.
- If you are assisting a faculty member in a course and have been given responsibility for scoring essay items, meet with him/her/zir to discuss the elements that the faculty member expects to see in an essay and the points to be assigned to the responses.
- Decide whether you are going to score factors other than content, such as spelling, language usage, and organization. Make sure that your students are aware if you are.
- If there are several essay questions, score all of the students' responses to one question at a time. This improves consistency and reduces any "carryover" effects.
- Score essay responses anonymously to avoid any bias resulting from your familiarity with students and their previous work. One idea is to have students write their names on the back of the answer sheet or booklet.
- Periodically check to see whether you have applied the criteria in the same way to later-scored answers as to earlier-scored ones.

- If you have a large number of papers to score, stop when you get tired so that your frame of mind will not cause your scoring to be inconsistent. When you start again, read over the last few papers you scored to be sure that your scoring was objective.
- Provide students with feedback so that the test provides an opportunity for students to learn their strengths and weaknesses. You can provide short written comments or verbal feedback to students in a brief conference.
- It is obvious that you will need to spend a great deal of time and effort to do a thorough job in scoring essay items. You may want to start out by using short-answer essay items and as you feel more comfortable with the process, refining your items to require a more extended answer. If you have a very limited timeframe in which to grade a large number of tests, then stick with short-answer essay questions.
- If you keep track of how students perform on each element in your list, you can identify the points that are weak and need to be reinforced in your teaching. If you provide the students with the elements of the ideal answer, they can gain information about their strengths and weaknesses.
- If you are assisting a faculty member who is responsible for the course, you might check with him/her after both of you have read several papers to ensure that your scoring is consistent. In some departments, this may be the typical pattern of supervision for the TA.

Labs and Problem Sets

Many teaching assistants at UNC work with courses in Math, Biology, and Chemistry, where students are assessed through solving problems and writing lab reports. Interestingly, grading long problems or lab reports is not entirely unlike grading essays. Students may understand what they are supposed to do in a lengthy calculation but make a mistake that leads to a wrong answer. The process of working through the problem and showing that work may be as important as getting the correct answer. If students will be given partial credit for their work on problems or exercises, then graders should have established criteria for awarding partial credit. Teaching assistants in math and science courses should provide students with a written statement of their (or the supervising faculty member's) grading criteria before the first assignment or lab report is due.

The following sections (adapted with permission from the Center for Learning and Teaching at the University of Pittsburgh, as well as other institutions) provide general advice for grading lab reports, problem-solving exercises, or numerical assignments and offer advice on preventing cheating. You are encouraged to speak with your supervising instructor and peers about the specific standards required in your discipline and for the specific courses with which you work.

Grading Lab Reports

At first glance, lab reports seem easy to grade. Since lab reports follow specific guidelines, it is not difficult to judge whether the basic requirements have been completed. A student who has finished the experiment and submitted an accurate lab report has met the fundamental requirements of a lab. However, not every experiment works out and not every lab report equally distills the larger themes from the experiment. When grading lab reports, consider the following:

- Was the procedure followed carefully and conscientiously?
- Was the theoretical purpose of the lab understood? Was it properly and thoroughly explained in the lab report?
- Was the lab report written in a clear manner and in the prescribed form according the standards of the discipline?
- Did the student explain mistakes and unexpected results, or explore alternative theories and procedures?
- The real key to grading a lab report is to establish standards in advance (preferably in a written lab syllabus) and to let students know how their work will be graded. Students need to know how much weight has been assigned to each of the following:
- Performing the actual experiment.
- Getting a correct result.
- Exploring alternative approaches and explanations.
- Recognizing the theoretical implications of the experiment (regardless of the success of the lab).

Although lab instructors apply their own standards, keep in mind that the overall objective is for students to experience the scientific method first-hand and to apply the theoretical models that they have learned in the lecture class. While lab grades traditionally are based on two criteria, completion of the experiment and a written lab report, it is possible to grade students on other observed aspects of the lab. Teaching assistants may consider student's preparation, their ability to perform the lab techniques, their understanding of the procedures, and their observance of safety standards. When using observation to assess grades, it is especially important that you establish clear guidelines and keep accurate notes on students' performance.

Grading Numerical Problem Solving

Numerical problem solving—everything from an engineering exam to a math quiz—pose special considerations for teaching assistants. Partial credit is often given to students who follow the correct procedures or use the right formulas even if they ultimately get an incorrect answer. Once again, establishing clear guidelines and making your grading criteria available to your students prevents justified frustration on the part of your students and can make grading easier. The following advice may be helpful:

- Take the exam. Taking the exam has two advantages. First, if you cannot solve a problem, it may indicate that the problem is poorly worded or not appropriate for the class. Keep in mind that questions posed on an exam should reflect the teaching objectives of the course. Second, taking the exam will help you to establish grading criteria. Are the formulas employed simple? If so, how much credit should you assign to a student who identifies the right formula or procedure, but does not know how to use it? Is there only one answer? Does the math (or other task) require multiple steps creating natural divisions to which to assign grades?

- Have one standard. Even before the exam is distributed, you and the instructor should meet to discuss the criteria that will be used for grading. All graders should use the same guidelines so that students are graded fairly. In some courses, this can be done when the course coordinators convene a meeting of all the course instructors.
- Watch out for patterns. As a teaching assistant you may not have written the exam and the grading criteria may not be your own. However, watch out for patterns that may indicate that an exam problem was poorly written. If all of the students in the class are making the same mistakes, bring the situation to the attention of your supervising faculty member. If a disproportionate number of students have come up with the same wrong answer, it is often a sign that the question was poorly constructed or misleading.
- Consider alternate solutions. Your grading criteria will probably be based on how you yourself solve the problem. Often the procedures that you, other teaching assistants, and the professor work out are the most efficient and even most appropriate means of answering the question. However, there may be other acceptable answers. In advance, determine how alternative correct answers will be handled and be alert to creative solutions so that credit can be assigned fairly.
- Take Breaks. Grading 200 problems in a night, or even a week, can be difficult. If you are grading numerical answers, grading fatigue can lead to serious mistakes. Take breaks. Only grade papers when you are alert.

Essays and Term Papers

Written assignments demonstrate students' knowledge of the subject matter, their capacity to evaluate information, and their ability to craft an argument creatively and logically. In other words, papers often test the depth of a student's understanding of the subject matter. The following sections provide guidelines for designing and grading written assignments.

Designing Written Assignments

Be creative but be realistic when writing essay or paper questions.

The design of writing assignments varies as much as the discipline you're teaching. An assignment, such as a lab report, may have a specified structure; whereas a creative writing assignment might have fewer rules governing the structure. Some assignments, such as a paper in history, may require the student to engage with source materials such as books, journal articles, and primary documents; however, a reflective assignment may draw on an individual's experiences or thoughts upon one text. As much as they may differ, the objective of writing assignments may be quite similar – helping students attain the skills needed to write well in a specific discipline.

Be creative but be realistic when writing essay or paper questions. Consider your teaching objectives and what your students can reasonably be expected to know or to figure out. Keep the language clear, precise, and simple, but include enough information that the student is given a basic outline of your expectations. Avoid using phrases that could be misinterpreted and avoid topics that cannot be answered within the page length and time you have set.

Grading Papers

No matter how well a question is worded and how many guidelines are offered, no two papers are ever alike. Two very good writers may marshal the same facts and come to the same conclusions, but how they present their arguments—the weight given to the evidence and the stress placed upon the conclusions—is bound to be different. Grading written assignments, then, is an inherently difficult chore. Two very different papers may both be A papers.

Grading writing assignments is an important part of teaching. The feedback we receive on our written work teaches us how to organize, develop, and communicate our ideas. Good writing is a practical skill that will help your students communicate effectively in almost any field that they explore.

Each discipline has its own style of writing and, as a result, its own standards by which papers are graded. If this is your first time grading, you should sit down with your faculty supervisor or another teaching assistant and discuss writing in your discipline and what is typically expected of undergraduates in your department. Bring a few papers along so that you can both read them and then discuss specific issues that the papers raise.

In the following sections, we provide guidelines for grading papers. Although your grading standards should be fitted to the course, your teaching objectives, and the department you are teaching in, this information may serve as a starting place for thinking about what is an appropriate grade.

Guidelines for Grading Written Assignments

- **Establish Clear Criteria for Your Students.** If you do not provide clear grading policies, few students will meet your expectations. Provide a detailed written description of the assignments in your syllabus or in a handout stating your policies. Although you may not have designed the syllabus and the assignments, as the one who is grading their papers, you should let your students know your expectations and guidelines.
- **Graders Unite.** If more than one person is grading papers, you need to establish a consistent standard for your grading. One simple way to do this is for each of you to

grade five papers and then to trade papers. Would you have given the same grades? If not, why? As you discuss the differences in your grades, outline a rough standard for the rest of your grading. When you are finished, you should each have a set of matching criteria for assigning grades. As you are grading, if you come across a paper that does not seem to fit the criteria you have established, assign a grade and then pass it to your fellow grader for a quick review.

Some instructors believe that when two teaching assistants are grading papers in a class, they should grade each other's recitations. This would seem to establish a greater level of objectivity since you probably do not know the students in your co-teaching assistant's class. But the approach also has some significant disadvantages. Two teaching assistants rarely present exactly the same material. If the material you presented in your recitation is different from the material your coworker presented, you may find it difficult to grade his or her recitations. In addition, your students have adapted their writing (as good writers should) to their audience. The verbal feedback you give in class helps to build students' expectations of how their papers will be graded. Switching graders can put your students at an unfair disadvantage.

- **Read All the Papers First.** Before you start to grade, read all (or at least most) of the papers once. Reading the papers will help you to establish the range of responses and to distinguish the best papers from the worst. Many graders, like Jim, even sort the papers into rough representative piles as they read through them. Then they grab the B paper pile and assign grades with respect to the other B papers. Believing it to be overly time-consuming, many TAs skip this step. However, a preliminary reading of all the papers should actually decrease the amount of time you spend grading each individual paper while increasing overall grading consistency.
- **Be Objective.** Needless to say, you should not allow your personal feelings about a student to influence your grading. What is often more difficult, but less obvious, is that you should not let your personal feelings about the position taken in an essay or paper influence your grading. If you hate capital punishment but your student just wrote a clear, well-argued essay advocating the death penalty, you should give it a good grade. When grading, you should focus on the quality of the argument not the specific values the student advocates. In other words, you are looking at how the student addresses the reader, explains his or her position, establishes the facts, and draws conclusions.
- **Be Consistent.** If one student lost three points for not mentioning new research into the optic nerve, every student who missed that argument should lose three points. Sometimes, after forty or so papers, keeping track of these little deductions can be difficult. A rubric and a model answer will do wonders at helping you maintain consistency while grading many papers.
- **Provide Clear and Concise Written Comments.** There is nothing more frustrating for a student than to get a paper back with two or three scribbled and indecipherable comments in the margins. The grade then seems arbitrary and the conscientious student is left with very little advice on how to improve his or her writing for the next assignment. Clear, concise comments that offer advice on how to remedy mistakes are

the most useful to students. Also, comments that point even the best student toward ways of improving work will help them as they move into more difficult work.

- **Separate Comments on Style from Comments on Substance.** Place short notes on grammar or style in the margins near the text you are referring to, but save longer notes on the presentation, organization and argumentation for the end of the paper. Until you finish reading the paper, you are not going to be able to make comprehensive remarks.
- **Provide Corrective Comments.** It is not enough to tell your students that they made a mistake; you also need to explain to them how to make their writing more effective in the future. Perhaps one of your students has demonstrated a clear knowledge of the subject you are teaching, but in his papers, he consistently makes arguments without drawing conclusions. You might do the following:

> **Explain the problem to the student.** "You seem to know the material, but you have not drawn any conclusions from the evidence."
>
> **Select an example of the problem and explain why it is a problem.** "This was a problem throughout the paper, but let us look at one example. On page three you provide a number of quotes that demonstrate that Freud had a low opinion of women. Good, but what is the effect of Freud's bias? Does it mean that we should take Freud's theories less seriously or can we trust that modern psychology has routed out these biases?"
>
> **Offer a solution.** "Joe, the paper is weak unless you draw some conclusions from your analysis. You might, for example, explain how Freud's bias taints the foundations of his theory. I might conclude the section you wrote by saying: 'Freud's bias cannot be simply dismissed as a product of early 20th century chauvinism since it fundamentally influences the psychology that is practiced today. Freud's entire theory of infant development, a cornerstone of this larger work, is . . .'" Avoid rewriting the entire passage; instead, offer students some direction on how they might rewrite it themselves.

Obviously, time will probably not permit your making such extensive comments about every problem that a student presents. Select the most pervasive problem, the one that you feel the student needs to work on the most. Learning to write is long-term project best accomplished by tackling one problem at a time.

• **Consider the Four Factors of a Good Essay.** First, the essay needs to make clear its purpose. Addressing its audience, it should frame the argument that is being made. Second, the essay should marshal evidence and present that evidence with arguments in a reasoned and logical manner. Third, the arguments should be organized in a persuasive way that builds toward the conclusions. Finally, it must be readable. Let your students know that the use of good grammar, correct spelling and a precise vocabulary make it easier for the reader to understand the argument that they are making. How these four factors (purpose, reasoning and content, organization, and presentation) determine the grade is up to you to decide. Not every instructor places the same weight on spelling as on reasoning. However, in most cases the grade you assign will be determined by looking at these four categories. Communicate this clearly to your students in your comments. If they have organized the paper well but have failed to draw logical conclusions from the evidence, compliment their organization and then show them how they might have used their evidence more effectively.

- **Provide Positive Feedback.** Your goal in grading papers is to encourage students to perform better on the next assignment. Offering only negative comments merely discourages students. Be sure to comment when the student has made an impressive argument or has demonstrated a clear understanding of the problem being addressed.
- **Allow Yourself Plenty of Time.** Grading papers takes time. After your preliminary reading, allow at least twenty minutes for a three- to four-page paper.
- **Use a Rubric, Grading Sheet or Handout.** Often when grading a stack of papers, you will find yourself writing the same comments over and over. Telling every student to indent quotations is painstaking work with little reward; in fact, such comments often distract you from the longer and more significant comments that you may want to write. One solution is to make a list of common problems that you found when grading a set of papers and to prepare a handout to distribute when you return the papers. Another possibility is to create a grading checklist. A grading checklist is a form attached to each paper with typical comments listed and mistakes checked off. (A grading checklist is not, however, a replacement for in-depth comments. You should use it only to mark consistent grammatical and organizational errors, and you should review it in class so that your students are clear on what the pre-fashioned comments mean.

Grading Standards: A Guide to Assigning Grades to Written Assignments

These grading standards establish four major criteria for evaluating written assignments: purpose, reasoning and content, organization, and presentation. Of course, not every paper will fit neatly into one grade category; a paper may, for instance, have some characteristics of B paper and some of C paper. The final grade it receives depends on the weight the instructor gives each criterion. The following is given simply as an example of a grading rubric. In developing your own rubric, you will want to consider the course learning objectives, the knowledge and skills that the written assignment is meant to assess, and any other specific points you have instructed students to demonstrate in the assignment.

Grade	Grading Standards
A Papers	The A paper has not only fulfilled the assignment, but has done so in a fresh and mature manner. It has effectively met the needs of the rhetorical situation, it makes a substantial contribution to the situation, and it likely to move the audience to act as the writer desires. The evidence is detailed; the sources of information have been used creatively and cited appropriately. The reasoning is valid. Beyond that, the paper is thoughtful, showing hard work, good judgment, and sensitivity to the complexities of the situation or issue. The organization is effective for the audience and purpose. The introduction establishes the context and purpose of the communication. Segments, whether sections or paragraphs, are fully developed and follow logically from what precedes them. Headings and subheadings are appropriately used. The conclusion is suitable in tone and strategy. The prose is clear and readable. It contains few errors, none of which seriously undermines the effectiveness of the paper for educated readers.
B Papers	The B Paper has not just followed the assignment but fulfilled it. In taking its stand, the paper shows a clear sense of audience and purpose. It shows more awareness of the implications of what it is saying and of its assumptions about the audience than the C paper does. The writer has not settled for the most obvious evidence. The B paper is characterized by thoroughness. The reasoning is more than adequate. Not only does it make no mistakes, but also it shows thoughtfulness and some awareness of complexities and other points of view. The B paper has an effective introduction and conclusion. The order of information is logical, and the reader can follow it because of well-chosen transitions. Paragraph divisions are logical, and the paragraphs use enough specific detail to make their point tellingly. The expression is competent, more ambitious than that of the C paper, less successful than that of the A paper. Not only is sentence structure correct, but it also uses subordination, emphasis, sentence length and variety, and modifiers effectively. It would be surprising to find serious sentence errors—comma splices, fragments, or fused sentences—in a B paper. Word choice is idiomatic, vocabulary precise. Punctuation, grammar, and spelling conform to the conventions of edited American English. The assignment has been followed. The paper develops its points with a sense of audience.

C Papers	The information and degree of persuasion in a C paper are appropriate. There is evidence and though the evidence is perhaps obvious and easily accessible, it has been gathered honestly and used responsibly. The C paper may exhibit some minor imperfections or inconsistencies in mapping out the arguments, but there are no major flaws in its reasoning. The organization is clear. The reader could easily outline the presentation. Paragraphs have adequate development and are divided appropriately. Transitions may be mechanical, but they foster coherence. The expression is competent. Sentence structure is generally correct, although it may show limited competence with such elements as subordination, emphasis, sentence variety, sentence length, and modifiers. It relies instead on simple and compound sentences. The paper is generally free of comma splices, unintentional fragments, and fused sentences. Word choice is correct though limited. It may contain errors in spelling, mechanics, and grammar.
D Papers	A D paper attempts to follow the assignment, even if the choice of topic or situation is poor, whether too broad, too narrow, or inappropriate. A D paper often shows a poor sense of audience and purpose. For example, it may over- or underestimate the audience's prior knowledge or assumptions. Or it may correctly assess the situation, but add little of substance to it. Necessary evidence may be missing, irrelevant evidence present, or the interpretation or evaluation of that evidence may be inadequate. The reasoning may be seriously flawed, resting on an insufficient understanding of the situation or the audience. Or it may rely too heavily on evidence from published sources without adding original analysis. Organization may be significantly flawed in any of the following ways: relevant segments may be missing; topic sentences may be absent or inappropriate to the content of the paragraph; paragraphs are not well developed, divided or arranged; transitions are missing or incorrect; introductions or conclusions are missing or incomplete. A D paper may have numerous and consistent errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The syntax or diction in some sentences may be so flawed that they are incomprehensible. Lack of proofreading can turn an otherwise adequate paper into a D paper.
F Papers	The F paper may have not answered the question posed in the assignment, even if it is correctly and coherently written. (Many instructors require that such papers be rewritten before assigning a grade.) It relates to the assignment but has no clear purpose, or goes off in several directions. It is missing essential elements of the assigned form of communication. It falls seriously short of the minimum length requirements. It may be plagiarized—either it is someone else's paper or it has used sources improperly or without documentation.

	It is plagued by more than one of the organizational deficiencies of the D paper. Numerous and consistent errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction, or syntax seriously hinder communication.

Checklist for Grading Essay Questions

Grading essay questions on exams requires attention similar to that used to grade papers. Here is a check-list that may help you evaluate essay questions.

Strengths: Argument and Presentation

- Clear thesis.
- Paper is logical and convincing, i.e., solid reasoning throughout.
- Good introduction, i.e., Interesting and anticipates argument.
- Good conclusion, i.e., effectively summarizes argument.
- Well organized.
- Plentiful and well-chosen evidence supports thesis.
- Good grasp of key issues.
- Addresses all aspects of the question.

Weaknesses: Argument

- Essay lacks a clear, specific thesis.
- Arguments are unclear or incomplete.
- Arguments are not substantiated with sufficient evidence.
- Too many facts, citations or quotations without analysis.
- Factual errors.
- Misused key terms or concepts.

Weaknesses: Presentation

- Weak paragraphing, e.g., unrelated ideas are strung together.
- Paper is poorly organized and does not follow a clear outline.
- No/weak introduction.
- No/weak conclusion.
- Insufficient attributions, i.e., sources are used without proper citations.
- Grammatical and/or spelling errors.
- Partially or mostly incoherent.

Advice

- Always proofread or have someone proofread your work.
- Prepare an outline before you begin to write.
- Read the question carefully and address all parts of the question.
- Spend more time preparing your answer; use lectures/books.
- For future assignments, seek the assistance of the Writing Center.
- If checked, make an appointment with your teaching assistant.

Your grade for this paper:

Additional comments are on the back of this page.

Evaluating Participation

It is a good idea to show some caution and consistency in how class participation is graded. Lack of participation by students may be due to factors other than understanding the course material. These factors include culture, gender, personality types, personal psychology, race, age, even classroom seating arrangements and the openness of the instructor. Previous negative experiences and interpersonal conflict (between class members) can also inhibit participation. At the same time, many courses rely on active participation by as many class members as possible. If you have the freedom to consider alternative means of assessing class participation, you could consider grading on the basis of small group activities and in-class writing assignments. At the very least, you should provide many and varied opportunities for all students to participate and be both respectful and supportive of student contributions.

As with any other form of evaluation, a rubric will clarify for your students how you will evaluate their class participation and calculate that portion of their grade. Some things to consider: Will attendance figure into the participation grade? Do you want to grade quantity of participation, quality, or a mixture of both? These are questions to be considered by you and your faculty supervisor, but an example of such a rubric, from Villanova University, is provided below.

Class participation deserving of an A grade will be strong in most categories; participation that is strong in some categories but needs development in others will receive a B; a grade of C reflects a need for development in most categories; D work is typically unsatisfactory in several categories; and F work, unsatisfactory in nearly all.

Activity	Strong Work	Needs Development	Unsatisfactory
Listening	Actively and respectfully listens to peers and instructor	Sometimes displays lack of interest in comments of others	Projects lack of interest or disrespect for others
Preparation	Arrives fully prepared with all assignments completed, and notes on reading, observations, questions	Sometimes arrives unprepared or with only superficial preparation	Exhibits little evidence of having read or thought about assigned material
Quality of contributions	Comments are relevant and reflect understanding of: assigned text(s); previous remarks of other students; and insights about assigned material	Comments sometimes irrelevant, betray lack of preparation, or indicate lack of attention to previous remarks of other students	Comments reflect little understanding of either the assignment or previous remarks in seminar
Impact on seminar	Comments frequently help move seminar conversation forward	Comments sometimes advance the conversation, but sometimes do little to move it forward	Comments do not advance the conversation or are actively harmful to it

Frequency of participation	Actively participates at appropriate times	Sometimes participates, but at other times is "tuned out"	Seldom participates and is generally not engaged

Sample rubrics by discipline or type of assignment
http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/rubrics.htm

The University Grading System

Consult the University Registrar's website (www.unco.edu/registrar) for detailed information on the following:

- Grading Policies
- Grade Due Dates

Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

As instructors we all bring distinctive abilities and perspectives to a classroom. Students also bring their own uniqueness. It is precisely this diversity of perspectives that makes a university education so valuable in a complex society. The challenge is to teach in a way that acknowledges and respects the cultural, political and economic realities of this country while at the same time trying to focus efforts on the needs of individual students.

Different points of view, whether a political stance on abortion or a different method of solving a math problem, tend to make people, including instructors, uncomfortable. Your challenge is to convince students that a certain amount of discomfort is inevitable while at the same time providing the tools and self-confidence necessary for them to stand up for their own points of view.

The following tips are taken from Barbara Gross Davis' chapter entitled "Diversity and Complexity in the Classroom: Considerations of Race, Ethnicity and Gender" in her excellent book, *Tools for Teaching*.

According to Davis, "There are no universal solutions or specific rules for responding to ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity in the classroom. ...Perhaps the overriding principle is to be thoughtful and sensitive ..." (p. 39). She recommends that you:

- Recognize any biases or stereotypes you may have absorbed.
- Treat each student as an individual, and respect each student for who he or she is.
- Rectify any language patterns or case examples that exclude or demean any groups.
- Do your best to be sensitive to terminology that refers to specific ethnic and cultural groups as it changes.
- Get a sense of how students feel about the cultural climate in your classroom. Tell them that you want to hear from them if any aspect of the course is making them uncomfortable.
- Become more informed about the history and culture of groups other than your own.
- Convey the same level of respect and confidence in the abilities of all your students.
- Don't try to "protect" any group of students. Don't refrain from criticizing the performance of individual students in your class on account of their ethnicity or gender. And be evenhanded in how you acknowledge students' good work.
- Whenever possible, select texts and readings whose language is gender-neutral and free of stereotypes, or cite the shortcomings of material that does not meet these criteria.
- Aim for an inclusive curriculum that reflects the perspectives and experiences of a pluralistic society.
- Do not assume that all students will recognize cultural, literary or historical references familiar to you.
- Bring in guest lecturers to foster diversity in your class.
- Give assignments and exams that recognize students' diverse backgrounds and special interests.

Working with Distressed and Disruptive Students

As a Teaching Assistant, you may have to work with a distressed or disruptive student. Not every distressed student is disruptive, and not every disruptive student is distressed. These two cases do sometimes overlap, however, and we have therefore chosen to deal with both in this section. Levels of both student stress and class disruption can appear in varying degrees of intensity: it is therefore important to exercise discernment regarding the appropriate response(s) to particular cases. One student who is slightly nervous about her mastery of a particular thematic area for a midterm may only require a pep talk and some additional tutoring. Another student who exhibits signs of rage in class may require a referral to the Counseling Center, and it may also be necessary to contact the Student Conduct Officer in the Dean of Students Office.

Of utmost concern is the issue of safety: safety of the student in question, safety of other students in the class, and your own safety. If a situation appears to compromise the immediate safety of any of these parties, call the UNC police (970-351-2245) or 911.

Additionally, seriously distressed students should be referred to the University Counseling Center. If a student appears to be significantly distressed, do not attempt to diagnose or solve that student's problems, yourself. Because some significantly distressed students may hesitate to seek out help, you may offer to call the Counseling Center for them (for example, while they are in your office) or walk with them to the Counseling Center.

If a seriously disruptive student fails to respond to your requests to stop objectionable behavior, it may be necessary to contact the Dean of Students Office, which handles allegations of violations of the Student Code of Conduct. It is helpful for the Student Conduct investigator to know about a seriously disruptive student who does not respond to instructor intervention, because the investigator can use prior reports of student disruption to guide how best to respond to a chronic offender. To report a student of concern online, go to this link: https://www.unco.edu/dean-of-students/shareaconcern/

With this being said, it is much more common for TAs to encounter lesser degrees of student distress and disruption, which do not require referrals to outside support services. Some general principles apply.

For distressed students:

- Listen to the student. Listen to the student's explanation of the issue, and ask questions. Sometimes, students will find simply talking about their problem helps.
- Avoid the temptation to prejudge a student's situation. A student who misses two assignments in a row, rather than being lazy, may have felt anxious to approach you after missing the first assignment. A student who appears not to have taken a writing assignment seriously may have legitimate weaknesses in writing skills. Again, give the student an opportunity to talk to you before you judge the student.

- Recall that your task as a teacher is both to impart knowledge and to provide motivation to learn. A little pep talk—encouraging but realistic—can go a long way toward allaying student anxieties.

For disruptive students:

- Politely, firmly, and specifically identify the undesirable behavior and why it is disruptive. For example, if two students are continually talking to one another during a lecture, you might say, “Excuse me, when you talk to one another during the lecture, it is difficult for your classmates to concentrate on the material. Out of respect for them and me, please refrain from talking unless you have something to contribute to the class.”
- Avoid being apologetic. If, for example, a student consistently uses language which is derogatory toward women, you do not need to apologize for politely pointing out that this type of language undermines a respectful class environment conducive to participation of all students.
- Do not be afraid to excuse a student from class if the situation warrants it. If you have repeatedly (for example, two times or more) asked a student to stop texting in class, you are within your rights to simply ask the student to leave for the day.

In cases of distressed or disruptive students, it can be difficult to know the appropriate response. Remember to err on the side of safety, take the student in question and the situation seriously, and do not be afraid to seek outside assistance, including from a senior faculty member, the Counseling Center, or Student Affairs.

Teaching with Technology

Best Practices for Using Technology in the Classroom When using technology for teaching, there are four basic principles to be kept in mind:

1. **Alignment:** Technology should be used for a purpose—not for the sake of being flashy and not as a distraction from other forms of pedagogy. Carefully consider the ways in which video or other media that you share with your class are aligned with your learning objectives. Consider the technology that is most closely in alignment with your teaching skills and the needs of your students—if you don't like to teach with Power Point, consider giving students a handout outlining the main points of your lecture and listing major concepts to assist them in note-taking.

2. **Accessibility:** Be sure that the technology that you intend to use is accessible to your students. While computers are virtually ubiquitous, and students living on campus have ready access to computing labs and other technology on campus, do consider whether or not your students have access to technology that you want them to use. Also, consider your own access to technology: make sure that you are familiar with all of the technology that you use and that media technology in your classroom is functioning correctly before the class. Plan ahead. If you are going to show a film, for example, don't wait until you walk into class to find out if the player in your classroom supports your DVD's regional format, or you will find yourself scrambling to come up with a lesson plan that does not include the film. By checking the regional format in advance, you will be able to have a matching-format DVD player delivered to the classroom by Technology Services. In addition, make sure your course materials, such as websites and PowerPoints, are accessible to students with disabilities.

3. **Assessment:** As with lectures, discussions, and labs, provide your students with guidance when dealing with media technologies. If you are showing them a film, provide them with the learning objectives that you have for them in watching the film. Consider giving them a short assignment to be filled out as they are watching it, for example, to structure their interaction with the media and to assess their learning at the end of it. Likewise, if you are using Tweeting or Blogging as a means to generate discussion on course content online, be clear about how you will grade their online contributions—Do they receive points simply for participating or will they receive different amounts of points for different qualities of contributions? Is there a minimum or maximum amount of participation that you expect?

4. **Reinforcement:** Technology should be used as reinforcement of and supplement to your teaching, but it should not be a simple reiteration of exactly what you have done in another format. For example, PowerPoint presentations can be useful in structuring a lesson, but your slides should not match your lecture word-for-word, such that you are simply reading from the slides. Videos of dangerous or otherwise inaccessible procedures or experiences can be used to augment your lecture or description of them.

Evaluating Your Teaching Skills

The introduction to this handbook advised you to think about your objectives for yourself in your role as a Teaching Assistant. Periodically, it is important to evaluate how well you have met those objectives. Evaluation has always been an important part of teaching. The focus of an evaluation may be a measurement of student performance, an assessment of teaching skill, a review of materials, or an effort to enhance both teaching and learning. In each case, valid and reliable information is needed if you are to make informed decisions about your teaching. Well- designed and carefully conducted course assessments can provide the information you need to make important decisions about how you teach and what you teach.

There are several reasons to evaluate your teaching performance. You might want to know how well a particular lecture was delivered; how students are feeling about a special technique you are using; whether you are providing enough or too much content; if students feel your tests are fair; how useful the textbook and/or readings are; how much material your students have learned; or any of several other questions about the teaching/learning process or its results.

Just as there are many reasons to evaluate, there are also many ways to gather the information. Some evaluation methods are as simple as a casual conversation in which you ask students how things are going, while others require special equipment or techniques (videotaping a lecture or gathering and analyzing student ratings using questionnaires). You can evaluate your performance by paying attention to the non-verbal cues of your students; reviewing student’s notebooks; asking for specific, written comments; having a friend, colleague, senior faculty member, or teaching consultant sit in on one or more of your classes; and, of course, by assessing student performance through your tests and/or assignments.

In the following sections you will find detailed information on formal and informal evaluation methods.

Evaluation of Teaching

If your pursuit of a graduate degree is part of a larger career plan that involves classroom teaching, group instruction, or presentations, it is helpful to have feedback on your teaching. There are formal methods available to you:

- Student evaluation forms used by your department or college, normally distributed at the end of the semester.
- In-class observation of your teaching by your supervising faculty member.

Informal Methods

There are also informal methods that can be used at any point during the semester. Such informal opportunities for feedback from students can be extremely helpful. They may help you spot an ineffective method that is inhibiting student learning before the semester is over.

In your class:

- ask students to complete a short survey or to provide written answers to a few questions at the end of class
- ask about a specific teaching technique that you employed
- ask your students to list their favorite and least favorite aspects of the class
- ask them what is going well and what they are finding difficult

Another approach measures what your students have learned and uses that as a basis for evaluating your teaching. Set aside five minutes and have students write a short summary of your lecture or define key concepts from the readings. Follow up a class discussion with a short in-class writing assignment where students list issues that they wished they had raised or inventory the best ideas that were discussed. Let students know in advance that these assignments will not be graded and that your goal is to evaluate your teaching and not their performance. Students are usually eager to participate in these "surveys." Asking your students to evaluate you empowers them. Whichever method you use to evaluate your teaching, your evaluation should conform to three simple rules:

1. Ask questions with a purpose in mind. What are your teaching objectives? What do you hope students are learning? What are you prepared to change? Choose survey questions and create evaluative assignments that will produce real answers to the questions you have about your teaching. Do not waste your students' time.
2. Make your surveys anonymous. Although you cannot guarantee perfect anonymity in an informal survey, ask students not to put their names on the surveys or quizzes. Students will feel much more comfortable being forthright if they know that their responses will not influence your opinion of them.
3. Follow up on your in-class evaluations. Read the responses carefully and report the results to your students. Let them know what changes you plan to make and what changes you feel it would be inappropriate to make. If time permits, involve your students in a discussion of the evaluation and the class. You may learn a lot.

Peer Review

Having a faculty or peer review of your teaching conducted should be as simple as asking a fellow graduate student, or a faculty member in your department, come to your class to observe your teaching. Some departments require that this be done regularly and have procedures in place to do so. Others will require more planning on your part. If you would like information on best practices in setting up and conducting peer review, please contact the Graduate School.

Graduate Student Professional Development

The Graduate School offers numerous workshops and events in the areas of research, writing, teaching, and career development based on employability outcomes. Professional development is offered with campus partnerships, such as the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and the University Libraries, and through events like the Research Symposium and 3MT competition.

Graduate Schools from across Colorado work jointly to provide professional development workshops with career readiness objectives. The cooperative effort, known as **Gradco**, provides a full program of live, online workshops. The brochure for Gradco opportunities is published on the Graduate School website listed above.

The Graduate School and the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) partner to support a Certificate in College Teaching Program, as well as other workshops and professional development opportunities. https://www.unco.edu/center-enhancement-teaching-learning/

Since many of our graduate students find it difficult to attend workshops on campus, the Graduate School is offering more professional development materials in an on-demand or webinar format using the tools available in Canvas. Keep an eye on the Graduate Student Professional Development webpages for on-demand modules.

Important Policies to Know

Below is a list of additional recommended codes and policies with which you should be familiar. You may wish to include some of these in your syllabi. Please check with your college or program area for any additional policies you may need to know or include on your syllabi.

Students with disabilities: Any student requesting disability accommodation for this class must inform the instructor giving appropriate notice. Students are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services (https://www.unco.edu/disability-resource-center/) at (970) 351-2289 to certify documentation of disability and to ensure appropriate accommodations are implemented in a timely manner.

Honor Code. All members of the University of Northern Colorado community are entrusted with the responsibility to uphold and promote five fundamental values: Honesty, Trust, Respect, Fairness, and Responsibility. These core elements foster an atmosphere, inside and outside of the classroom, which serves as a foundation and guides the UNC community's academic, professional, and personal growth. Endorsement of these core elements by students, faculty, staff, administration, and trustees strengthens the integrity and value of our academic climate. https://www.unco.edu/community-standards/

Academic Misconduct. UNC's policies and recommendations for academic misconduct will be followed. Violations of academic integrity should be reported to the Dean of Students Office. For additional information, please see the Dean of Student's website, Student Handbook link and current catalog. https://www.unco.edu/community-standards/

Discrimination. It is a violation of University Policy to discriminate in the provision of education or employment opportunities, benefits, or privileges, to create discriminatory work or academic conditions, or to use discriminatory evaluative standards in employment or education settings if the basis of that discriminatory treatment is, in whole or part, the person's race, religion, gender, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. Concerns about discrimination at UNC can be submitted through this website:

Sexual Harassment (Title IX). For detailed information on UNC's Sexual misconduct policies and information about Title IX, please see the Title IX Coordinator's webpages: www.unco.edu/sexual-misconduct/. Sexual misconduct is a violation of UNC policy and federal law. The University of Northern Colorado prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or discrimination that violates federal or state low, or the University's antidiscrimination policy and grievance procedure. Reports of sexual misconduct will be investigated thoroughly by the Title IX Coordinator's staff. Concerns or reports of sexual misconduct may be made through the website noted above.

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. The Registrar's website maintains a page of FAQs for instructors about FERPA. Remember: When in doubt, do not give out information about students or their educational records. https://www.unco.edu/registrar/faculty-staff/ferpa.aspx

Syllabus Statements about University Policies or Course Policies. The Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning posts a range of statements for syllabi. These cover specific federal, university, and course policies. https://www.unco.edu/center-enhancement-teaching-learning/teaching-resources/syllabus_statements.aspx

Who to Contact for Assistance

Help with Your Assistantship:

Graduate School Financial Award Specialist, Susan Pryor – susan.pryor@unco.edu

Graduate Student Engagement and Professional Development:

Dr. Cindy Wesley, Associate Dean of Academics - cindy.wesley@unco.edu;

Graduate Student Concerns:

Dr. Cindy Wesley, Associate Dean of Academics – cindy.wesley@unco.edu

Office of Global Engagement: https://www.unco.edu/global/Dean of Students Office

Office of Community Standards
Assistance with student rights and responsibilities, or to report a student of concern: http://www.unco.edu/dean-of-students/

Disability Support Services: https://www.unco.edu/disability-resource-center/

Registrar's Office: https://www.unco.edu/registrar or call (970) 351-2231

Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (Title IX Coordinator)
Assistance with Discrimination and Title IX Concerns: http://www.unco.edu/sexual-misconduct/

UNC Counseling Center: http://www.unco.edu/counseling-center/

UNC Emergency and Crisis Contacts: http://www.unco.edu/emergency/

Bear Pantry (Food Assistance): https://www.unco.edu/bear-pantry/