The Top 10 Suggestions for New Teaching Assistants (TAs)

If you’re a new TA, you don’t know what you don’t know yet, but these suggestions will be helpful as soon as you have some experience in the classroom!

1. Get to know your class to find out what motivates them. What works for some might not work for others. From this information, create your own system of rewards. This incentivizes success.

2. Hold their attention; it’s the only way to get them to remember. Move around, ask questions, and give them something to do. Break from the lecture only format.

3. Allow them some autonomy and control in the classroom – where possible, give them choices about assignments, due dates, tests.

4. Ensure the students feel safe expressing their opinions; create an environment that is respectful and comfortable. This enhances their willingness to pay attention.

5. Test frequently and with different formats. This addresses the different learning styles of your students. Remember that if you grade on a curve, you are emphasizing the score on the test and de-emphasizing how much they actually know. Try to foster mastery of the material over performance on a test.

6. Be prepared, organized, enthusiastic. This signals to them that the course matters to you, which can help it matter to them.

7. Learn their names. This helps them to feel more connected to the class, and increases their motivation to attend class and behave well.

8. Provide timely, pertinent, and constructive feedback.

9. Provide clear rubrics for assignments and assessments.

10. Create a visible structure to the class, with clear information about expectations, goals, requirements, and policies. Typically, this is done through the syllabus. Go over it verbally in class, provide a handout, and post it online. The more ways you present it, the more likely they will access it.

This list was compiled by the Fall 2017 students of GRAD 6001: Collins Few, Taylor Fussell, Emma Hilton, Ashley McDermott, Elizabeth Medlin, Lauren Price, Carla Tierney, Jordan Whitley, GRAD 8001: Jalal Hemidach, April Smith, Jessica Taylor, and GRAD 8011: Shuangshuang Ji, Licheng Jin, Ping Mao, Tang Ye, Bin Zhang. These suggestions were based on theories of learning, motivation, and memory in Cognitive Psychology.