Teaching Tips for TAs: Recommendations for First Time TAs

1. Be organized and prepared.

2. Make sure at the beginning of each class that students know your plan and goals for the session. Refer to it periodically and conclude with it at the end of the session.

3. Begin and end the class on schedule. Students are extremely time conscious, especially when distance is a factor between buildings.

4. Be careful about copyright laws in regard to the use of articles and videotapes.

5. Academic freedom is not academic license. Be objective. Do not use classes as political forums for research specialties.

6. Check occasionally with people in the back row to see if they are hearing your words and seeing your visuals adequately.

7. Let humor arise from the interaction of the class. Avoid telling jokes (unless you’re a master at it, and then do it sparingly) and never create humor at someone’s expense. The use of profanity and slang usually offends students. Profanity can interfere with the teacher’s image as a positive model.

8. Be available outside class for consultation. Keeping regular office hours is important.

9. Expect good attendance and keep a seating chart even if only for occasional use. It humanizes the class atmosphere and makes students more accountable to the goals of the syllabus.

10. Do not be afraid to say you do not know the answer to a question, but be sure to research the answer as soon as possible.

11. Avoid saying, “That’s a good question,” unless the question is truly significant. It tends to intimidate others who ask questions and often reflects merely your interests.

12. Accept the fact that in every class you will not reach or influence every student. Your best effort is all that can be expected. Some students may dislike you for a variety of reasons; e.g., age, authority, image, the content of the course, or even your looks. Never lose your composure concerning a personal challenge by a student.

Adapted from “Better Training for Teaching Assistants” by Paul D. Travers