Guide for Teaching Assistants

Becoming a Teaching Assistant (TA) can be a rich and rewarding experience. You will have the opportunity to contribute to the academic growth and development of undergraduate students, engage with faculty in the development and delivery of course materials, and, of course, build the teaching component of your resume. To ensure a great experience, it is important to understand the many facets of being a TA and how these are determined. This guidance document provides you with important information on the basic administrative elements of a TAship in the School of Environmental Sciences and tips that will allow you to become an effective TA.

## Teaching Assistants in SES

As a Teaching Assistant at the University of Guelph, you are a member of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3913, Unit 1. The successful candidate will be provided, via email with notification of the offer of the work assignment. The response to the Offer of Work Assignment must be made online, a copy of which will be made available to the employee. At the beginning of the term, SES will ask you and the course instructor to complete a TA Work Agreement, which outlines your basic duties as a TA (e.g., office hours, marking, tutorials, etc.). It’s the joint responsibility of the supervisor and the TA to hold a meeting to discuss responsibilities and estimated hours of work and complete the [TA Work Agreement](https://www.uoguelph.ca/sessional_ta/faq/ta-work-agreement.).

The TA Work Agreement should be completed with the course instructor. The Work Agreement must be completed within five (5) days of the commencement of employment and is included in the assigned hours of work. The instructor will have to decide how the hours for the semester should be allocated. Teaching Assistantships are normally 140 hours for a 1.0 appointment, 105 hours for 0.75, and 70 hours for a 0.5 appointment, per term. As a TA, it is important for you to provide input on how many hours you think you will need to complete different tasks.

## Mandatory Training for TAs

To work as a TA at the University of Guelph, you must complete the following programs, which can be found online through CourseLink:

1. EHS Worker Health & Safety Awareness Training
2. Accessible Service Provision
3. Making Education Accessible.

TAs must demonstrate completion of these courses by [uploading the Certificates of Completion](https://www.uoguelph.ca/sessional_ta/faq/how-do-i-upload-my-university-guelph-administrative-courses) (which are available for printing upon completion of each module) to their profile.

## Best Practice for TAs

The roles and duties of a TA can look very different; you may be marking laboratory reports, running laboratory demonstrations, leading discussions, or teaching a course independently. Even though the degree of engagement with undergraduates varies across these roles, there are several common TA competencies essential for graduate students who teach. Teaching Assistants should be able to:

* Exhibit respect for and understanding of students,
* Present information clearly,
* Engage students with material through active learning,
* Facilitate student learning by conveying feedback effectively and in a timely fashion,
* Provide fair evaluations,
* Communicate and manage appropriate expectations for achievement in the course,
* Conduct themselves according to high standards of professionalism and ethics.

Adapted from Fraser, E., Morse, K., Patrito, H., Olsen, K.C., Forder, J., Dimitrov, N. (2017). [*Western Guide to working with teaching assistants*](https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=tsc-purple-guides)*.*

Teaching Support Centre, Western University.

# Five conversations every TA should have with their course instructor before (or just after) the semester starts

The following questions are meant to help start conversations with your course instructor and maximize your teaching assistant experience. Arrange to meet your course instructor in advance, by email or by visiting them during their office hours, to ensure enough time to discuss all relevant questions.

## What is my role as a TA?

Discuss in conjunction with your **TA Work Agreement**

* What is **my role** in:
  + Class lectures (should I attend, take notes; this may also be reflected in hours)?
  + Tutorials?
  + Labs?
  + Office hours?
* What are the **main goals** and **learning outcomes** for the course?
* What **background do the students** typically have?
* What are the **main challenges** for students?
* What **percent of marking** will I do?
* Where does **my role end**? For example: What do I do in cases of suspected plagiarism? Or re-marking requests?
* How should I address you as the course instructor in class? Dr.? Prof.? First name?

**Tip:** Ask for the outline in advance and add test/exam, marking and exam prep, and other expected busy dates into your calendar.

## What is my role specifically related to marking?

* What will I be responsible for marking and what are the marking timelines?
* Are there **rubrics**? If not, may I construct one? (Ensure this is reflected in your hours and approved by the instructor)
* Do you have sample **‘A, B, C, D and F’ papers**?
* Will there be a **marking exchange** (with other TAs or the instructor) to check consistency?
* What kinds of **feedback** would you like on papers (i.e., comments throughout, edits)?
* Would you like **marking summaries** (i.e., notes on patterns among the students)?
* Which one of us **posts the grades** to CourseLink?

## What should I do if I am approaching my maximum semester TA hour limit?

* Can we schedule our mid-point meeting to review my hours and workload?
* How much time should I put into preparing for lab/tutorial?
* What do I do if I need more time to mark or prepare?

**Tip:** All TAships are different, but no TA at Guelph can work more than 140 hours/semester. **Keep track of your hours** (remember, you are here to graduate!).

## Are there any opportunities for me to contribute to the class?

* May I deliver a **guest lecture**?
* Would you like me to provide feedback to you **on labs and/or tutorials**, as the semester progresses?

## Is it possible to be evaluated as a TA by the students and to receive a TA reference letter for my teaching dossier?

* Check with your course instructor and/or department whether there are end-of the year evaluations for TAs.
* Ask permission to develop and hand out an evaluation if TA evaluations are currently unavailable in your department (more information available on the [TA resources website](https://otl.uoguelph.ca/ta-resources)).
* Ask your instructor to come and sit in on a tutorial or lab so that they can give you feedback on your teaching.
* Compile student feedback and give to the course instructor with a specific list of the duties you performed:
  + Your instructor can use this information if they decide to write a personalized letter of reference for you teaching dossier.

For more information and resources for Teaching Assistants, please visit the [Centre for Teaching and Learning Online](https://otl.uoguelph.ca/ta-resources) or in person at Day Hall.

This resource was adapted with permission from the Western Centre for Teaching and Learning. [5 Conversations every TA should have with their course instructor before (or just after) the semester starts.](https://teaching.uwo.ca/pdf/teaching/5_Conversations%20to%20Have%20with%20your%20Course%20Instructor_May%202022.pdf)