

TEACHING ASSISTANT MANUAL

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Sponsoring Offices

Center for Educational Resources
Homewood Academic Deans

Managing Editor

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INTRODUCTION

Whatever your reasons for becoming a teaching assistant (TA) at Hopkins, there are doubtless many questions you will have as you approach the first day of class. We have designed this handbook to help you succeed in making the transition from student to teacher.

There is no one right way to become a good teacher. New teaching assistants will encounter different situations depending on their experience, the demands of their departments, and the students gathered in their classroom. This handbook addresses the boundaries and expectations of the teaching assistant position at Hopkins. This manual will serve as a quick reference guide to answer your questions, provide some suggestions and examples, and direct you to resources available to TAs on this campus.

The teaching environment you will be entering at Johns Hopkins is that of a small school that conducts big research. A significant number of undergraduates report feeling overwhelmed by their work-load, and characterize some professors as distant or unapproachable. This is where your contribution as a TA becomes important. You will provide the personal contact that may only be available to students in their sections and labs.

We've tried to cover the most important aspects of what TAs do at Hopkins and address frequently asked questions. As each TA's experiences and challenges will be different, not all of the sections will apply to your particular situation.

The Center for Educational Resources (CER) has posted a copy of this manual (with active hyperlinks) along with other materials you might find helpful on the CER's TA training web page (<http://cer.jhu.edu/teaching-academy/tati>). These include links to other teaching resources and videos from the TA Orientation sessions for you to draw upon whenever you need reassurance or ideas on how to deal with students in the classroom.

Teaching can be a rewarding experience if you choose to make it one. Successful teaching depends upon your attitude. Remember that you are not alone in this experience; you have plenty of resources at Hopkins, beginning with this handbook and website. Draw on the experiences of others by talking with your professors, your peers, and even your students. If you maintain the idea that you, your professors, and your students are all working toward a common goal, you will do well.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

On the next two pages you will find a list of University Offices, Guides, Policies, Resources. Throughout the document there is linked text followed by an asterisk (*) indicating items that may be found with the URL spelled out on the list. This will be convenient if you are using a print form of the document.

UNIVERSITY OFFICES, GUIDES, POLICIES, RESOURCES

OFFICE/SERVICE	TELEPHONE	WEB ADDRESS
Academic Advising	410-516-8216	http://www.advising.jhu.edu
Academic Ethics for Undergraduates (Guide)	410-516-8208	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates
Adobe Connect		https://cer.jhu.edu/resources#adobeconnect
Audio Visual Services (KIT-CATS)	410-516-6699	http://classrooms.johnshopkins.edu/avservices
Bookstore (Barnes & Noble)	410-662-5850	http://johns-hopkins.bncollege.com
Calendars (Academic, Events, etc.)		https://calendar.jhu.edu
Campus Security Escort Services	410-516-8700	http://security.jhu.edu/services-for-you/escort-program/index.html
Career Center	410-516-8056	http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/careers
Center for Educational Resources	410-516-7181	http://cer.jhu.edu
Center for Language Education	410-516-4520	http://krieger.jhu.edu/cle
Counseling Center	410-516-8278	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter
Counseling Center—Recognizing Students in Distress		https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/worried/facultyandstaff
Custodial Services	410-516-8063	http://www.jhfre.jhu.edu/services/maintenance_and_repair/custodial/index.html
Dean of Student Life, Office of	410-516-8208	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life
Digital Media Center	410-516-3817	http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/dmc
Disability Services	410-516-4720	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities
Disabilities Teaching Guide for Faculty and Staff		https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities/faculty-information
FERPA-University Policy on Family Educational Rights and Policy		https://www.jhu.edu/assets/uploads/2017/01/ferpa.pdf
Graduate Representative Organization (GRO)	410-516-7682	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/gro
Health, Safety and Environment		http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/hse/offices_and_programs.html
Health and Safety Training		http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/hse/training
Hopkins Emergency Response	410-516-7777	http://heru.jhu.edu
Institutional Equity, Office of	410-516-8075	http://oie.jhu.edu
International Student and Scholar Services	667-208-7001	http://ois.jhu.edu
Innovative Instructor Article Series		https://cer.jhu.edu/publications/innovative-instructor
Innovative Instructor Blog		http://ii.library.jhu.edu
International TAs ESL Program (Support & Resources)	410-516-4520	http://krieger.jhu.edu/cle/language-programs/english-for-international-tas
IT@JH (Information Technology)	410-516-4357	http://www.it.jhu.edu
J-Card (Hopkins ID Card)	410-516-5121	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/jcard
JHBox		https://it.johnshopkins.edu/services/collaboration_tools/jhbox/index.html
Lab Safety		https://labsafety.jhu.edu/jhu-lab-safety-resources

OFFICE/SERVICE	TELEPHONE	WEB ADDRESS
Learning Den Tutoring Services		http://advising.jhu.edu/tutoring-mentoring/learning-den-tutoring-services
Maryland Poison Center	800-222-1222	http://www.mdpoison.com
Mid-Semester Evaluation Forms		https://cer.jhu.edu/teaching-academy/tati/resources#taresources
Multicultural Student Affairs	410-516-8730	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/oma
Peer Counseling — Undergraduate	443-823-2459	http://pages.jh.edu/aptt
PILOT Peer-Led-Team-Learning		http://advising.jhu.edu/tutoring-mentoring/peer-led-team-learning-pilot
Pre-Professional Programs & Advising	410-516-4140	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising
Registrar	410-516-8080	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/registrar
Security Office—Information	410-516-4600	http://security.jhu.edu
Sexual Assault Response & Prevention	410-516-7333	http://sexualassault.jhu.edu
Sheridan Libraries	410-516-8335	https://www.library.jhu.edu
Sheridan Libraries—Academic Liaisons		https://www.library.jhu.edu/library-departments/academic-liaison
Sheridan Libraries Citation Guide		http://guides.library.jhu.edu/citing
Sheridan Libraries—Reserves Services and Electronic Reserves	410-516-8377	http://www.library.jhu.edu/library-services/course-readings
Sheridan Libraries —Borrow and Request Materials	410-516-8370	http://www.library.jhu.edu/library-services/borrow-and-request-materials
Sheridan Libraries—Research Consultation	410-516-8335	http://www.library.jhu.edu/library-services/research-consultation
Sheridan Libraries—Reserves Request Form		https://www.library.jhu.edu/library-services/course-readings/reserves-request-form
Sheridan Libraries—Special Collections	410-516-8348	http://www.library.jhu.edu/library-departments/special-collections
Shuttle Services	410-516- 7275	http://ts.jhu.edu/Shuttles
Student Disability Services	410 516-4720	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities
Student Disability Services—Guidelines for Teaching Students with Disabilities		https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities/faculty-information
Student Health and Wellness	410-516-8270	https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-health
Student Information System (SIS) help guide		http://help.sset.jhu.edu/display/FAC/Home
Student Life Policies		http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies
Study Consulting Program		http://advising.jhu.edu/tutoring-mentoring/study-consulting
Teaching Academy	410-516-7181	https://cer.jhu.edu/teaching-academy
Teaching Assistant Training (Homewood)	410-516-7181	https://cer.jhu.edu/teaching-academy/tati
Technology Classroom Reservations		http://classrooms.johnshopkins.edu
Technology Fellowship Grant Program	410-516-7181	https://cer.jhu.edu/techfellows
Transportation Services (Parking, Shuttles, etc.)	410-516-7275	http://ts.jhu.edu
Turnitin Plagiarism Detection Service		https://cer.jhu.edu/tools-and-tech/turnitin
Tutoring Programs	410-516-8216	http://advising.jhu.edu/tutoring-mentoring
Weather Hotline	410-516-7781	https://www.jhu.edu/alert
Writing Center	410-516-4258	http://krieger.jhu.edu/writingcenter

YOUR ROLE AS A TEACHING ASSISTANT

Your Expectations for the Semester

Before you start the semester, consider two things: advance preparation for the work of teaching the section or course and what you want to get out of teaching it. In terms of workload, be realistic about how much time it will take to prepare for class, to run lab sessions, or to grade thirty ten-page papers on the War of 1812. Talk to TAs who have previously assisted with the class to get a sense of the advance preparation required. In terms of your own expectations, thinking in advance about what you want students to take away will help guide your preparations.

Students' Expectations of You

Students expect organized class or lab sessions, defined goals, relevant feedback, and sufficient access to you as the TA. The following are some tips for meeting these expectations.

What's the Point? Informing students of the objectives of learning the material can help connect the subject matter to students' interests, making the semester more productive for all. Address this question as often as relevant.

Be Prepared! Obtain personal copies of all course readings before the course begins. Ask the professor or department administrative assistant if desk copies of textbooks can be ordered. If the publisher does not provide free copies, check with the instructor about how to obtain course texts. You should check into the availability of required readings in the bookstore and in the MSE Library. Ask the professor if any materials should be placed on reserve.

It is always good a idea to prepare several classes in advance, in case you misjudge how much material you'll have time to cover. Having extra material ready will help you to overcome anxiety and establish your self-confidence. Plan discussion topics that are both engaging and relevant to the course.

Check *Student Life Policies**, the rulebook for undergraduates, for information pertaining to such subjects as add/drop deadlines and the deadline for filing Incompletes.

Be Enthusiastic! Students want an instructor who engages with the subject matter and makes it relevant to them. Communicate what you find fascinating about the course material. Use relevant videos or images. Consider what drew you to the field, and share that passion with the class.

Encourage Class Participation. You can elicit participation from students in many ways. Making participation part of the grade can leverage your requests for input. Calling on students by name is an effective way to draw out some quiet ones but may embarrass others. You can offer a way out by letting students pass when you call on them. Find some merit in every response and acknowledge that the student has participated.

Don't Try to Be Their Friend. Some new TAs worry about what their students will think of them. Don't try to be overly friendly with the students or to come across as cool. It is not your job to be liked. You are their instructor. Sometimes that means having expectations that may not be popular with your students. Fairness and knowledge of the material are more likely to win students over than attempts to fit in with them.

Professors' Expectations of You Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

Start the semester with a clear understanding of what the professor expects of you, ideally with an in-person meeting. Plan to meet with them on a regular basis throughout the semester. Don't be afraid to ask if you feel that you need guidance or clarity on a professor's policy. If you need answers to a question about teaching, it is your job to persist until you get it. Know when the professor is available and find out the best way to contact them when you need immediate feedback.

At your initial meeting, make sure you understand the professor's goals for the course and your responsibilities as a TA, including how much time you are expected to commit to the work and how much freedom you will have in shaping your section or lab. Clarify administrative details, such as grading and attendance policies. You should also agree on the number of office hours you will hold per week and on administrative policies, such as penalties for tardiness to class and late papers. If there are several sections in the course, meet with the other TAs to coordinate policies and grading.

In some courses, the TAs are responsible for much of the administrative work, such as putting books on reserve, setting up the course Blackboard site, making copies, or reserving audiovisual equipment.

Clarify how to handle student complaints. Be sure to discuss issues of academic integrity with the course instructor and other TAs before the first day of class. By taking a firm stand on ethics, you ensure equal opportunities for all students. If a problem arises with a student, be sure to share it with the professor.

Some departments find it necessary to hire undergraduate teaching assistants to fulfill their teaching positions. In addition, undergraduate TAs may co-teach with graduate TAs in some courses. **As a best practice, undergraduates should not be involved in grading in a course in which they are a TA.** If grading by an undergraduate TA is unavoidable, the instructor of record should de-identify papers and exams to avoid biased grading practices.

PREPARING FOR CLASS

Budgeting Your Time

Schedule your week and make a plan of action. Create a list of everything you need to do in the coming week. Estimate how long each activity will take. Be sure to build into your schedule adequate time to prepare for class, especially reading the materials.

Prioritize the list and arrange tasks into the time you have available. Schedule high-priority items and fit lower-priority items into leftover blocks of time.

With the plan of the week in front of you, tighten up your schedule to eliminate dead time. For example, consolidate time on campus by scheduling your office hours immediately after lecture or section.

Setting Learning Objectives

Regardless of the course, you will have a multitude of objectives to meet throughout the semester. Broad course goals state what topics or issues will be addressed, but they do not clarify what students should learn from the course. This is why it is a good idea for you as a TA to specify learning objectives for the section or lab, if your professor has not already done so.

Consider distributing a list of objectives, perhaps as part of your syllabus, to your students at the start of the semester or a course section. This list will give students a sense of what is expected of them and will help them direct their efforts in navigating through the course. You should also include objectives on assignment sheets, so students know what is expected for each assignment.

Developing Learning Objectives. Taking the opportunity to clearly convey objectives will prove helpful in generating assignments, exams, or other evaluation tools for your course. Well-written objectives include the following:

- A clear explanation of what the student should learn or accomplish.
- A statement of the circumstances in which the student should be able to know or accomplish a given goal. Circumstances illustrate the instructional resources offered to students.
- A statement of the measures that will be used to assess the material that has been learned or accomplished. You must also

clearly convey how well the student should perform on a given evaluation in order to establish a minimum acceptable level of performance for accomplishing your objectives.

- In addition to curriculum objectives, which encompass the course material you expect students to learn, you may also develop objectives outside the curriculum, such as certain technical, reference, or interpersonal collaborative skills.

Clearly conveying your expectations to students will allow for more time spent on meeting your objectives.

For more information on Learning Objectives, please review the following Innovative Instructor article on the subject, <https://cer.jhu.edu/publications/innovative-instructor#writing-effective-learning-objectives>

Writing a Syllabus

Most professors will already have a syllabus for their course; however, you may have to draft one yourself. The following checklist will guide you.

Logistics. Include the names and contact information of the professors and TAs along with the location and times of lectures, labs, or sections.

Contact Information. Let the students know the best way and time to get in touch with you.

Learning Goals. You or the professor should review these in the first class, and they should be included in the syllabus so that students can link their work and the delivery of course content to over-arching goals or themes.

Prerequisites. Be clear on the professor's policy on admitting students without prerequisites, and refer ambiguous cases to him or her. If they enrolled with insufficient background, be ready to point your students to resources where they can augment their knowledge on their own.

Assignments and Readings. In addition to the weekly assignments, tell students where they can find the required reading. Note when assignments and readings are due. State whether readings are to be completed before or after each class. Be clear on how assignments are to be turned in.

Grades. Outline how students will be evaluated and what assignments or exams they will have to complete. Describe these tasks, how they will be graded, and how much each is worth as part of the overall course grade. Review and enforce the professor's policy on grade appeals.

Course Policies. Include clear policies concerning attendance, late assignments, and other rules in the syllabus. Students are more likely to adhere to policies if you explain the reasoning behind them. Consider making the last page of the syllabus a contract that students must sign and return to you, saying they have read and understood the syllabus and agree to comply with all policies.

University Policies. Include University statements on ethics (including plagiarism violations), and diversity and inclusion. Also include a statement on accommodations for students with disabilities. Refer to the sections in this manual on Ethics and University Policies, Plagiarism, and Teaching Students with Disabilities for details.

Resources. Remember student needs for additional resources and assistance, such as tutoring or counseling, and list the appropriate offices and contact information. You can find information about these resources in this manual under Additional Teaching Resources.

Preparing Course Content Delivery

Depending on the course in which you are a TA, you may or may not have to prepare to deliver course content (e.g., giving lectures or leading discussion or active learning sections). If you do, following are tips to get you started. If you are unsure or uninspired, talk to the professor or last year's TAs.

Set Objectives. Make a list of what needs to be accomplished in the section hour. This should be driven by the course syllabus.

Develop a Lesson Plan. Prioritize the items on your list of objectives. Then chart the basic flow of the ideas to be covered in the section, including time for questions and discussion.

Include "Soft Time". Build flexibility into your section schedule. This is particularly important at the beginning, when you are still figuring out how much material you need to fill a section hour. Don't cram too much material into one section, but have backup material prepared in case you finish early. Students in sections have different personalities, and some classes may move more quickly than others.

Practice. If you are overseeing a lab, run through it ahead of time. If you plan to give a lecture or explain a particular concept at length, practice and time yourself. You may be surprised how different the material sounds and how much longer it takes when you say it aloud. Always speak more slowly than you think is necessary – you don't want to rush through the material.

IN THE CLASSROOM

The First Day

The first class provides an opportunity to set the tone for the semester. The following are some pointers to help you start the semester on the right foot.

Before the First Class

Make a handout with your name, the course name and number, and your contact information (email, campus address, office location, and office hours). Think twice about sharing your phone number as students may feel they can text you at any time and expect an immediate answer. Set expectations about how quickly and when you will respond to emails.

Get to the room at least fifteen minutes early to address problems, arrange chairs, organize notes and papers, and write announcements on the board. Make sure that you and the classroom have the appropriate equipment to conduct your instructional activities. This includes making sure that everything is operating properly and that your laptop and mobile devices are compatible with the technology in the room. Visit the classroom before the start of the semester to ensure compatibility. Know the contact information for technical support for the building should problems arise.

At the First Class

Use the first class to get to know students and to introduce yourself to them. Let the class know what you study, how long you have been at Hopkins, and what your background or interest is in the subject of the course. Then ask the students targeted questions, going around the room so that everyone speaks. For example, asking “How does this class relate to your personal interests?” can elicit interesting answers from students.

Have information ready about assignments, tests, and grading prior to the first class. If you are teaching outside your area of expertise, you may feel some discomfort, but you do not need to share this with your students. Develop some background before your first section, and realize that, although you may not be teaching in your area of specialization, you have the general disciplinary skills that are essential to assisting and directing your students.

What’s Happening? Provide a thumbnail sketch of the broad goals of the course and what you expect students will learn from studying these concepts. Show students that you are well prepared.



Outside of good preparation, the most important thing you can do is believe in yourself. Remember, in the classroom, you are the expert!

What Are Your Expectations? Explain your criteria for classroom participation, assignments, and grading. Spell out exactly what level of preparation you expect from them. Include information about issues such as late penalties, style requirements, and attendance. Make a handout that defines the rules for working together on labs, homework assignments, problem sets, and papers, as well as studying for exams.

Finally, S-L-O-W Down! New teachers—especially on the first day—have a tendency to rush through material. Pause to elicit questions and reemphasize important points.



Always keep in mind that you are a better learner than your students. Even if you feel you are not fully grasping the difficulty of the reading assignments and the content of the lecture material that your instruction is meant to supplement, your students are light-years behind you. For me, this little reminder was particularly helpful when I was a TA for a Shakespeare course—a period that is far outside of my comfort zone—and I had to assist students with material and concepts that were as new to me as to them.”

Nick Bujak, English TA

Establish a Classroom Climate

It is your responsibility to make sure that everyone in your class is afforded the same educational opportunities. Here are a few things you should keep in mind as you set the tone in your class-room:

Be Aware That You Have Power. As a TA, you may often forget just how intimidating, even stifling, your authority can be. Though you may feel insecure, you have power over the students through your grading, knowledge, and expertise. Keep this in mind.

Be Clear about Your Role. Undergraduates find it helpful for the TA to outline his or her role early in the semester, to clarify standards and expectations directly, preferably in writing. This can include whether you will read early drafts of papers and how far in advance you want to see them. As a new TA, you may find yourself rewriting your students' written work, offering answers that they can figure out on their own, or capitulating to students' efforts to gain your sympathy and extend deadlines. If you find this happens frequently, you need to step back and re-evaluate your role as a TA. It may be useful to review the objectives you have formulated for the course. Your job is to foster student learning of the course material, not to be a friend or to do the students' work for them.

Learn Students' Names. Use students' names as much as possible. Check attendance. Return homework individually. You can ask students to fill out cards with their names and information so you have a complete class list that you can use to jog your memory. Take advantage of the student photos and background academic information that are available online in the Registrar's Student Information System* (SIS).

Listen to Your Students. Often a student is satisfied just knowing that someone in power has listened or understood his or her concerns or opinions. Respecting students, and addressing their concerns, can build mutual respect that will carry over into the classroom. Here are some tips to help you show students that you are respectful and care about them:

- Establish eye contact with students.
- Be mindful of students' body language. Slouching, fidgeting, sleeping, or chatting are indications that students are not paying attention, do not understand the material, or are bored. Rather than ignoring this body language, ask if there are questions and consider changing your teaching strategy.
- Avoid being condescending. Examples of outright authoritarianism and manipulation of students by TAs are rare, but students may perceive an attitude of superiority on the part of their TAs.
- Be aware of favoritism and fairness. If students are not coming to see you during office hours or seem uncomfortable speaking with you, ask why and make provisions to accommodate them.

Arranging the Classroom Seating. This is a crucial part of the classroom environment, and it can help foster or deter classroom activities. Students should be able to see the blackboard and the instructor. You may also change seating arrangements to facilitate different types of interaction. For instance, you can have students move into a circle for discussion.

Soliciting Student Input. Here are some tips to help you encourage as much student input as possible without allowing the class to stagnate or be dominated by a few vociferous students:

- Avoid asking questions that single out students. The result may be humiliating for the student and embarrassing for you.
- Be alert for ways to include reserved students in class activities.
- Support students in pursuing and reasoning through their own ideas.
- Set expectations for class discussions to ensure civility and respect for differing opinions.

“ I try to memorize each student's name as quickly as possible, and in one large class got their permission to take their pictures with them holding name cards in front of them so that I would have flashcard pictures to practice memorizing their names at home!”

Amy Breakwell, History TA

Conduct

Absences

You are likely to run up against students who do not attend class regularly. On the first day, indicate to students that you and the professor insist on class attendance and that you will not condone lateness. Be specific about your policies, and clearly articulate penalties for tardiness. It's easier to prevent a problem than to deal with it after it develops.

Of course, some students have legitimate excuses to explain their absences (e.g., serious illness, religious holiday, death in the family). These reasons must be respected. In cases of excused absences, it is the student's responsibility to notify the faculty and TAs of upcoming holidays or events and to make arrangements to complete missed assignments or exams.

Difficult Students

Most TAs, sooner or later, will encounter an obnoxious student. This student may do a number of things to disrupt class. Some students are rude to their classmates or to the TA; others monopolize class discussion. First, consult with the professor or other experienced TAs, as they may have tips to help you. Then, you might ask to see the offending student after class to discuss the behavior.

TAs should also use their authority to prevent any one student from antagonizing, interrupting, or confronting classmates. Keep the classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. Ensure that a lively debate does not become a personal battle. Even the subtlest sexist, racist, xenophobic, or homophobic comments should not be tolerated. If you think that such a comment was made out of naiveté, then correct the student gently; if the comment was made maliciously, use sterner methods to demonstrate unequivocally that such behavior is unacceptable.

For more information about how to hold discussions in the classroom, please review the following Innovative Instructor Blog post, <http://ii.library.jhu.edu/2018/04/27/lunch-and-learn-teaching-discussion-based-classes>

Attentiveness in the Classroom

Explain to students on the first day that you expect their undivided attention during class. Urge them to respect

both you and their peers. Students occasionally disrupt class discussion by having separate conversations, texting, or doing other work. Do not ignore or tolerate this type of behavior.

Late Work

First and foremost, be sure you understand the professor's late assignments policy. Establish a late policy before the course begins and explain it explicitly, both in writing and verbally. Then stick to it.



You may want to establish rules for laptop use by students in your class. Some students will surf the web during lectures. However, you also need to consider that students use laptops for note-taking.

What Affects the Classroom Atmosphere?

As a TA, be aware of the following common expectations that students bring to the classroom. Whether you choose to uphold these expectations or alter them, it is useful to address these three points. Keep in mind that students come from different cultural or educational backgrounds, and may not implicitly understand what you require.

Egalitarianism. In some classes a high level of student participation may be expected and calculated as part of the final grade. In other classroom situations student questions and comments during class may be regarded as disrespectful interruptions. Be sure to acknowledge these distinctions and articulate your expectations.

Individualism. Some students expect individual attention and to be rewarded for independent thinking while some instructors prioritize group efforts over individuality and reserve the highest praise for teamwork, cooperation, and emulation. Again, clarify your expectations.

Informality. Students and TAs at Hopkins generally expect a casual class environment. Recognize that this is not the case at every institution of higher learning, students from other cultural backgrounds may have different expectations.

Five Steps to a Better Classroom Environment

The following tips can help you establish an open and comfortable environment for all students in your classroom:

Know Yourself. Where do your own values fall on the spectrum from egalitarian to hierarchical, from individualism to cooperation, from informal to formal?

Be Explicit About Your Expectations. Be clear about class dynamics. By what name should students call you? Do you invite student participation? Student discomfort during section is often a result of not knowing what the TA expects.

Show Respect and Be Friendly. Treat all students with respect. Make eye contact to prevent students from feeling invisible or alienated, but be aware that prolonged eye contact can make some students uncomfortable.

Never Assume. Make a deliberate effort not to accept racial, national, or gender stereotypes. Believe in the capabilities of all of your students and challenge them all to work hard and do their best.

Get to Know Your Students. Encourage students to come to office hours, or schedule mandatory conferences. One-on-one, you can ask students about their educational backgrounds and preferred learning styles.

Teaching Methods

You can't be all things for all people, but using a variety of teaching techniques helps engage students.

Foster Collaborative Inquiry. Students retain more when they are active learners, forming questions and answers for themselves. Create assignments or encourage class discussions that require students to come up with the questions as well as the answers.

Encourage Individual Thought. Require students to come to class with written questions. Ask questions that necessitate reflection and discussion rather than factual regurgitation. If a question has only one right answer, it may not be the best question with which to begin a discussion.

Provide Models of Good Work. Students need models of good work to guide them. Take note when a student does something positive, and provide examples of what to emulate. You may also want to provide self-generated examples of what not to do.

Personalize Lessons. Instead of giving every student or group the same assignment, have them choose relevant topics of their own interest to explore, applying lessons learned from class.

Keep Course Material Fresh. Whenever possible, incorporate current events or topics of interest to students in your discussion or assignments. Use multimedia sources, such as blogs or YouTube videos, on topics related to the course. Consult with your subject librarian to find out what resources are available.

Diagnose and Cure Frustration. Students who are lost and discouraged may not know where to start. Build their confidence by providing opportunities to succeed in intervals, breaking down course material or assignments into manageable parts.

Build a Solid Foundation. Begin by asking some straightforward questions on the basic facts. Once the class has the facts, it can then build skills towards interpretation.

Basic Skills and Strategies

Blackboards. Use the board sections in a structured and orderly way. Create headings so that students, copying down what you write, will understand references to your notes. Remember not to talk while your back is turned. The ensuing pause gives students a chance to catch up. Write clearly in a readable size. Walk to the back of the room after class and see what you can read, or ask during class if everyone can read what you wrote. Don't erase anything until all the boards are filled. Put important concepts in boxes or use colored chalk for emphasis.

PowerPoint. If you use PowerPoint in your section, keep the information on each slide concise, highlighting the salient facts, and avoid overly busy and text-heavy slides.

You might offer hard copies or online access to your slides in advance of the section meeting so students don't spend the class transcribing slides. However, talk with the instructor before you distribute any copies of PowerPoint slides of lectures or sections. Some instructors prefer to make copies available after class in order to encourage attendance and attention in class. Other faculty prohibit distribution of slides altogether to prevent them from being passed on to students in the future.

Time Management. Come early, start on time, end on time, and leave late. By coming early, you are able to greet entering students and get prepared. By starting on time, you reward students' timeliness. By ending on time, you maintain sanity.

Office Hours. Office hours are probably the most important opportunity for TA-student contact. Choose a quiet, comfortable, and accessible location, such as departmental lounges or campus cafes during off-hours. If you are sharing your office with other TAs, be sure to arrange non-conflicting office hours.

Write your office hours on the board for the first two or three sections and include them on your general handout. Let students know that they can schedule a special meeting if they can't make your regular hours. To encourage students, some TAs make one visit per term a class requirement. You can expect anxious students in your office before exams or as deadlines approach for assignments.

Keep a list of campus resources readily available so that you can refer students to programs that offer special assistance, such as assistance for ESL learners, tutoring, writing help, and counseling. Contact information can be found in the University Contacts list at the beginning of this manual

Adobe Connect. Another option to communicate with students outside the classroom is an online collaboration platform called Adobe Connect. You can learn more about this tool, which permits real-time audio and video communication and document sharing, through the Center for Educational Resources website page on [Adobe Connect](#)*

Email. There are good reasons to avoid using your personal email for student interactions, particularly if you are managing a class with large enrollment. You don't want these messages to get lost in an already overflowing inbox. You might want to create a separate email account for your student-related communications, or better yet, use the Blackboard course site for student communications and submission of assignments. This will alleviate the possibility of students using technical malfunctions (i.e., forgetting to add attachments to an email) as an excuse for late submissions or failing to turn in the assignment. A [JHBox](#)* account can also be set up for submitting assignments.

Dealing with Concerns or Emergencies

Most of the time, your classroom will be filled with healthy students whose biggest concern is what is going to be on the next test. As a TA, however, you should be aware of how to handle emergency situations.

Medical Emergencies in the Classroom

If a student in your class has a medical condition for which your assistance might be necessary, they are instructed to bring you a letter at the beginning of the semester that outlines how to handle an emergency situation. For example, if a student has an allergy and must carry an EpiPen, they should inform you during the first week of class and give you instructions on how to help if they are incapacitated.

Sometimes students fail to notify you or an unexpected medical emergency may arise. If a student becomes seriously ill, faints, has a seizure, or there is another type of medical emergency, you should immediately call campus security at 410-516-7777 or dial 911. If you call 911 first, it is important to call Campus Security to alert them to the situation. They will dispatch members of the [*Hopkins Emergency Response Organization*](#)^{*}. Additionally, you should ask your class if there is a Hopkins Emergency Response Unit (HERU) student member present to assist.

Concerns about a Student

Your students might come to you with problems or concerns. Undergraduate students may feel more comfortable talking to you instead of the course professor. Occasionally, they might come to you with problems that are bigger than grade changes or questions about class notes. If a student comes to you with a problem that you aren't sure how to handle, you can always talk to the instructor of the course for suggestions on what steps you should take. Depending on the nature of the problem, you can also contact [*Academic Advising*](#)^{*}, the Student [*Counseling Center*](#)^{*}, the Office of the [*Dean of Student Life*](#)^{*}, or the [*Student Health and Wellness Center*](#)^{*}, staff of which will be happy to provide you with suggestions or take the steps to provide help to students in need. Contact information can be found in the University Contacts list at the beginning of this manual.

If Safety in the Classroom Is Compromised

Safety inside the classroom is not always guaranteed. As a TA, you should be aware of the classroom climate and be on the lookout for students who have issues that might escalate into an unsafe situation. Keep an eye out for warning signs, such as mood changes, challenges of authority, or conversations you overhear that raise concerns.

Of course, there are not always warning signs, so you should know what to do if there are ever situations in the classroom in which your students' and your safety is compromised. In these situations, contact emergency personnel as quickly and as safely as possible. Call the campus security emergency phone number, 410-516-7777, or 911 as soon as safely possible.



Calling Campus Security is optimal because they will immediately dispatch officers to your location as well as contact the appropriate authorities or emergency personnel.

**Campus Security
410-516-7777**

TIPS FOR SPECIFIC FIELDS

The roles of teaching assistants are as varied as the many academic departments that have TAs. Whatever your responsibilities may be, the following paragraphs offer advice on how to prepare for some of the important duties that you may encounter as a TA.

Discussion Sections

Discussion sections can take a number of forms. You may use the time in a physics class to go over problems, in an English class to analyze and discuss literature, in a sociology class to explain and dissect theories. Regardless of the specific goals of your section, you will help students to improve their skills in writing, speaking, thinking critically, and solving problems if your teaching strategies actively engage them in learning. One effective way of promoting active engagement is to provide students with opportunities to talk about what they are learning in the classroom through a discussion section. Discussions engage students, help the class to examine and clarify confusing concepts, and frequently raise valuable questions.

Goals of a Discussion Section

- Give students opportunities to apply lecture concepts.
- Allow students to cooperate and learn from each other.
- Increase students' sensitivity to other points of view and alternative explanations.
- Allow the TAs and instructor to gain feedback on how well the objectives of the course are being attained.
- Provide motivation for further learning.

Starting a Discussion

There are a number of techniques you can use to open up a discussion. Here are a few examples:

- Ask open-ended questions that get students thinking about relationships, applications, and consequences.
- Show a short video or distribute a relevant news article or blog post and ask for reactions.
- Provide questions that highlight important ideas in the next lecture to form the basis of the next class discussion.

- Have students write about an idea or question for a few minutes at the start of class.
- Have students bring in discussion questions of their own. Be clear that these questions should elicit class discussion rather than serving as a recapitulation of lecture material.
- Assign questions or tasks for small groups to work out. This may help shy students feel less inhibited about contributing. Provide structure for these group activities, or they may lose focus. Circulate around the room to monitor activity.
- Ask for reactions to specific portions of assigned readings or lectures.

Moderating a Discussion

As a TA, you may find discussion sections to be seriously misnamed—especially if they are filled with awkward and long moments of absolute silence as you face a room of blank stares. Because of the potential for awkwardness, some new TAs may wonder how there possibly can be enough to say to fill the discussion period. With practice, you should be able to initiate a student-driven discussion that you guide.



Remember that discussion is an opportunity for your students to share ideas. It's not a discussion if you are doing all or most of the talking.

Be Prepared. Review the lectures and reading material prior to the section and, whenever possible, have written examples of the material for reference.

Be Respectful. Before you begin a discussion session, be mindful of how you carry yourself and communicate with others. Your responses to students, the attitudes you display, and the beliefs you convey all indicate to students the type of dealings they can anticipate. Avoid being condescending or acting like a know-it-all. Chastising students for wrong answers may stifle future discussion.

Establish a comfortable, collaborative classroom atmosphere that encourages students to share ideas. Provide considered, reflective responses to student discussion, and respectfully correct or redirect students whose comments are misdirected or off-base.

Avoid getting defensive or hostile when a student challenges your opinion or expertise. Remember that your students come from diverse backgrounds and not all of them will share your ideology. One good response to a challenge from a student might be “Good, I’m glad we’re hearing different opinions on this subject. Are there others?” Welcome the disagreement; it can lead to a productive conversation.

Stay On Topic. Explain the topic of discussion in advance. Designate a certain amount of time to spend on each topic. However, leave yourself some flexibility in case the discussion is engaging students. Write key facts or information on the board as visual reminders. Make concrete observations that tie comments back to the topic.

Ask Questions About Students’ Questions. Rephrase students’ questions to make sure that you understand what they are asking. At the end, ask if you answered their questions. If a student is unclear about your response to his or her question, spend some time after class or during office hours going over the question. Don’t waste valuable class time trying to answer the question of a single student.

Wait for Answers. A lull in the discussion could mean that the students need a moment to digest what they’ve heard. When you ask a question, wait for students to respond until it is clear that you are expecting an answer. If students still do not talk, don’t be afraid to call on individuals. Students will come better prepared to engage in discussion if they know there is a chance they will have to speak in front of their peers. If you run out of material before the end of class, ask your students if there are other topics they would like to discuss.

Weekly Assignments

Short weekly assignments may help ensure that students will do—and think about—the readings in preparation for discussion. If you plan on giving students assignments, make sure you get approval from the instructor and that the assignments are stated on the syllabus. You want to avoid changing expectations or creating unanticipated work in the middle of a semester. You can ask students to write up discussion questions on the reading or write a short paragraph about their position in relation to the reading. You may want to have your students email their questions to you in advance of class, so you come to section aware of what interests them.

Have students bring a question on the weekly assignment, an answer to a question you posed the previous week, or a problem from the homework that they found challenging and would like to discuss. Assign one or two students each week to be a discussion leader or moderator. This puts some responsibility on students to guide discussion and may encourage participation by having students suggest the topics they feel are important or relevant.

Encouraging Attendance and Participation

Make sure that you are clear about attendance requirements from the very first day. Address attendance problems with both the student and instructor. Encourage attendance and participation by including required assignments or presentations that will make up part of the final course grade.

Stress the importance of class participation in the final grade to encourage reluctant students to speak up during class. Make it clear that attendance does not count as participation; students should not only show up but also thoughtfully contribute to class activities.

“Many classes require a participation score, which can be tricky to calculate. I’ve found it is helpful to keep careful track of attendance, as well as some specific notes on student participation throughout the semester. That way, at the end of the semester, you aren’t just basing class participation on a gut feeling – and you have some backup in the event that a student disagrees with your assessment!”

Katie Gray, History TA

Lecture Courses

The central objective of a lecture is to communicate a set of concepts to an audience, in your case, of undergraduates. Following are strategies that successful lecturers use.

Planning the Lectures

The lecture process begins long before class convenes. Thorough preparation and organization of ideas makes lecturing easier for both the lecturer and the audience.

Plan Without Over-Planning. Reading from a transcript of your lecture can be deadly. Make an outline and use notes instead. Practice giving the lecture to make sure that the content is well organized with a clear and persuasive argument. Work from notes, but devote most of your energy to presentation and engaging students.

Liven Up the Material. Focus on the particular aspects of the material that personally interest you. Intersperse the lecture with references to your own life, students' personal experiences, or concrete and current examples of the themes. Illustrate examples with diagrams, slides, images, videos, demonstrations, cartoons, or case studies.

Delivering the Lectures

Being well prepared before your arrival to the lecture is half the journey. The other half is delivery—make sure that the time you spent in preparation is not wasted.

Preview and Review. Start the lecture with an overview of what will follow. Emphasize how each lecture fits into the larger picture of the course as a whole. Display an outline and refer to it as you move from point to point. Pause along the way to review what you have covered up to that point.

Know Your Voice. Speak clearly, slowly, and loudly enough to be heard. Check to be sure your students can hear you, and that you are not speaking too fast. Listen for distracting speech patterns, such as repeatedly saying, “Um”, “Uh-huh,” or “You know,” or using the same phrases frequently, and don't lower your voice towards the end of a thought.

Repeat Important Concepts. Use tactics to alert students that the concepts about to be introduced are

important, such as writing key phrases or themes on the board, or announcing, “This is a key theme we'll see repeatedly.” If appropriate, tell students that a particular concept is important for an upcoming assignment or exam.



Practice your lecture and time yourself. This will ensure that you will not go over the allotted time and will have time for questions and discussion. A good rule of thumb is allowing at least 20 minutes for discussion and dealing with administrative issues.

Acknowledge Your Weaknesses. When a student asks a question to which you don't know the answer, do not attempt to fake an answer or avoid the subject. Admit that you are not sure, promise to find the answer, and get back to the student and the class promptly.

Imitate Good Lecturers. Take a minute to think about instructors you've really liked, and assess what it was that made them effective lecturers.

Laboratory Sections

Teaching a lab section can be a truly enjoyable experience. In a lab, students are active participants in what they learn. Instead of merely absorbing knowledge, students have the opportunity to gain firsthand experience in a given scientific field. Laboratory work helps to animate abstract concepts and teach practical techniques. Most importantly, labs teach students about the process of being a good scientist. This process includes everything from keeping a detailed lab notebook to working collaboratively.

First Day of Lab

This may be the first lab course for some of your students. Go over important policies, such as “Lab notebooks must never leave this room,” or “Open flames are allowed only in the hood.” Include policies on grading and attendance as well as suggestions about how to format their lab reports. Include a

sample lab report for guidance, as students may be unfamiliar with this style of writing.

Preparing for a Lab

Preparation is essential to running a lab section. Being familiar with the experiment in principle is not enough. Ideally you should run the entire experiment from start to finish before attempting to instruct anyone else. When this is not possible, familiarize yourself with all of the equipment and make sure you know how to operate it. Read the lab manual thoroughly, and make sure you are prepared to explain concepts and procedures.

In some departments, the instructor or head TA will demonstrate experiments before each class. This is not always sufficient preparation. Set aside a specific time each week to prepare for the lab. Make a point of talking to TAs who have already taught the lab and find out what students found difficult. Remember that your students will be less efficient than experienced scientists.

Student Preparation

Students who have reviewed lecture notes and the lab manual will have a greater understanding of the day's experiment than those who come to lab unprepared. Ensure that students are familiar with the lab before they come to class by giving a short quiz based on the techniques and concepts introduced in the lab manual, or having students come to lab prepared with a statement of the experimental purpose and procedure.

Supervising the Experiment

Make contact with every student as the lab progresses to be sure that they are on the right track. As a lab TA, you will need to help students recover from experimental errors while encouraging independence. Inquire about the results of intermediate steps. If they're way off, allow them some time to uncover the mistake on their own, but don't leave them floundering for too long. A hint or two may get them back on track.

Realize that you cannot help every student at once. Encourage your students to seek advice and compare results with each other when you are not available. You may have students perform the experiment in small groups or pairs. In this way they can help each other learn the material, share equipment and preparations, and answer each other's questions.

Safety in the Lab

Carelessness, lack of preparedness, and ignorance of safety procedures can be disastrous and result in injuries. Be aware of the safety guidelines and procedures at Johns Hopkins University in case of an accident. As the person in charge, you may be called upon to act quickly in the case of a chemical spill, fire, explosion, ingestion of or contact with a toxic substance, or any of a number of other hazardous situations. Be prepared for such situations and respond accordingly, after making sure the appropriate safety personnel are contacted.

When it comes to handling dangerous materials or equipment in lab, you should always assume that your students did not read the safety warnings in the lab manual. Point out how toxic materials should be handled and how they should be disposed of properly. Inform students about hazardous combinations of chemicals and unsafe lab practices. Demonstrate potentially tricky techniques. Point out safety showers, eye wash stations, and fire extinguishers. Give students instructions on how to deal with possible problems and how to contact campus safety and security.

In case of an emergency call campus security at 410-516-7777. They will contact the appropriate emergency personnel and direct them to your location on campus.

For more about lab safety, please see the Johns Hopkins [*Lab Safety*](#)* website.

“W” Courses

To encourage excellence in writing across disciplines, the University requires all undergraduates to take a number of writing-intensive (W) courses. The University defines a writing-intensive course as one in which students produce at least 20 pages of finished writing over multiple assignments, usually three or more papers; instructors respond to students’ work in written comments, in conference, or both, and students have at least one opportunity to receive feedback on a draft and then revise. A writing-intensive course does more than assign writing; it guides students’ practice in writing and makes writing an integral part of the course.

Sequence Writing Assignments

A W course should be designed around a coherent sequence of assignments that builds both content knowledge and writing skills at the same time. In such a sequence, each assignment builds on the ones before it, and pre-draft assignments, class discussions, and in-class workshops are designed to help students master the intellectual and rhetorical skills they will need to write their papers. Here are a few principles to keep in mind:

Work backward from your goals; create small assignments that develop the skills needed for the final assignment.

What is the most advanced assignment of the course? Let’s say it is an 8 to 10-page essay, based on both primary and secondary sources, that asks students to enter a critical controversy and argue their own points of view. For this assignment, you must teach your students how to analyze a primary source, how to evaluate an argument, how to structure an essay, how to integrate and document sources, etc. Folded into these intellectual skills are other skills, such as summarizing and writing clear sentences. Your assignments should develop these skills individually, or in limited assignments, before asking students to practice them simultaneously in the final paper.

Start small, and break down assignments into smaller, more manageable parts. While students may be overwhelmed by a large and complex assignment, they can succeed when the task is broken down into manageable parts. If the final paper will be an 8 to 10-page essay, you could ask students in the first assignment to write a short analysis of a single, primary source. Building on that initial assignment, and using a mix of graded and ungraded assignments, you can bring your students to the point where they

can comfortably take on the final paper. Such a course sequence might look like this:

- Paper 1: analysis of a primary source, 1-2 pages (ungraded)
- Paper 2: analysis of a primary source, 3-5 pages (graded)
- Paper 3: evaluation of a secondary source in relation to a primary source, 5-7 pages (graded)
- Paper 4: argument using primary and secondary sources: enter a critical debate, 8-10 pages (graded)

Define your terms and use examples. Don’t assume students know what you mean by the words summary, analysis, synthesis, argument, report. You must define the genre and its constituent elements. What do you mean by thesis? What constitutes evidence? How does structure manifest itself? And what does structure look like in a lab report, in a close analytical reading of a literary text, in an argument about a public policy issue? Provide concrete examples that show students what is expected.

Bring Writing into the Classroom

By asking students to write in class, you can model for students the role that writing plays in your discipline. Here are a few suggestions:

At the beginning of class, ask students to write for three to five minutes on some aspect of the reading you will discuss that day. Ask students to respond to the reading, or put a specific question on the board to help stimulate and focus discussion. What strikes them as the most puzzling (questionable, important) passage in the text? What do they see as the author’s key claim, and why? Ask them to identify an important underlying assumption the author makes, or to name a particular point in the text with which they agree (or disagree), and explain.

Brief in-class writing exercises help students focus on the subject, stimulate discussion, and promote writing as a means of thinking. Use in-class writing exercises to get started, to switch gears in the middle of class, or to give students a chance to sum up their own thoughts at the end: What do they want to take away from class today? These exercises need not be graded.

Discuss the readings as writing. How does the article/essay/report work as a piece of writing? What is the author’s strategy for setting up the beginning, establishing context, letting readers know what’s at stake? What are the author’s sources of evidence, and how does he or she use them? How does the author handle transitions? Structure the essay? Anticipate counter-arguments? This approach won’t work with all readings, but many can do double duty as models for the intellectual and rhetorical moves you want your students to practice. By asking students to consider the work they’re reading as writing, you engage students as fellow writers in the scholarly enterprise.

Choose secondary readings with which students can engage analytically. If a secondary reading is too sophisticated or difficult, or if students do not have access to the data on which it is based, they will be unable to grapple with the text in a meaningful way, and you will spend much of class time attempting to explain what the text says rather than guiding students’ evaluation of it.

Make students’ writing the subject of class activities. You can turn students’ writing into an important text by setting up a class workshop. If you ask students to summarize a text in one paragraph (a good pre-draft assignment for a synthesis or an analysis), you can read two or three of the summaries in class and consider, in a class discussion, how well they fulfill the criteria you established for a summary. Or put students in pairs and ask them to evaluate each other’s summaries. Grading is not necessary; the aim is to help students improve their writing.

You can arrange workshops for pre-draft assignments (paper proposals, tentative theses), parts of drafts (introductions, body paragraphs), or whole drafts. For whole drafts, students will need to read them ahead of time—they can email them to each other or post them on the course Blackboard site. In any case, you will need to establish clear guidelines for both the specific purpose of the workshop and the logistics. Setting up in-class workshops gives students the opportunity to receive constructive feedback, teaches them that writing is a process involving revision, and takes their work seriously as writing meant for readers. Workshops also give participants the opportunity to see how fellow writers approached the same writing task and to practice their textual analysis skills.

Respond to and Evaluate Written Work

How You Respond Depends on the Goal of the Assignment.

When you respond to students’ writing—whether by email, in conference, or in written comments on their papers—keep in mind the objectives for the assignment. If the writing is a short, in-class exercise, the purpose may be to stimulate class discussion, in which case the interaction with classmates’ ideas is both purpose and response. If the assignment is a pre-draft that asks students to summarize in a paragraph the main argument of one of the readings, students need to know whether they have provided an accurate account of the argument. If they have, that is all you need to say. If students miss the argument or only have part of it, say that, and send them back to the text. There’s no point in asking students to critique an argument if they don’t have a clear understanding of what the author is arguing.

Use Pre-Draft Writing Assignments to Keep Students on Track.

Pre-draft writing assignments are useful checkpoints for you to make sure students are on the right track. If you assign students to develop a tentative thesis, you can use their assignments in class to discuss what makes a good thesis for the paper in question. And you can comment on their individual assignments by making suggestions that will help strengthen their thinking and, when needed, send them in more fruitful directions. Responding to students’ writing is an important means of teaching. It is also evaluative; your responses are guided by your judgment about what is working well, what isn’t, and how students might improve. Teaching in this way integrates the criteria for evaluating the final product into the process of producing the product.

“If you’re teaching a writing-intensive course, it may be a good idea to establish a policy on the reading of drafts. To be fair to all students, I advise either limiting the number of drafts you will read for each assignment or the number of pages of the draft (for instance, the first two pages) you will read. You can also offer your office hours as the forum in which to discuss revisions. This policy will help to control your workload and will treat all students fairly by setting the same limits for all.”

Caroline Arden, Writing Seminars TA

Use Grades to Reinforce What Students Have Learned.

When students submit their papers to you for grading, the teaching continues. If you determine grades based on how well students fulfill the criteria for the assignment—the criteria you taught—then grades become more than positive or negative reinforcement; they become the means of reinforcing the specific lessons and writing values that you teach. Students may not like their grades, but they should understand them in the terms of the course. Create a rubric (a list of competencies or qualities) that provides the criteria you will use to assess their work, to be shared with your students along with the assignment.

Explain the grade in a formal written comment, sometimes referred to as an endnote, which provides students with an analysis of both the strong points and weak points of the paper, and what could be improved to lift it to a higher level.

The endnote should be typed, should address the student respectfully and by name, and should refer concretely to the paper. It's useful to number the paragraphs (or have students do it) so that you can refer to specific sections. For instance, if one of the best parts of a paper is the student's use of evidence in paragraphs 4-6, tell him or her that. You might also contrast that strong section with the weak use of evidence, in paragraphs 7 and 8 so that the student can see, in the context of their own paper, where the use of evidence is effective and where it is not. Your comments should:

- Evaluate the paper in the terms of the assignment.
- Point to what the student did well.
- Explain the weaknesses and the resulting consequences (e.g., how the failure to provide necessary background undermines coherence).
- Consider how the student writer can improve.

This last point regards the student as a writer whose learning and practice are not bounded by this single assignment, and it locates grading in the context of your teaching.

Tips on Writing Endnotes. Make sure that you are fair to the entire class when writing endnotes. Avoid spending so much time in the writing of one note that you neglect other students' work by establishing a time limit for writing endnotes on each paper. You might also jot notes to yourself on a separate piece of paper as you read so that you can quickly determine the two or three main things you want to include in your endnote. If you get stuck on a paper, set it aside, go on to the others, and return to the problem paper later.

The Art of Problem Solving

Problem solving sections are interactive by nature. The role of a TA in such sections changes from one of being a sage, providing answers to students, to being a coach, teaching students how to find solutions on their own. TAs in problem solving sections need to be able to teach the approach to solving a problem. This may involve breaking down a problem into small parts, linking to previously covered topics, using proper terminology and nomenclature, and untangling the problem for the students.

Do's and Don'ts of Problem Solving

Advance preparation is key to running a successful problem solving section. You will want to go over all of the problems to be covered in class to be sure that you are familiar with the approaches to finding solutions. Identify the elements of the problems and where the potential pitfalls for students are likely to occur. This will help you to guide students as they work through the problem. Make sure that you have examples that are similar to the problems students will have on their homework and tests.

In your role of coach, you will want to engage the class to take ownership of the work and encourage class participation. Remember that you are teaching the students how to think broadly, not just solve a single problem. You should not be lecturing or providing the answers for the students.

If you, or the students, are working on the blackboard, think about how much space will be needed, and plan for a good flow for the explanation, solution, or student work. Make sure that all students can see the board. Remember not to talk while your back is turned. Write a part of the presentation, example,

problem, or solution and then turn to face the class to explain what you have written. Continue in this way until you have finished. Write clearly in a readable size, you should check at the end of class by looking at the board from the back of the classroom, as well as asking during class if everyone can read what you have written. Cover as much of the board as is available before you circle back to your starting point and begin erasing. Make sure that students have had a chance to take notes on board work before you erase.

Think about the topics you want to cover in each session and design your presentation for clarity. Don't skip over parts of the explanations—what may be evident to you may not be for your students. Take your time and be sure that everyone is following along by looking at body language and asking if there are any questions. It is important to check for student understanding at each step, before moving on.

Pay attention to sticking points or obstacles for your students and be prepared to show alternate solutions or offer additional explanation for clarification. Peer instruction can be valuable for those who are struggling. A student who has been challenged by a problem and discovered the method for solution may be able to explain the process to a fellow class member. Where appropriate, encourage students to collaborate.

Don't hide errors or lack of knowledge. If you encounter a problem or question you cannot answer, tell students you will look into it and get back to them at the next session.

EVALUATING YOUR STUDENTS AND YOUR TEACHING ABILITIES

Preparing Exams and Writing Assignments

An important part of successful teaching is successful assessment, and you will, at some point, be faced with this challenge. The evaluation and grading process entails much more than merely marking answers right or wrong. Homework, papers, and exams provide important feedback to students about their level of learning through grades, comments, and suggestions. Similarly, they provide feedback to you about your effectiveness as a teacher. Here are some important ideas that you will need to keep in mind, no matter what type of exam you are writing:

Timing. Be mindful of the amount of time a student will have to answer a question. For example, a carefully reasoned essay should take about 30 minutes to complete.

Administrative Details. Establish both the format of the examinations and the grading criteria at the beginning of the semester.

Variety. Attempt to rearrange the logic and the requirements of questions so that the general concepts remain the same, but the specific details or cases change each year.

Proofread Your Questions. There is nothing worse than a question that students cannot muddle through because of typing errors, a confusing structure, or grammatical problems.

Take-Home Exams. The take-home examination is a good format for seminar courses because it can test a high level of complexity and specificity. It is also an option when the final exam accounts for a substantial portion of the course grade, because it allows students ample time to produce their best work.

True/False and Multiple-Choice Questions

Types of Questions and Reasoning. True/false questions generally test facts and definitions, while multiple-choice questions can be used to test the correct use of facts, definitions, concepts, or abstract thinking. Both types should be used only when there is a clear “right” answer.

How to Write Questions. Consider these tips when creating questions.

- Avoid qualifying terms like “may,” “some,” or “to a considerable degree.”
- Do not create false statements from true statements through the use of negatives (e.g., “True or false: It is not the case that $X = Y$ ”). Instead, use straightforward declaratives (e.g. “True or false: $X = Y$ ”).
- Make an effort to be truly random in the pattern of correct answers. If a, b, c, and d are possible answers, have the letter of the right answer change from one question to the next.
- The answers (d), “all of the above,” or (e), “none of the above,” should be used sparingly.

Essay and Short Answer Questions

Within each question, limit the number of sub-questions. Each question should attempt to get students to integrate two or three broad themes in the course. Experiment with the format of questions. For example, combine short-answer questions or identifications with an essay-length question. Give students some options, such as choosing to answer one of two essay questions.

Designing Writing Assignments

Decisions about how you will use writing in your course and how you will design writing assignments are determined by the discipline, the level, and the goals of the course. What do you want the writing assignments to accomplish? Work backward from your objectives, and design your assignments to help students achieve those objectives.

There is a substantive difference between assigning one large final paper and assigning a series of shorter papers over the course of the semester. The one-paper approach can be effective for advanced students, but to ensure adequate guidance and progress throughout the semester, consider a sequence of steps along the way. Whether you’re teaching an introductory-level or a more advanced course, you can use a mix of ungraded and graded assignments to help students master the intellectual and rhetorical skills they will need to write the most complex assignment of the course.

Ask students to turn in a research question or proposal, an annotated bibliography, a draft beginning or a tentative thesis, a presentation on the research, or a

draft before the final paper. An alternative approach is to assign shorter papers at first, either as sections of a longer paper or as separate assignments, which will allow for feedback throughout the semester. This approach helps students, in 100- and 200-level courses especially, to develop as writers within the context of your discipline.

For each assignment, provide a series of questions to help focus students' thinking, state explicitly that you do not expect students to answer every question but rather to formulate an arguable thesis in response to some of these questions. Otherwise, you may get papers that merely list answers to each question. For more information about writing assignments, see the previous section on "W" Courses."

Grading

Grading is an important part of your teaching. When responding to students' written work and assigning grades, keep in mind the purpose of the assignment and what you want students to learn. Develop a rubric, a set of criteria for the assignment, to ensure equity in grading. Sharing the rubric with students when you give them the assignment will help them understand how they will be graded.

Grade What You Teach. Determine grades based on how well students fulfill the criteria for the assignment—the criteria you taught—so grades become an important teaching tool, a means of reinforcing specific lessons and principles. Students may not like their grades, but they should understand them in the terms of the course and your rubric.

Be Consistent. By basing grades on the rubric, the criteria for the assignment, your grading will be clearer and more consistent. When you're grading papers, you can speed up the process and increase consistency by skimming through several papers before commenting or assigning grades. This will help give you a sense of the papers as a group, how they compare, and what characterizes the stronger papers. After you finish grading (but before you finalize the grades), it's a good idea to double-check papers in the same grade range to make sure they are commensurate.

Respond in Writing. Commenting in the margins of written work can help you track the work as you go, but be sparing with margin comments. You might make notes for yourself on a separate sheet of paper, and then put only those comments in the margins that address important points. You can explain the grade on a comment sheet (sometimes called an endnote) that provides students with an analysis of both the strong points and the weak points of the paper. Make sure to relate your comments to the rubric and mention what could be improved to elevate the grade to a higher level.

Keep Accurate Records. Have a system, maintain the security of your records, and make sure you have a backup or copy. If attendance and participation are factors in final grades, record attendance at every class (not later). Record the submission of all homework and pre-draft assignments on the days you receive them. If you ask students to submit an electronic version of their papers in addition to a hard copy, you will have an accurate record of when all papers were turned in. Retain your attendance and grade sheets after the course is over.

“When grading lengthy midterms, you may find it difficult to maintain a fair and consistent rubric, especially for written questions requiring students to form an interpretation of course material. Before you start, it will help to have a clear idea of what a good answer would be for each question. Then, before assigning any grades, read quickly through several of the tests to get an idea of the range of responses.”

Marsha Libina, History of Art TA

Stay Current with Grading. The information you provide to students by responding to and evaluating their homework, pre-draft assignments, tests, and papers is an important part of your teaching. It helps you and students keep track of what they've learned and what they still have to learn. This information must keep pace with the course.

Have a Clear Policy on Re-grades. If your course allows re-grades, put your policy in writing, in the syllabus, and make sure your grading criteria are clear (see above). If you find mistakes, correct them. If you're unsure of how to handle a grading problem, refer the student to the professor.

Evaluating and Improving Your Teaching Skills

Don't punish honest criticism. To keep things on an impersonal basis, encourage students to keep written evaluations anonymous. Criticisms are not personal attacks. Put comments into a larger perspective—one that encompasses the performance of the professor, you, and the students.

Show that you take evaluations seriously. The more you do this, the more likely you are to get thoughtful feedback.

Get feedback throughout the semester. It can be very helpful to take the midterm exam yourself, so that you can make adjustments as you go.

Sources of Information

Students. If you encourage students to see you individually during a semester, you can use these meetings to ask them about your teaching. To help stimulate discussion, depersonalize your questions (e.g., "Was this assignment unclear? Why?") You could also take a few moments during class to talk with all your students about how the course is going.

Anonymous written comments often allow students to be more free and thoughtful. If you want to write your own evaluation form, ask questions that are both specific and open-ended, such as: "Were comments on papers or exams helpful?" "To what extent was the TA approachable?" or "Did the TA encourage participation? How?" You might consider using one of the *Mid-Semester Evaluation Forms**.

Faculty and Peers. Form a Peer Review Group with fellow TAs in which you each take turns sitting in on each other's classes. Such processes provide relatively unbiased commentary on specific classroom practices and expose people to a variety of teaching styles and techniques. There is also a lot to be learned from faculty about teaching. Some faculty members make a habit of visiting TA discussion sections or labs and offering commentary. Being observed and evaluated by a faculty member can be more stressful than being observed by a peer, but the potential reward can be worth it.

Self-Evaluations. Video and audio taping sections are two ways for you to see how others see you. Observing yourself can lead to some startling discoveries about how you interact with your students. Sit down and think about what the information you are gathering is telling you. If a discussion or lab goes particularly well or poorly, take some time to think about why—and what you could have done differently. If attendance or participation is low, get some feedback from students and make changes. Learning to teach is like learning anything else—it's an ongoing process.

ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCES

Center for Educational Resources (CER)

CER staff are available to help you with questions you have about teaching. The mission of the CER is to partner with educators (both faculty and graduate student instructors and teaching assistants) to extend their instructional impact by connecting innovative teaching strategies and digital technologies. The CER is located in the Milton S. Eisenhower Library.

The CER is jointly sponsored by the Krieger School of Arts & Sciences, the Whiting School of Engineering, the Sheridan Libraries, and Hopkins Information Technology Services. CER staff offer a variety of services and resources for teaching assistants such as course management system training, assistance with using the Turnitin plagiarism detection service, clickers, and temporary equipment loans.

Training, Resources, and Services

Blackboard Course Management System Training. Blackboard is the course management system used on the Homewood campus. It is a web environment that enables faculty and graduate students to organize online course materials, access course tools, and interact effectively with students via discussion boards. When used to its full potential, Blackboard can be an effective tool to support your course. The CER offers both online and hands-on training for faculty interested in incorporating the program into their course. Links can be found on the [Center for Educational Resources*](#) website.

On-Demand Instructional Technology Help. The CER provides assistance when you need it and where you need it. Request a consultation at cerweb@jhu.edu, or stop by the CER anytime between 9am and 5pm.

Educational Tools. The Center offers assistance with the Turnitin plagiarism detection service, Panopto for lecture recording and streaming, and the in-class student response (clicker) system. The CER has developed and made available to instructors a web application, Reveal, for annotating content using images, audio, and video resources to illustrate visual relationships.

Communication Tools. The CER will provide interested faculty and TAs with an orientation to web conferencing and collaboration with Adobe Connect and Skype.

Equipment Checkout and Multimedia Lab. The CER has educational technology equipment available for temporary loan to faculty and graduate student TAs who are teaching a class. There is equipment to aid in recording: camcorders, digital audio recorders, microphones, and cameras. There is equipment to assist with teaching: portable clickers, tablets, and individual laptops. A small multimedia lab with powerful computers and Adobe Creative Cloud software can be reserved. Loan periods vary and may require faculty sponsorship.

To reserve equipment for loan or space in the Faculty Multimedia Lab, visit the [Center for Educational Resources*](#) website and look under Tools & Tech for Equipment Loans.

The Innovative Instructor. The [Innovative Instructor Article Series*](#) on teaching excellence at Johns Hopkins University is available through the CER website and in print form in the CER (located on Q level of MSEL). Written by Hopkins faculty and campus instructional technology experts, the goal is to increase communication about effective teaching solutions and how to achieve them. Through these articles instructors share successful teaching strategies, learn what colleagues are doing, and discover new technologies and skills for the classroom.

The Innovative Instructor Blog. The [Innovative Instructor Blog*](#) builds on the successful print series of the same name focusing on Pedagogy, Best Practices, and Technology. Blog posts cover topics such as active learning, assessment, use of case studies in instruction, classroom management, instructional design, how to engage students, grading and feedback, collaborative learning, leading discussions, hybrid instruction, and teaching methods. Posts are written by JHU faculty, staff members in teaching and learning centers, post docs, and graduate students.

Technology Fellowship Grant Program. The [Technology Fellowship Program*](#) is a mini-grant initiative designed to help Hopkins faculty develop digital course resources by combining their instructional expertise with the technology skills of graduate and undergraduate students. The focus of this program is to create instructional resources that support undergraduate education. Faculty and students work together to develop projects that integrate technology into instruction while enhancing pedagogy, increasing or facilitating access to course materials, encouraging active learning, and promoting critical thinking and/or collaboration among students.

The Teaching Academy

The *Teaching Academy** serves as an exceptional graduate and post-doctoral fellow professional development program at Johns Hopkins University. The mission is twofold: to support the learning experiences for undergraduates by training graduate student teachers, and to prepare graduate students so they may thrive in higher education as academic professionals once they graduate.

The Teaching Academy offers Ph.D. candidates and post-doctoral fellows, from all divisions across Johns Hopkins University, teacher training and academic career preparation opportunities through courses, workshops, teaching practicums, teaching as research fellowships, and individual consultation. The Teaching Academy is administered through the Center for Educational Resources (CER) in the Garrett Room of the Milton S. Eisenhower Library on the Homewood campus.

Programs Offered

TA Orientation and Training. Responsibilities assigned to TAs vary by department. Some are the sole instructors for a course, others lead laboratory exercises, run discussion sections, create and grade exams, or perform other course-related educational and administrative functions. Such activities provide an opportunity for graduate students who expect to pursue full-time college or university teaching to practice designing and delivering effective undergraduate instruction. These responsibilities are critically important to the delivery of undergraduate education at Hopkins. To further TA training, the Center for Educational Resources will work with departments, graduate student groups and individuals. Contact Richard Shingles at tati@jhu.edu to schedule an appointment.

The TA Orientation and Training includes the following:

- **Fall TA Orientation for First-Time TAs** (Required Session). The focus of this event is on preparing TAs for their immediate instructional teaching assignments. More than 200 graduate students attend TA Orientation each year. New TAs are introduced to the administrative landscape of the TA at Hopkins through a mandatory plenary session. The plenary session is followed by a series of sessions covering a variety of issues for first-time TAs, including Preparing for the First Day, Supporting a Lab, Leading Effective Discussions, Evaluating Writing Assignments, and The Art of Problem Solving Instruction.
- **Eyes on Teaching** (Optional). A workshop series repeating topics given at TA orientation plus additional topics, targeted primarily at those with little or no formal training as educators, is offered during the academic year. These one-hour workshops are designed as a general preparation for instructors to teach independently and effectively at the university level. The workshops are open to all graduate students and to others with instructional appointments at JHU, and will have added value for those developing a teaching portfolio. Participation in six Eyes on Teaching workshops fulfills Phase I of the Teaching Academy's Certificate of Completion program (see next section for details).
- **Preparation for University Teaching** (Elective Course). A formal course offered in the spring semester for graduate students. Participants in the course engage in peer-to-peer teaching and have the opportunity to be videotaped and critiqued on their lecture presentations. The emphasis of the course is on lesson and course preparation, presentation skills, the effective facilitation of discussions, and the development of self-assessment techniques. The course is offered through KSAS (360.781) and WSE (500.781) and carries one credit. Successful completion of this course fulfills Phase II of the Teaching Academy's Certificate of Completion program (see next section for details).

Certificate of Completion Program. This is a certificate program for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows that provides an introduction of sound pedagogical practices, explores different educational models, and helps participants acquire teaching and assessment skills through courses, workshops, and a teaching experience.

Teaching Institute. The Johns Hopkins Teaching Academy offers a three-day Teaching Institute to graduate students and post-doctoral fellows to advance the development of university-level educators by enhancing classroom teaching skills. The three-day event is packed with information, hands-on experiences, tools, and resources. Participants benefit from getting to know one another and working together in a learning community comprised of fellow future faculty.

Teaching-As-Research Fellowships. Teaching-As-Research (TAR) is the deliberate, systematic, and reflective use of research methods by instructors to develop and implement practices that advance learning experiences and student outcomes. The TAR program is open to graduate students and post-doctoral fellows across the university; fellowships carry a stipend awarded upon submission of a final report and presentation.

Office of Academic Advising

The Office of *Academic Advising** maintains a website with useful information on deadlines (e.g., add/drop deadlines and the deadline for filing Incompletes) and services available to undergraduates such as tutoring and mentoring.

Student Information System (SIS)

The Student Information System (SIS) is Johns Hopkins' university-wide, web-based student information system. Faculty can use this system to print the course roster, email the entire class, and enter grades online. To learn more about how to use SIS, please review the *Student Information System (SIS) help guide**

Resources for International Teaching Assistants

One of the main concerns of international teaching assistants is that they may not be able to communicate effectively in English with their students. While linguistic and cultural differences exist, there are many ways, in addition to speech, to enhance your communication and make your teaching more universally engaging and accessible. Teaching may seem daunting at first, but like everything else, it gets easier with practice. Your ability to communicate will improve as you practice speaking and adapt to American culture.

Interacting with your peers and colleagues—especially other international students—is a good way to build confidence in your own ability to communicate and gives you the chance to trade problems and solutions with others in the same situation. Above all, be patient with yourself. You can learn as much from your students as they will from you.

If students have a hard time understanding what you are saying, write the main points of your lecture on the board. Teaching with handouts can also help. Taking the time to create handouts before class gives you the opportunity to compose your thoughts and express them clearly in English.

Make sure you understand students' questions completely before you attempt to answer, even if that means asking the student to repeat the question. Check frequently to see if the students are following you. Don't forget to maintain eye contact as you explain material. After finishing one section of a lecture, ask the students if there are questions before you continue.

Remember that your English language ability is only one of your skills. You also have your passion for the material, your cultural background, and your life experiences, all of which will help to make you a more interesting teacher. Your students can't take advantage of these things if you don't share them. On the first day, if you are comfortable doing so, tell the students where you are from and what other languages you speak. If the place you consider to be home is somewhere that you suspect many of them have never been to, bring in a picture. Many JHU freshmen have never left the United States. If you have studied at a university outside the United States, say so. If the classroom experience was very different at that university—for example, if there was little in-class discussion, or if the pedagogy of teaching the

subject in question was different—take a moment to share that story with the students. This will make the students more comfortable, and if they later have trouble understanding something you say in class, they will not feel embarrassed to ask for clarification.

Classes for International Teaching Assistants

The Center for Language Education offers classes for current and prospective international TAs through the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. Departments usually recommend their students for the courses, but you can also sign up on your own with permission of the instructor. A few weeks prior to the beginning of the semester, information about placement testing will be posted on the [Center for Language Education's*](#) website page for the [International TAs ESL Program*](#). You then may be asked to appear for an assessment of your English language oral skills to help determine which courses would meet your needs.

Courses Currently Offered:

- AS.370.600 Oral Skills/Int'l TA's
- AS.370.601 Communication Strategies
- AS.370.602 Accent Reduction
- AS.370.603 Culture and Communication in American Academia
- AS.370.604 Academic Writing
- AS.370.605 Strengthening Oral Communication Skills

Office of International Student and Scholar Services

The primary goal of the Office of *International Student and Scholar Services** (OISSS) is to help members of Hopkins' international community to acquire and maintain the appropriate visa status, and cope with the challenges of making a transition from one setting to another.

The staff is prepared to help with issues international students may face in adapting to an academically and culturally different environment. On the Homewood campus, OISSS staff will be your first source of important information. It is important that you meet them soon after your arrival at Johns Hopkins University.

OISSS staff members can answer your questions and advise you about immigration regulations, financial concerns, health matters, housing, employment

possibilities, and other issues relating to your period of stay in the United States. Johns Hopkins University offers a wide range of student services at Homewood, and, when necessary, OISSS will refer you to other offices that can more fully address your needs and concerns.

In order to properly attend to everyone, OISSS advisors require students and scholars to make an appointment prior to being seen for advising in the office, however, walk-in advising is available (check website for times). These walk-in advising sessions do not require an appointment.

Advising services for new arrivals, I-9 processing, and signatures on I-20/DS-2019 forms may be handled at any time during OISSS office hours, and are not limited to walk-in advising hour. (667-208-7001).

Office of Pre-Professional Advising

The JHU Office of *Pre-Professional Programs and Advising** is dedicated to encouraging students interested in pursuing careers in the health and legal professions to make conscious and thoughtful decisions about their future paths. They serve undergraduates, graduate students, and alumni of the Krieger School of Arts & Sciences and the Whiting School of Engineering. Office resources are available to students beginning in their first year.

Tutoring and Counseling Services

As a TA, you will usually have direct contact with the undergraduates in your class. You will be the first line of defense against serious academic problems. After the first test, homework assignment, or essay, identify students who are having problems with the course. Meet with these students to find out what is going on—you can discreetly ask them to visit during office hours or stay after class for a few minutes. Students may be having personal problems, need accommodation for disabilities, or may not have the necessary study skills or background for the class. Students may come to you, but if they are having trouble and do not seek your help, make an effort to reach out to them.

The Learning Den

The Office of Academic Support offers academic assistance to full-time Homewood undergraduate students who want help with course material. The *Learning Den Tutoring Services** provides tutoring for all registered students in the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences and the Whiting School of Engineering. Tutoring is conducted in small group format, with a maximum of six students in each group.

Help Rooms

Help rooms are run by their respective departments and offer free drop-in tutoring for interested students. There are help rooms for Chemistry, Languages (Chinese, Japanese and Korean), Math, and Physics.

The Study Consulting Program

The *Study Consulting Program** is designed to help students improve their academic performance. Consultants are trained graduate students or seniors who provide general assistance with academic issues such as organizational and time management skills, procrastination, test anxiety, note taking, study techniques, reading college text books, and self-discipline. Students and consultants meet once each week for one hour at an agreed-upon time and location. There is no charge for participation in this program, which focuses on the needs of the student.

Pilot Learning

*PILOT Learning** is a loose acronym for peer-led-team learning. PILOT program supports specific courses. In the Hopkins PILOT program, students are organized into study teams consisting of 6-10 members who meet weekly to work problems together. A trained student leader acts as captain and facilitates the meetings.

Writing Center

The *Writing Center** offers undergraduate and graduate student writers free, individual conferences with experienced tutors trained to consult on academic writing assignments. Students can work with tutors on all aspects of the writing process, from organizing their thinking to revising their drafts. The Writing Center, located in the Hutzler Reading Room of Gilman Hall (Room 230) offers fifty-minute appointments, starting on the hour, and usually maintains hours Sunday through Thursday, 2-10 PM. Although walk-ins are accepted, students are strongly encouraged to book appointments in advance using the online scheduler.

Counseling Center

The *Counseling Center** assists students in maintaining their psychological and emotional well-being. Psychological problems are not a prerequisite for going to the Counseling Center; students may use these resources for personal growth and enrichment through educational and support programs. All services are confidential and free of charge to full-time undergraduate and graduate students from the Schools of Arts & Sciences, Engineering, and the Peabody Institute. Individual, couples, and group counseling are available. The Counseling Center also offers services in career decision-making, consultation, workshops, and out-reach programs.

If you notice significant changes in the work or attitude of a student, consider referring them to the Counseling Center. If a student comes to talk to you and you feel that their problems are beyond your ability to help, offer to connect the person with professionals in the Counseling Center.

Students desiring Counseling Center services can make appointments in person or by phone. In addition, a professional staff member is on duty daily for immediate assistance in case of an emergency. The Counseling Center is staffed primarily by

licensed psychologists. Center services are also provided by interns who are advanced doctoral students in professional psychology and work under the supervision of senior staff. The Counseling Center has consulting psychiatrists available for medication management and consultation.

Recognizing Students in Distress

The *Counseling Center's - Recognizing Students in Distress** webpage lists some of the signs of students in distress, including students who may be suicidal or potentially dangerous. TAs should read through it carefully. You may find yourself in a position to observe and recognize changes that signal psychological distress in students. This is not to imply that you need to be on the watch, but rather that students often seek out faculty and staff to share their distress. At other times, you may become concerned with the behavior you have observed in one of your students. Being able to identify students in distress, having some guidelines for dealing with distressed students, and being aware of appropriate referral resources that can assist you will allow you to be more in control of situations which may present themselves.

The Counseling Center holds workshops for recognizing and assisting students in distress and is happy to advise you with concerns you might have.

The Sheridan Libraries

The *Sheridan Libraries** are part of the Johns Hopkins University library network and include the Milton S. Eisenhower Library, which is the principal research library at the University. Other specialized collections in medicine, international affairs, music, and space science are located across the University's campuses. Smaller collections are also maintained at satellite campuses and centers.

Library Resources for Student Research

The library provides specialized services for courses that require research. When given advance notice, subject librarians (Academic Liaisons) can lead a class session that instructs students on how to use library resources. These sessions are geared toward the needs of your particular course and can take place within the library, where students receive hands-on instruction from the Academic Liaisons, or within your own classroom. In addition, Academic Liaisons can design a customized page on the library website that guides students in conducting the specific research demanded by your course. If you don't have the time to arrange a session in the library, you can still steer your students to the library's Research Consultation Office, where a librarian is on duty weekdays from 10 AM until 9 PM during the academic year, with more limited hours on weekends, holidays, and the summer.

Special Collections

The *Sheridan Libraries Special Collections** houses rare books, historical manuscripts, the University archives, sheet music, and digital collections. Materials are housed in three locations. The Milton S. Eisenhower Library/Brody Learning Commons houses the Rare Book Collection, the Ferdinand Hamburger University Archives, and Manuscripts. The John Work Garrett Library of rare books and manuscripts is in the Garrett family home, Evergreen House, at 4545 North Charles Street. Finally, the George Peabody Library, in its magnificent Victorian building, is located at 17 East Mount Vernon Place. For hours and directions to each location, visit the Sheridan Libraries Special Collections website.

Special collections cover the historical aspects of most disciplines, and librarians are eager to work with faculty and graduate students to use these materials to support and enhance teaching. Holding a class in

Rare Books and Manuscripts offers students a tangible experience of history in the classroom setting and adds exciting depth to a course. All Hopkins students are welcome to make use of these materials for individual research, and in most cases, librarians can also make arrangements to support course-related research assignments.

Library Reserves

Instructors of courses offered by all divisions of the Johns Hopkins University on the Homewood campus may reserve required and recommended materials for their students. These materials include published books, book excerpts, journal articles, government documents, videos, DVDs, and audio materials.

This service also offers Electronic Reserves, which is integrated with Blackboard. EReserves will digitize copies of book chapters or journal articles that are not already available online that you may require or recommend for your courses. Course reading lists may be submitted through the [Sheridan Libraries Reserves Request Form](#)* or by emailing your syllabus to reserves@jhu.edu.

Library Audiovisual Materials

The MSE Library has audiovisual materials, including a wide range of audio and video recordings. If the library does not have the resources your course needs, your Academic Liaison may be able to order them.

Technology Resources and Services

At times, you may need additional resources to support teaching your course. Johns Hopkins provides you with access to various audiovisual materials and support, multimedia equipment and support, and classroom technology services.

KIT-CATS - Classroom Audiovisual Technology Support

[Audio Visual Services \(KIT-CATS\)](#)* (Krieger IT Classroom Audio-Visual Technology Support) offers a wide range of technology services for the Homewood campus. These services include the delivery and setup of video conferencing technology for courses,

meetings, conferences, and special events, as well as audio and video recording services at an hourly rate. KIT-CATS also provides digital conversion services for converting analog audio cassettes to MP3 digital audio files. The staff can provide consultation services relating to presentation technologies or serve in a simple advisory role on the best type of equipment for a given application. KIT-CATS provides equipment at no cost for undergraduate courses (restrictions do apply; see the website for details). All equipment is available on a first-come, first-served basis. It is recommended that requests be made at least a week in advance of the event or activity.

Digital Media Center

The [Digital Media Center's](#)* (DMC) mission is to prepare life-long learners to confidently master new technologies and to disseminate work that effectively communicates their ideas.

The professional and student staff offers training and support in the use of multimedia hardware and software through workshops, peer coaching, and 1-on-1 mentoring. Students may borrow equipment such as video and still cameras, music creation/recording gear, game systems, projectors, and sound equipment for club events, academic projects, and personal recreation.

The main lab features workstations with a wide selection of software for video, audio, graphics, web, and 3D modeling. The game lab is a fully equipped development and testing center with high-end workstations. The recording studio contains a state-of-the-art composition, recording, and editing system complete with synthesizers, key-boards, drums, and effects processors. The DMC is open to full-time students in the Schools of Arts & Sciences and Engineering.

JHBox

[JHBox](#)* is a cloud-based file sharing and file storage system which enables users to collaborate and share information through any device: desktop, laptop, phone or tablet. JHBox makes it easy to upload content, organize files, share links to files, and manage file and folder permissions. Johns Hopkins users can share files with students and others outside the institution. JHBox comes with 50 GB of free space per user.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

An important part of being a TA is administering the policies that preserve academic integrity at Johns Hopkins. You are not alone in this endeavor. It is your responsibility to recognize problems and report them immediately to your supervising professor. The professor, the Associate Dean for Student Conduct, and the Undergraduate Academic Ethics Board will work together to enforce the academic policies.

It is important for you to document academic misconduct clearly and to inform your instructor immediately. Your instructor will contact the Associate Dean for Student Conduct and may request a direct settlement or hearing request. If a hearing in front of the Ethics Board is necessary, your instructor will be expected to present an account of the case as well as provide supporting evidence.

Cheating

The best way to combat cheating is to provide an explicit definition of cheating in the context of the course at the beginning of the semester. According to the guide, *Academic Ethics for Undergraduates**, cheating is defined as “the act of stealing ideas, information, and words. Any act that violates authorship or takes undue advantage is cheating.” Cheating can take on different forms. While cheating during an exam is the most obvious type, students can be called to the Ethics Board for knowingly facilitating cheating, creating unfair competition, lying, or collaborating inappropriately with other students on assignments.

To prevent cheating before it happens, you should minimize the temptation to cheat as much as possible. An attentive eye may be enough to discourage most students from cheating. For quizzes and exams, if possible put an empty seat between each person and reiterate the policy before the exam begins. Another option for some classes may be to require students to turn in an outline and rough draft before the final paper.

Clearly define the rules on student collaboration on assignments, papers, and exam preparation. It is critical that you explain these policies, as they vary greatly among departments and professors. Make sure that the cheating policy is enforced equally for all students. Don't change policies mid-semester. If you feel that you must make a change, communicate the new policy and your reasons for the change during class. If you treat cheating seriously, your students will do the same.

Plagiarism

The guide *Academic Ethics for Undergraduates** describes plagiarism as “representing someone else's information, ideas or words as your own by failing to acknowledge the source.” Clearly define plagiarism on the first day of class and before the first paper is due. Plagiarism is a serious problem that can have very serious repercussions—make sure your students understand the rules and the consequences before they start writing. Refer your students to proper citation resources such as the *Sheridan Libraries Citation Guide**

If you suspect plagiarism, copy the original paper and then go through the student's work and the texts carefully. Document all cases of plagiarism, whether verbatim use of an author's works or stolen ideas. And, since the professor is ultimately responsible for dealing with plagiarism, discuss issues with him or her as soon as possible.

Turnitin.com Plagiarism Prevention Service

JHU has a University-wide site license for the *Turnitin Plagiarism Detection Service**. This service provides an easy-to-use method for instructors to check the content of papers for unoriginal material. The Center for Educational Resources offers Turnitin training and information for KSAS and WSE instructors. Instructors can request a Turnitin account by sending an email to turnitin@jhu.edu. Requests from TAs need to be coordinated with a sponsoring faculty member.

University Statement On Ethics

The strength of the University depends on academic and personal integrity. Ethical violations would include cheating on exams, plagiarism, the reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Report violations that you witness to the professor of your course.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Johns Hopkins University is a community committed to sharing values of diversity and inclusion in order to achieve and sustain excellence. We believe excellence is best promoted by being a diverse group of students, faculty, and staff who are committed to creating a climate of mutual respect that is supportive of one another's success. Through its curricula and clinical experiences, the University purposefully supports this goal of diversity, and in particular, works towards an outcome of best serving the needs of students. Faculty and candidates are expected to demonstrate an understanding of diversity as it relates to planning, instruction, management, and assessment.

Office of Institutional Equity

As a TA, you may have contact with the Office of *Institutional Equity** for concerns relating to diversity, disabilities, harassment/discrimination complaints, or equity compliance.

The Office of Institutional Equity was established to provide leadership for university efforts to promote institutional equity and a diverse university community, and to assure that the university's programs and procedures comply with federal, state and local laws and regulations as related to affirmative action and equal opportunity with special attention to disability issues.

The office develops and coordinates the implementation of the university's Institutional Equity Programs and procedures. In addition, the office provides training efforts related to disability issues and sexual and other forms of harassment. The office receives, investigates, and responds to discrimination complaints on the basis of gender, marital status, pregnancy, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, veteran status, and other legally protected characteristics. The office also provides mediation services for University-related issues.

Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct Claims and Your Role as a TA

The TA-student relationship carries the potential of becoming grounds for claims of discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct because of the inherent power imbalance. You should be mindful

of this danger and maintain appropriate and professional relationships with your students. To this end, it is better to be too formal than to be too casual. Dressing professionally, only meeting with students in public places and during daytime hours, and treating all students in the course equally will help create a natural sense of formality.

You can help minimize claims of discrimination by making it clear to students that you treat everyone equally. This may sound self-evident, but it is not so simple. Remember that you must maintain a professional relationship with ALL of the students. If some students perceive that you are especially friendly to other members of the class, they are likely to assume that you are discriminating and will not grade objectively. Maintain a professional distance, and be equally friendly with and accessible to all students.

Do not get too personally involved with your students, and absolutely do not become romantically involved with a student in your class. Due to the nature of power relations in the classroom, a fine line distinguishes romance from sexual harassment, and potentially, sexual misconduct.

Harassment can occur in many different forms. Sexual harassment, whether between people of different sexes or the same sex, is defined to include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when:

1. submission to such conduct is made implicitly or explicitly a term or condition of an individual's participation in an educational program;
2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for academic evaluation or advancement; or
3. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive educational environment.

Contact the Office of *Institutional Equity** and/or the Office of the *Dean of Student Life** if you become aware of a discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct issue during the course of your duties. If a student discloses an issue involving discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct, make no promises of confidentiality. TAs confronted with such disclosures should make the students aware of the available complaint process and refer students to the Office of Institutional Equity.

Teaching Students with Disabilities

Disabilities

Students who disclose a disability to the University must be reasonably accommodated in both the classroom and in extracurricular activities as a function of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Although the term “disability” is more easily applied to noticeable conditions—such as mobility, hearing, or visual impairments—many disabilities that you encounter in the University setting will be hidden. These include conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder, learning disabilities, chronic medical issues, and psychological disorders. The ADA mandates that individuals with any of these disabilities be provided reasonable and appropriate accommodations to ensure equal access to, and participation in, the programs and services offered by the University. When these accommodations are provided, students with disabilities can be expected to meet course requirements in a manner comparable to their classmates.

Accommodations

Each student with a disability is accommodated on a case-by-case basis after a review of the documentation of their disability. Accommodations can include extended testing time, use of a private testing space, note takers, interpreters, digitized textbooks, or priority course scheduling.

Your Role as a TA

Before a student receives accommodations, they must contact the Office of *Student Disability Services**. This office will email course instructors the specific classroom accommodations that have been authorized by the University’s ADA Compliance Officer. As a TA, you should contact the instructor to determine what accommodations have been granted. You and the course instructor must work with the student to ensure that the authorized accommodations are implemented. If a student discloses a disability to you and either does not have an accommodations letter or has not consulted the Office for Student Disability Services, you should refer that student to that Office. Do not attempt to accommodate the student on your own. You are obligated to keep all the information you receive about a student’s disability confidential.

The accommodation process can take time, so be sure to instruct your students to communicate their needs to you, no later than the first week of class, and

then again each time they require something specific (e.g., private location for an exam). Request that they always provide you at least a week’s notice so you have adequate time to arrange the accommodation. It is strongly recommended that you place a statement like the following in your syllabus to help clarify the accommodation: “All students with documented disabilities who require accommodations for this course should contact me at their earliest convenience to discuss their specific needs. If you have a documented disability, you must be registered with the Office of Student Disability Services (385 Garland Hall, 410-516-4720) to arrange the receipt of accommodations.”

Points to Remember in the Classroom

- Students who present you with an accommodations letter from the Office for Student Disability Services are entitled to their accommodations as a function of federal ADA law. As such, you must take all appropriate actions to ensure that they receive these accommodations in a timely manner.
- When in doubt about how to assist a student with disabilities, ask the student directly and check the accommodations letter provided by the Office for Student Disability Services. If you still have questions, call 410-516-4720.
- Confidentiality of all student information is absolutely essential. At no time should the class be informed that a given student has a disability, unless that student makes a specific request to do so. Failure to protect students’ confidentiality is a violation of both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Flexibility may be necessary when applying attendance and promptness rules to students with health-related or mobility difficulties. All requests for flexibility due to a disability should come from the Office for Student Disability Services (and should be outlined in the accommodations letter) to prevent misuse of this accommodation by the student.
- The Student Code of Conduct regarding disruptive behavior applies to all students. You should state behavioral expectations clearly for all students and discuss them openly in your classroom, on your syllabus, and with individual students as necessary.
- For more information on types of disabilities and suggestions for instructors see *Student Disability Services—Guidelines for Teaching Students with Disabilities**.

FERPA—FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT

As a TA for Johns Hopkins, you may have access to confidential student records. You have a responsibility to protect all education records in your possession. The confidentiality, use, and release of student records are governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). To comply with FERPA, the University may not release “personally identifiable information” from an education record. Personally identifiable information is information that is directly linked or easily traceable to an individual student, such as Social Security or Hopkins ID numbers.

See *FERPA—University Policy on Family Educational Rights and Privacy** for a comprehensive guide available in the form of a downloadable PDF document.

To Avoid Violations of FERPA, Please Do Not:

- Post grades.
- Require social security or Hopkins ID numbers on submitted materials or link a student’s name and SSN or Hopkins ID in a public manner.
- Use full or partial SSNs or Hopkins IDs for grade postings.
- Leave graded tests or assignments in a stack for students to pick up by sorting through the papers of all students.
- Circulate a printed class list with names, social security or Hopkins ID numbers, or grades as an attendance roster.
- Discuss the progress of a student with anyone (including the student’s parents) without the written consent of the student.
- Provide lists of students enrolled in your classes to a third party for commercial purpose.
- Provide student schedules or assist anyone other than University employees in finding a student on campus.

The ramifications for violations of FERPA are severe, including possible loss of Title IV Financial Aid Funding. If you have questions, please call the Office of the General Counsel at 410-516-8128 or the Office of the Registrar at 410-516-7148.

Best Practices for Returning Graded Examinations and Papers

- Return exams or papers yourself, or ask your department administrator to do so if you are unable to.
- Fold and staple exams or papers with only the name of the student visible on the front
- At the end of term ask students to submit a pre-addressed stamped envelope to return exams or papers.
- If you must post grades, use code words or randomly assigned numbers known only by you and the individual student. The order should not be alphabetical.
- Post grades to Blackboard (only the students can access their own information).

SELECTED REFERENCES ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Tools for Teaching and Teaching Tips, in bold in the list below, are good places to start.

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