BYU Department of Linguistics TA Manual

Introduction

As a TA, you play an important role in students' learning experiences. Your work as a TA can be very rewarding, particularly as you interact with students and help them achieve course outcomes. At times, particularly when starting out as a TA, you might feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities a TA has. This manual will help you understand your role as a TA and will provide guidance on how to make the experience enriching for you, your professor, and the students in your class.

TA Basics

Your Purpose (to Help Prof and Students)

Your purpose as a TA is to assist your professor and the students in your class. Be proactive in seeking out ways to assist your professor and the students. Your professor is likely very busy and will appreciate not only your help in completing your assigned course tasks but also your ideas and efforts to improve the learning experience for students and to reduce the professor's burdens. The role of a TA also gives you the opportunity to develop your skills in various areas and to receive mentoring from your professor.

Why You Were Selected to Be a TA

You were selected as a TA because your professor is confident that you will be able to fulfill all the responsibilities involved in being a TA (see the following sections for more details). Although there is a learning curve in being a TA, you will do well if you follow the guidance in this manual and the guidance your professor provides.

General TA Duties

TA duties vary somewhat depending on the course and the instructor, so it's important that you and your professor discuss in detail what duties you'll complete as a TA. In general, you can expect to grade most or all assignments and to answer students' questions about your grading and feedback. Your professor might also ask you to hold office hours, tutor students, make copies, send general communications to students, lead study/review sessions, help with classroom technology, assist with class activities and instruction, and even

teach classes. Make sure you are familiar with the contents of the syllabus and other course-overview materials the professor provides.

Professor's Expectations for TAs

Some expectations will vary by professor and course, but all professors expect TAs to communicate in a clear, respectful, and timely manner; to manage their tasks effectively in order to complete work on time; to accept and take action on feedback; to learn and try new things; to take the initiative to help students; and to be self-directed in finding answers to questions and solving problems.

Prior to being hired, it's important to meet with the professor to discuss the details of the job and his or her expectations for you. Make sure to discuss the following, as well as any other topics that need to be addressed so you feel confident in excelling as a TA:

- The specific tasks the professor wants you to complete during the semester
- How frequently you'll meet with the professor
- What to call the professor
- The number of hours you should plan to work each week and how the number of hours might vary at different points during the semester or term
- Whether you should attend class
- Whether you will teach any classes
- Whether you should have office hours and, if so, how often
- How and when to provide updates on classes and students' needs
- Preferences regarding receiving mentoring and help

If any of your duties or the professor's expectations are unclear, ask him or her for clarification. Your professor wants you to succeed and will be happy to answer any questions you have. If you feel nervous about any of the duties or expectations, remember that your professor has confidence in your ability to be successful; that's why you were hired. Don't hesitate to ask your professor for strategies on how to efficiently fulfill your responsibilities. Also, recognize that your professor doesn't expect you to be perfect; rather, your

professor expects you to try your best and to improve as you become more comfortable with your responsibilities as a TA.

Students' Expectations for TAs

As a TA, you are in a student-facing position and you need to be aware of students' expectations for you. These expectations are that you will communicate in a clear, respectful, and timely manner; that you will offer training and help on assignments if needed; that you will grade assignments fairly; and that you will offer compassion and support amid the stress of the semester.

The Department's Expectations for You

As an employee of the Department of Linguistics, it is important that your behavior reflects positively on the department. Additionally, the department expects you to log your work hours accurately, clocking in to Y-Time at the start of each work session and then clocking out at the end of each work session. While you are clocked in, you should be focused on completing your TA work and should avoid any distractions.

Communication

Communicating clearly, promptly, and respectfully is an essential aspect of being a TA. Let the professor and students know the best method for contacting you (email, the learning management system [LMS] messaging platform, text, etc.), and include your contact information in the syllabus and the LMS. Also indicate how quickly you'll respond to messages. A best practice is to respond within twenty-four hours (except perhaps on weekends). Email is often an effective communication strategy for brief and simple conversations. If the topic of the conversation is more complex and the risk of misunderstanding is higher, then consider meeting in person or via Zoom.

Initiative and Independent Work

As a TA, you will need to take the initiative to complete your responsibilities without needing to be reminded and micromanaged by your professor. If you've already taken the course you're the TA for, you're probably familiar with the course content, assignments you'll be grading, and so forth. If you haven't taken the course previously, you might need to ask the professor more questions in order to ensure you understand

how to complete your tasks successfully. When you do need to ask the professor questions, try to group multiple questions together rather than contacting the professor each time a question comes up. So, for example, if you're grading a student's assignment submission and a question arises, see if you can find the answer in the course materials or information that the professor has provided. If you can't find an answer, write down the question and continue grading the assignment; note any other questions that you can't find answers to as you grade the submission. After you've finished grading the student's submission (and perhaps a few other students' submissions), email the professor with the list of questions you've written down.

Though you should strive to work independently, also balance this expectation with good use of time. For instance, if you can't find an answer on your own after ten or twenty minutes (depending on the type of question and task at hand), it's more efficient to ask the professor than to continue searching for an answer on your own for the next two hours.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and the Need for Training and Clarification

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and having weaknesses doesn't mean you can't be an effective TA. It's important to recognize both your strengths and your weaknesses so that you can play to your strengths and also work on improving your areas of weakness. You're probably aware of many of your strengths and weaknesses, and this manual's information on personality styles might have provided more insight. You might also want to ask for feedback from family members, friends, and your professor in order to identify your strong points and areas for improvement. Also be open to feedback you receive from students in the class you're a TA for.

After you identify an area you're weaker in, such as grading objectively or promptly, make a plan to improve in this area. Start by looking for resources that can help you improve. For example, if you're weak in technical skills, enroll in one of the courses offered through BYU's library (https://lib.byu.edu/services/software-training/register). Also, don't be afraid to ask your professor for suggestions on how to improve your skills or for training in specific areas. Your professor wants you to perform as well as possible and will be happy to help you so that not only you but all the students in the class you're a TA for will benefit.

It's also okay to ask your professor to clarify his or her expectations regarding your performance, how to grade an assignment, or fulfill other aspects of your job. Before asking for clarification, make sure to review any information that the professor has already provided; you might find answers to your questions, and even if you don't, you'll be prepared to ask more specific questions and the professor won't need to repeat information he or she has already provided. Decide whether the most effective approach will be to email your questions or to set up a time to meet with the professor to discuss them in person. Be as specific as possible when asking for clarification and guidance, so that the professor can be as helpful as possible. Being specific can also help avoid miscommunication and can help interactions with the professor to be as efficient as possible.

If you're facing a problem, such as in grading an assignment or interacting with another student, try to brainstorm some solutions on your own first. Then, present the solutions to the professor to receive input on which option to implement or, perhaps, to develop a different solution with the professor's assistance.

Technical Tools and Physical Equipment

LMS

Before the semester or term begins, set aside time to learn how to use the TA/instructor features in the LMS your professor has chosen to use (Learning Suite or Canvas). For example, make sure you understand how to add announcements, how to add or edit assignments, how to add grades, and where to leave feedback on assignments. Information on using Learning Suite is available at https://lsinfo.byu.edu/instructor-help. Information on using Canvas is available at https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Instructor-Guide/tkb-p/Instructor#jive_content_id_Assignments. If you experience technical difficulties with Learning Suite or Canvas, contact BYU's OIT Service Desk at 801-422-4000.

Zoom

If you TA a course that will be using Zoom, then make sure you are familiar with the tools that are available to Zoom hosts (e.g., starting, pausing, or stopping a recording; allowing multiple people to share their screens; using breakout rooms; and sharing your system's sound for videos). Also make sure you're

familiar with how to use the chat tool, how to move around the Zoom control panel, and how to change the video layout (i.e., which Zoom participants you see). Training on Zoom is available at https://teachanywhere.byu.edu/technology-media/zoom and https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us.

Classroom Equipment

Your professor might ask for your assistance in setting up, using, or troubleshooting problems with classroom equipment (projectors, video/sound equipment, white board markers, etc.). If you'll be in charge of using the classroom equipment, make sure to test it out beforehand so that the class will run as seamlessly as possible. If you experience issues with technical equipment, contact BYU's OIT support desk (801-422-4000) for assistance. If white board markers are missing or are dried out, then go to the department office (4064 JFSB) and ask for markers.

Interaction with the Professor

Evaluation and Feedback on Your Work

Even if you'll be a TA for only one semester, it's important to evaluate your performance and receive feedback from your professor. If your professor doesn't take the initiative to provide feedback, then ask him or her to provide feedback once a month (it's okay to remind the professor if he or she forgets to give the feedback). The feedback can be given and discussed via email, but an in-person meeting is typically more beneficial because the feedback will likely be more extensive and detailed and it will be easier for you to ask questions and ensure you understand the feedback.

Whether you receive and discuss the feedback, make sure that you and your professor briefly review your responsibilities, what you're doing well, and areas in which you can improve. Don't berate yourself if your professor points out areas in need of improvement. Consider the feedback an opportunity to turn your weaknesses into strengths. With your professor, brainstorm strategies to improve your performance. Then, develop a plan to implement the strategies. During your next feedback meeting with your professor, discuss your progress.

In addition to obtaining feedback from your professor, you can ask for feedback from students. For example, you or the professor could send the students a brief survey through which to provide anonymous

feedback. Students might provide various and even contradictory feedback, so focus on identifying trends. However, also consider views expressed by only one or a few students, and determine whether you can modify your processes to better meet the needs of all students. Talk with your professor if you have any questions about the feedback that students provide, whether to change your processes based on specific pieces of feedback, and how to do so.

Feedback for the Professor

Just as it's valuable to receive feedback from the professor, it can be helpful to provide feedback to your professor, particularly because of your interaction with students and your familiarity with their work in the course. Professors appreciate insight on students' needs and how to maximize their learning experiences, and your input will be valued, particularly if you provide it is a clear, respectful manner.

Ask the professor how he or she would prefer to receive the feedback—for example, in person or via email—and what topics the professor would like feedback. You could share your perceptions of overall trends in the students' learning, information about specific students who might be struggling, instructional strategies that seem particularly effective or less effective, and any other insight you have about the course.

Mentorship

Being a TA should benefit not only the professor but also benefit you, in that you'll have opportunities to increase your knowledge and skills. For example, you'll likely increase your understanding of course topics and improve your communication, critical-thinking, project management, and time management skills. You might also have opportunities to increase your teaching skills. Your professor can help you develop skills in all of these areas. However, the mentoring doesn't need to focus only on skills related to your responsibilities as a TA. You can also ask your professor for advice on career paths and further education, among other things. Ask for advice on steps you can take in the short-term and in the long-term to achieve your goals.

Some mentoring may occur informally as you talk with the professor about course-related topics. It's also okay to request more formal mentoring—professors do want to help, but since they're typically very busy, be prepared to ask for the formal mentoring. For example, you could ask to meet with the professor at

regular intervals. For the mentoring to be as effective as possible, prior to meeting with the professor, spend time thinking about what you'd like to gain through the mentoring. For instance, do you want to learn about specific career opportunities or how to prepare for graduate school? After you've identified some topics, email them to your professor so he or she can be better prepared to mentor you during the meeting. When you meet, also ask about the professor's educational background, research interests, and other information to get to know the professor more. This information can give you more ideas about how you the professor can mentor you.

Letters of Recommendation, Collaboration Opportunities, and Job Opportunities

If you establish a good relationship with your professor, such as through fulfilling your job responsibilities and engaging in mentoring, he or she will be happy to write letters of recommendation for you (e.g., for a job or graduate school) and will let you know about research and other collaboration opportunities, as well as internships and jobs that would be a good fit for you.

If you are seeking a letter of recommendation, make sure to give the professor plenty of notice before the due date. Also provide your professor with information and materials that will help him or her in writing the letter. For example, if the letter of recommendation is for a job, provide a link to the job posting, a copy of your résumé, and list of your skills and experiences that the professor might want to address in the letter, and information on how to submit the letter.

Students' Characteristics

As a TA you'll have the opportunity to interact with many people—your professor and the students in the course—all of whom have different personalities, communication styles, learning styles, and competencies. Interacting with and helping some people might be easier than interacting with and helping others. The following sections contain information that can help you to understand people better and how to interact with them productively. Make sure to remember that one personality style, for example, isn't necessarily better than another. It's essential to respect others, regardless of whether they are different from you, and to strive to work well with them.

Personality Styles

Understanding people's personality styles can help you avoid communication issues and better understand and help students. Below are descriptions of some common personality styles.

- Task vs. Relationship Orientation
    - Some people tend to think about things in terms of tasks that need to be accomplished, whereas other people tend to think about things in terms of relationships to establish or maintain. A task-oriented student might meet with you and immediately ask about a course assignment. A relationship-oriented student might meet with you and ask about your weekend before asking questions about a course assignment.

      Neither approach is necessarily better than the other. Rather, just be aware of your orientation and that of the person you're interacting with, so that you can work well together. For example, if you're relationship oriented, recognize that schedules and deadlines are important to task-oriented people. Show respect for their time and deadlines, and remember that a task-oriented person who is focused on logic and planning isn't by default being unfriendly. If you're task oriented and working with someone who's relationship oriented, take time to build a relationship and don't focus entirely on schedules and deadlines.
- Thinker vs. Doer Orientation
    - A thinker tends to emphasize thinking about things, and a doer tends to emphasize completing things. Thinkers tend to be creative but aren't as skilled as implementing their ideas. In contrast, doers tend to act on their ideas but might not have thought the ideas through sufficiently before taking action. The best results come from balancing thinker and doer orientations by identifying which orientation you lean toward and then actively applying techniques from the other orientation. For example, if you're a thinker, organize your ideas into projects, and break the project into the steps required to complete the project. If you're

a doer with a long list of tasks to complete every day, determine the purpose of the tasks so that you focus on achieving the overall objective and maintain high-quality standards.

- Myers-Briggs Personality Types
    - The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a test used to determine people's personality traits in four areas: preference for extroversion or introversion, reliance on the senses (e.g., sight and sound) or on intuition to gather information, reliance on logic or emotion to make decisions, and preference for structure and planning or for flexibility and exploration.

Learning Styles

Students learn in a variety of ways, including through seeing graphics, hearing information, reading and writing, and taking on a physical role. Students may prefer or learn better with one of these learning styles over the others but can still learn through the less-preferred ways. Because students' preferred learning styles vary, often the best approach is to use a variety of styles. To decide which style to use when teaching a specific concept, determine which option will be most effective for teaching the concept. For example, when students need to learn basic terms, having the students read the terms and then complete a quiz might be an effective strategy. In contrast, when students need to learn to apply concepts to a new situation, an effective approach might be to have students role-playing the situation with classmates. Getting to know the students and their interests can also help you decide how to teach a concept.

Motivation

Students will have different levels of motivation to learn and to excel in the class you TA for. Many factors that affect motivation are out of your control, but there are some things you can do to encourage motivation. First, communicate your confidence that the students can achieve the course objectives and that you will help them to succeed. Second, encourage the students to ask you questions and to visit you during office hours. Third, explain how you will grade assignments and the processes you will follow to grade objectively (e.g., by using a grading rubric). Fourth, help students apply course concepts to the real world so the students understand the relevance and importance of the concepts. Fifth, demonstrate your own interest in the course concepts. Sixth, if you will be teaching class sessions or leading study/review sessions, choose

learning activities that will engage students (e.g., instead of lecturing the majority of the session, give students opportunities to apply the concepts; see the section titled Class Instruction for more suggestions).

Technical Experience and Skills

Students will have varying levels of experience and skills in using technical tools. Let students know at the beginning of the semester that you can help them navigate using the LMS, computer programs that will be used in the course, and other technical tools that will help the students succeed in the course. In addition to providing guidance via email or a meeting, consider referring students to the tutorials and workshops that BYU and other sources offer regarding how to use various technical tools. For example, BYU provides information on using Learning Suite, Zoom, and Office and Adobe programs, among others. Remember to remain patient while helping students learn to use technical tools; programs that are familiar to you and easy for you to use may not be as intuitive for students and may be a cause of anxiety. Be willing to walk through a program with a student to provide support and guidance and to troubleshoot any issues that arise.

Generational Differences

Some students in your class might be nontraditional students—that is, they are older than typical college students, they likely have children, and they may currently have jobs or may have had jobs prior to enrolling in college. Nontraditional students may face challenges that aren't as common to traditional students; these challenges include transitioning back into an educational environment, learning how to use technical tools, feeling anxiety about their ability to excel in their courses, and balancing schoolwork with other responsibilities (e.g., work and family).

Nontraditional students' motivations also tend to vary somewhat from traditional students' motivations. For example, nontraditional students typically have a stronger focus on applying course content to their lives than do traditional students. Further, nontraditional students generally place higher value on establishing personal connections with instructors than do traditional students.

Be sensitive to nontraditional students' challenges and values. Strive to help these students just as you would help traditional students, even if the ways that you can best help nontraditional students differ from how you might help traditional students.

Dress Code, Professionalism, and Confidentiality

Professionalism

As a TA, make sure to always demonstrate professionalism. You can demonstrate professionalism by being courteous in the way you speak and act, keeping confidential information confidential, and fulfilling your responsibilities. You can also present yourself professionally through your attire. Make sure to follow the dress code standards specified in BYU's Honor Code, and consider wearing business-casual attire if you'll be teaching class or meeting with students. Acting professionally will help you establish trusting and respectful relationships with students.

FERPA/Student Confidentiality

As a TA, it's essential that you understand FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), which addresses students' rights to keep their academic information private. In terms of FERPA, as a TA you need to focus on three main things: students' contact information, course work, and grades. You'll have access to students' email addresses, NetIDs, and perhaps other personal information, and you aren't allowed to share this information with anyone, including a student's parents or spouse, unless the student has given permission in writing. Additionally, you'll have access to students' assignments and grades, both of which are considered part of a students' education records and are considered confidential. You aren't permitted to share this information with anyone but the professor and the student, unless the student has given permission in writing. Similarly, you aren't allowed to provide anyone, except the professor, with information about the student's class attendance or behavior, unless the student have given written permission. For more information about FERPA, go to https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/node/548.

Empathy for Students

It's important to be kind and respectful to all the students with which you interact. Remember that many students become stressed during the semester, whether because of difficulty understanding course topics, keeping up with course assignments, or dealing with situations unrelated to schoolwork. If students contact you and indicate they're stressed, frustrated, or otherwise distressed, strive to show empathy for the students. Acknowledge their feelings, offer encouraging words, and see if you can assist them by helping

them understand course topics, for example. Don't feel pressured to give them better scores on assignments than their work merited. (However, if students have documented accommodations, do adjust deadlines and expectations as appropriate.) If a student asks for an extension on an assignment due date or for other adjustments, seek your professor's input.

If a student wants to discuss topics that you feel are too personal (health issues, Honor Code issues, etc.), politely change the topic. If the student mentions feeling depressed or anxious or shows signs of alarming thoughts or behaviors, encourage the student to contact BYU Counseling and Psychological Services at 801-422-3035. If you think the student might be a danger to himself or herself or to others, contact BYU Campus Police at 801-422-2222. If the student mentions Honor Code issues, direct the student to his or her bishop or the Honor Code Office.

Project Management

As a TA, you'll need to use project management skills in order to keep track of and fulfill all your responsibilities on time. For projects such as grading a paper, it's a good idea to describe the assignment and identify the needs, goals, expectations, and constraints of the project. Here's an example:

- Description: Twenty papers of four to five pages need to be graded. Each paper takes thirty to sixty minutes to grade, so grading could take up to twenty hours.
- Needs: You need to read each paper closely enough to be able to grade it based on the rubric and to provide useful feedback.
- Goals: You will grade each paper within two weeks after the assignment due date, and your feedback will include at least three comments about how to improve the paper.
- Expectations: Your professor and the students expect you to assign fair grades based on the assignment instructions and grading criteria.
- Constraints: The day you need to finish grading the papers is the same day that a large assignment is due in a class that you're taking.

With the information above, you'll be prepared to create a plan for grading the papers well and finishing on time. For example, block out time in your schedule to work on the grading so that you'll be able

to finish on time while also accomplishing your non-TA responsibilities. Additionally, decide on your process for grading. For instance, you might decide to comment on a paper as you read it rather than waiting to add comments until you've finished reading the paper (by which time you might have forgotten some of the feedback you'd planned to give).

Time Management

As a TA, you'll need to manage your time well in order to complete TA tasks promptly and efficiently amid other demands on your time. One way to help you ensure you put in your hours each week is to schedule in your hours on a calendar. Estimate how long it will take to complete a specific task, and then block out that time on the calendar. It's a good idea to schedule in a little extra time to complete a task in case it ends up taking longer than you expected. (As the semester progresses, you'll become better at estimating the time required to complete a task. At the beginning of the semester, before you become better at estimating, ask your professor to help you estimate how long to schedule for a specific type of task.) When scheduling in work, make sure to consider tasks due this week as well as tasks coming up in the next few weeks; otherwise, you might not schedule your work in a way that will enable you to accomplish upcoming tasks by their deadlines. During your work hours, make sure you focus on the work and reduce any distractions (e.g., turn your phone on silent so you don't get text and call notifications).

Sometimes you will have multiple tasks to complete and will need to decide which tasks to prioritize. In general, you'll want to prioritize the tasks that are the most urgent and important. For example, if you need to grade two assignments, you should prioritize grading the assignment that's a precursor to a larger assignment in the course rather than prioritizing grading a test on a topic that students don't need feedback on in order to do well on future assignments. While prioritizing large urgent and important tasks, make sure you don't neglect tasks that are urgent and important but small, such as emails from students. Consider blocking out a certain time of the day to respond to TA-related emails. At the beginning of the semester, let students know when you will typically respond to emails.

Sometimes, unforeseen circumstances may prevent you from completing tasks on time. In this situation, create a plan for completing the work by a new deadline and inform the appropriate individuals

(e.g., your professor, an individual student, or the entire class). If you communicate promptly and generally complete work on time, you'll be able to maintain the trust of the professor and students even when a setback does occur.

Class Instruction, Study Sessions, and Office Hours

Class Instruction

If your professor asks to you lead classroom instruction, it's important to understand principles of effective instruction. The information in this section will provide a starting point. Also ask your professor for guidance since he or she is experienced with the content and with how to effectively teach it to students. Your professor will likely have instructional materials (e.g., PowerPoint slides and activities) that you can use. In addition to receiving assistance from your professor, refer to the numerous resources on BYU's Center for Teaching and Learning website.

Below are tips for improving students' learning experiences in the classroom:

- Call the students by their names.
- At the start of class, present the agenda for the class.
- Use examples to illustrate course concepts; help students understand the application and relevance of the concepts in the real world.
- Help students connect new concepts with previously learned concepts.
- Give students opportunities to practice applying the course concepts and to receive feedback.
- Encourage the students to ask questions and share their experiences and perspectives.
- When a student asks a question, encourage other students to share answers before you provide an answer. If neither students nor you know the answer to a question, explain that you'll look for an answer and provide in an email or in a future class.
- Treat students respectfully, even when their opinions differ from your own.
- Have students teach each other concepts.
- Limit lectures to ten to fifteen minutes at a time; follow the lecture with class or group discussion or activities.

- During class discussions, call on specific students to speak rather than relying only on students who volunteer to speak.
- Have a positive attitude, and convey your interest in the concepts you're teaching.

Not all students learn best via one instructional method, so vary the methods you use. Effective classes typically contain a variety of activities, include brief lectures, class and group discussions, case studies, role-plays, and exercises to complete individually or in a group. Look for a variety of ways to help students test their knowledge; options include creating online polls, quizzes, and games, among many others. In deciding which teaching methods and activities to use, consider which options will work best for the concepts being addressed.

Study/Review Sessions

Your professor and/or students might ask you to lead study/review sessions, such as before an exam. Decide whether to hold the session in person or online; if you decide to meet in person, schedule a meeting room that will be large enough to accommodate all students). Brainstorm ways to effectively help the students review the relevant concepts. Options include a PowerPoint presentation, a Kahoot! quiz, a Q&A, and a worksheet, among others. The professor might already have materials you can use, so don't hesitate to ask.

Office Hours

Ask your professor whether you should have regular office hours each week or whether you should meet with students by appointment only. If you will hold regular office hours, it's common to offer them two times a week, for one hour each session. Choose times that are convenient for you and that will likely be convenience for students. A good idea is to hold office hours on one day that the class meets and on a second day on which the class doesn't meet; also consider choosing two different times of the day. Also determine where you will hold office hours. Make sure to include your office hours dates, times, and locations, as well as your information, in the course syllabus and on the LMS. Throughout the semester, remind students about your office hours and encourage students to meet with you. If you notice that specific

students are struggling in the course, reach out to them individually and invite them to get your help during your office hours.

Grading and Feedback

Grading Criteria

Your professor will likely provide you with a grading rubric or grading criteria to use when grading an assignment. If the professor provides grading criteria, create a rubric based on the criteria, and then send it to your professor for approval. If rubrics aren't already on the LMS, add them to the LMS to increase grading transparency and to ease the process of grading.

If the professor doesn't provide rubrics or criteria, work with the professor to develop a rubric to help ensure that your grading addresses the key competencies the students are supposed to demonstrate in the assignment and so that you are better able to grade students' submissions objectively.

As you grade an assignment submission, questions might arise regarding whether a student has met the assignment criteria. It can be helpful to review a few students' submissions and also review feedback you received on the assignment if you've previously taken the course. If you're still unsure of how to score an assignment, ask the professor for guidance. Consider asking the professor to review how you graded a submission and then to provide feedback on whether you should adjust how you're grading the assignment.

Additionally, make sure you know the professor's policy on late work. For example, if late work is accepted, what is the deadline for turning in an assignment? How many points will be deducted? Similarly, will the professor allow students to resubmit assignments for the purpose of earning better grades? Make sure that students understand the policies regarding late work and resubmissions.

Feedback on Assignments

Providing feedback on assignments is just as important as is grading the assignments. In giving feedback, highlight things the student did well and also areas the student can improve in. Make sure that your feedback is encouraging and indicates that you're confident the student can strengthen current areas of weakness. When pointing out areas of weakness, try to provide specific examples that will help the student

understand the concepts better so that he or she can do better in the future. Offer to meet with a student if he or she would like additional help understanding a concept.

You can provide your feedback in various formats. For example, you can enter feedback in the notes section of the assignment submission on the LMS, or you can add comments directly on the assignment submission in the LMS. Alternatively, you could add comments to a file and then upload it to the LMS. Let students know where you will typically provide feedback, so the students understand where to look for it.

If you'll be providing feedback electronically, consider creating a file in which you add specific points of feedback that's relevant to multiple students' submissions. For instance, if you notice that you've given two students praise regarding a specific aspect of their submission or that you've provided two students with an explanation of a challenging concept, then paste that wording into the feedback file so that you can copy and paste it in the next submission that the comment applies to.

Sometimes, a student might challenge you on a score you gave the student. Rather than getting defensive, objectively explain the rational for the score. Focus on referring to the grading rubric and your feedback. Your explanation will likely appease the student. Alternatively, the student might point out reasons the score should be adjusted. Consider the student's argument, and determine whether it is valid. If you're unsure, ask your professor for input. If you and/or the professor determine that the score shouldn't change or shouldn't change to the degree the students believes is fair, politely explain the rationale and what the student would need to do differently in the assignment to receive a higher score.

Timeliness of Grading

Typically, the sooner you can grade assignments, the more beneficial it is for students. A good guideline is to finish grading assignments within one week of when they were due. Longer assignments, such as papers, may require a longer turnaround; ask your professor what a reasonable timeframe is for grading longer assignments and for tips on how to grade efficiently. Let students know what the general timeline will be for grading assignments, and also note which assignments might have longer grading turnaround times. Doing so will reassure students and will help you stay on track. If for some reason you do get behind in grading assignments, let your professor and the students know, so they can adjust their expectations.

Inputting of Grades on LMS / Submittal of Final Grades

Whether grade assignments in the LMS or grade hard copy versions, you'll need to enter the assignment scores in the LMS after you finish grading. If your professor has asked you to submit final grades for the semester, refer to the information at https://lsinfo.byu.edu/final-grades.

Frequently Asked Questions

When and how do I clock in?

To clock in and clock out, use BYU's Y-Time tool, which available through my.byu.edu and can also be accessed through the BYU mobile app. Log in to Y-Time using your NetID and BYU password. Once logged in, you'll see buttons for clocking in, clocking out, and reviewing your timecard. If you forget to clock in before working or to clock out when finished working, you can correct the information before the current pay period ends (every other Friday). If the pay period ends before you correct the information, you'll need to email the department secretary at ling-admin@byu.edu.

How many hours can I work each week? How do I balance busy and slow times?

Most TAs are approved to work 5–10 hours per week. Your professor will tell you the specific number of hours you should plan to work each week. Be aware that you'll have more tasks to complete during some weeks of the semester than during other weeks. For example, right before the semester starts, you might be busy helping the professor finalize the syllabus, update the course on the learning management system, and completing other preparations for the course to begin. The first two weeks of the semester might be slower because students won't have as many or as large of assignments as they'll likely have later in the semester. The middle and end of the semester may be particularly busy because of having more and larger assignments to grade, having more meetings with students, and leading study sessions. Make sure to look at the upcoming weeks to determine how heavy your TA load will be and to plan accordingly. During slow times, ask your professor whether he or she has any low-priority or upcoming projects for you to work on (e.g., creating a TA guide for future students TAing the course, creating a grading rubric for an upcoming assignment, or compiling a report of students' progress in the course so far). Alternatively, particularly if you

will have a busy week outside of your TA duties, ask the professor for permission to put in fewer TA hours that week.

When and how much do I get paid?

You'll be paid every other Friday. For undergraduates, TA positions start at $15.50 per hour. For graduate students, TA positions start at $20.50 per hour.

Where is my office?

You can work in the TA lab, which is located in JFSB B169. Before you can access the lab, you'll need to go to the department's office (4064 JFSB) to read the rules regarding lab access and then sign a form indicating you agree to follow the rules. You'll then receive the door code to the lab.

Who supervises me?

The professor you TA for is your supervisor.

What is the process to terminate employment as a TA?

It is a professional courtesy and an expectation that you will give at least 2 weeks notice before terminating employment in your TA position. In unusual or unforeseen circumstances that make it difficult to do so, you may work with the department and your professor to make other arrangements.

How do I get help with student or professor problems?

If you apply the information in this manual, you'll avoid many potential problems with students and your professor. If a problem does arise with a student, then refer to this manual again, particularly the information regarding people's learning and personality styles and regarding communication, to determine whether you can apply the information to help you resolve the issues. Have empathy for the student and try to understand his or her perspective, and collaborate with the student to develop a solution. If you aren't able to resolve the issue on your own, then contact your professor and ask for guidance. Depending on the situation, the professor may decide to address the situation himself or herself. If problems with a student continue, make sure to keep the professor updated regarding the situation so that you continue to receive assistance from the professor.

If you have a problem with your professor, make sure to review the information in this manual, particularly the information regarding what is expected of you as a TA, regarding people's personality styles, and regarding communication. If you apply the information in this manual and still experience difficulty with your professor, then set up a meeting with the professor to discuss the issue. During the meeting, focus on being objective, clarifying any misunderstandings, and understanding the professor's expectations; avoid being defensive. You can find other helpful tips in the *BYU Magazine* article "We Need to Talk." If meeting with the professor does not resolve the problems, then contact the department chair or an associate chair.

What can I do when I have down time during class?

Your professor may not ask you to attend each class, particularly if you're familiar with the course content. Even if you don't regularly attend class, it may be beneficial to attend classes on topics that you're not as familiar with or that you'd benefit from reviewing, particularly if you'll be grading an assignment or leading a study session on the topic. If you do plan to attend a specific class session, let your professor know beforehand.

If the professor does want you to attend most or all classes, then the professor will likely have specific tasks for you to complete during the class. For example, the professor might want you to take attendance, collect assignments, pass out handouts, help with classroom technology, and answer students' questions during individual or group work. At times that you're not completing a specific task, take notes if doing so will help you prepare to answer students' questions, lead study sessions, or grade assignments. If you don't need to take notes, then focus on grading homework if you can do so in a manner that won't compromise the confidential nature of students' academic performance (see the section in this manual titled FERPA/Student Confidentiality). If you don't have any grading to complete or can't do so without compromising confidentiality, then work on other TA-related tasks you need to complete (including updating and reviewing your schedule to ensure you'll complete all tasks on time). If you still regularly have free time during class, then outside of class time, ask your professor whether you need to come to every class and stay the entire period and, if so, what the professor would like you to do during class and whether it's okay to work on tasks unrelated to your TA job including homework for other classes or research.