



Saint Mary's University

Psychology

Teaching Assistant (TA) Handbook

2010-2011 Academic Year

Dr. Brent Vulcano

Dr. Debra Gilin-Oore

Department of Psychology

Saint Mary's University

The materials contained in this Handbook are for educational purposes and are protected by copyright.
Unauthorized reproduction of any of the material is a violation of the applicable laws.

Introduction

Each year the Department of Psychology hires approximately 50 teaching assistants to assist faculty with a variety of duties. Given the trust that professors must have in their TAs, and the interactions that TAs have with students, it is important that teaching assistants understand well the nature of their responsibilities to both professors and students, and the policies and practices that support the position.

The TA Training Program was developed to help you understand your role, duties and responsibilities as a Teaching Assistant.

For additional information or inquiries, please contact david.bourgeois@smu.ca.

Table of Contents

Welcome Aboard!	4
Teaching Assistant Duties and Responsibilities	5
Expectations of Teaching Assistants	7
Instructor's Responsibilities.....	10
Hours of Service	11
TA Salary Scale 2010-2011.....	12
Payroll Processing	12
Graduate and Advanced Undergraduate TAs	12
Guidelines for Use of Psychology Office and Lab Spaces	14
Harassment.....	15
Dealing with Difficult Students.....	16
Guidelines for Undertaking Tests and Exams.....	17
Guidelines for Grading of Assignments.....	24
Teaching Assistant Checklist.....	26

Welcome Aboard

Congratulations to all of you since you have been selected as Teaching Assistants! Selection to serve as a TA is acknowledgement from a professor/instructor of an above average level of initiative, scholastic and interpersonal abilities, and other positive qualities.

This Handbook is designed to serve as a guide to help you with your responsibilities.¹ The role of a TA includes a variety of duties, responsibilities, and expectations. Because Teaching Assistants have a very important and challenging role in the Department, we aim to help you prepare for your responsibilities so you can succeed in your efforts to undertake your job well. In addition, the content of the manual can help you to avoid some common mistakes and pitfalls. Moreover, the TA Handbook and TA training are intended to provide a forum for students, instructors and Teaching Assistants to discuss any and all relevant issues.

Students, instructors and Teaching Assistants all play a part in the university experience. Students are challenged with learning - on several fronts, academic achievement, and the development of their academic abilities. Instructors have myriad responsibilities, an important portion of which is to aid students in their academic endeavours. Instructors also have a responsibility to participate in research. A skilled TA helps her/his supervising professor(s) in these arenas by helping with the accomplishment of her/his teaching objectives such as lecture preparation and student evaluation. A TA can also facilitate student learning; for example, you may be asked to work with students who are having difficulty understanding the textbook, or need extra help comprehending an assignment. In these ways a TA serves as an important link between the professor and the students.

The time spent as a TA can be an important opportunity to gain valuable experience that improves one's resume or curriculum vitae. TAs gain from the development of leadership experience, experience with higher education and academics, organizational and management skills, and if you perform well, positive references from your TA supervisor to help with any future endeavours.

This is to say that positive letters of reference or recommendations are not automatic – they are earned by performing well, which means meeting or exceeding expectations, exhibiting professionalism and initiative, and interacting in a productive manner with the professor and students.

***Important Note about Using this Guide:** This guide is designed to provide an **outline** of the most common duties and expectations of the TA position in Psychology at SMU. However, it is

¹ These guidelines were prepared by Dr. Brent Vulcano and modified subsequently by the TA Quality Committee (Dr. Vulcano, Dr. Maryanne Fisher and Dr. Debra Gilin-Oore). The original version benefited from the input of Shannon Cousens and Danielle Harris. The second version was improved with the aid of Ms. Kelly Sabourin, who served as the initial TA Coordinator. The current edition was updated by Dr. David Bourgeois and Courtney Heisler.

very important that you **meet with the course Instructor (Supervisor)** to discuss specific expectations and your required duties. To aid you in your efforts to perform well, there is a **checklist** at the end of this guide. Bring it to your TA supervisor as a reminder of the important tasks, duties and responsibilities that require clarification and emphasis. We suggest you undertake this step at the very beginning of the semester. In addition, we encourage you to feel free to raise any ideas that stem from your review of this Handbook. Your course instructor likely has her/his own preferences but might well welcome the discussion of new ideas. Call, visit, or email your TA supervisor to promptly arrange this meeting.

Teaching Assistant Duties & Responsibilities

There is more to being a TA than you might have considered. General and specific duties of a TA are **outlined** below, along with a range of **responsibilities** and **guidelines**.

By way of an over-arching role, we can characterize you as the “eyes and ears” of the course instructor. As such, the instructor relies on you to provide relevant information that may flow through you via the students. For instance, you will often be the first point of contact for students’ concerns, and the instructor will rely upon you to convey any and all relevant information to her/him. To help you with this role you are strongly encouraged to develop rapport with the students in a course, and with the instructor.

More specifically, a TA’s **role** is two-fold: (1) to assist the instructor in a variety of ways that enable students to meet their **academic goals** in the course to which you are assigned as a TA, and (2) to aid the professor with course related tasks such that it allows her/him to complete their other job-related tasks. By way of example, you may be required to photocopy materials, and/or prepare materials to be copied at the Print Centre, which is located in the basement of McNally Main. Any time saving you can provide the course instructor translates in to time s/he can spend undertaking research, preparing lectures, revising course materials, etc. But there is much more to being a TA than making copies of course related materials! The TA role is multifaceted, challenging, and dynamic. For example, advanced undergraduate and graduate TAs may deliver guest lectures or teach weekly lab sessions. What then are the general duties of a TA? These are outlined below.

At this juncture, it is important to mention that the TAs duties are undertaken within the context of her/his capabilities. The instructors’ job-related obligations and responsibilities are clarified later on in the Handbook.

This is a sample of typical TA tasks; note that your specific assignment may include a subset of these tasks and may include additional duties. Your unique skills and your early performance in the job may influence what duties you are entrusted with.

General TA duties may include some or all of the following:

- **Review** and **perusal** of examination or tests with a view to ensuring accurate content, acceptable readability, and to search for grammatical and typographical errors.

- **Hold Office Hours** (to accomplish the following):

To be available to students to answer any questions pertaining to, but not limited to:

- Upcoming assignments and tests or examinations
 - The outcome of exams or tests
 - Completed assignments
 - Course readings
 - Understanding of course materials
- **Preparation** of answer keys for tests and examinations – with the following proviso. Identification of the answers to any and all evaluation questions, including test questions/ essay questions, and term papers, along with the appropriate scoring are the responsibility of the instructor. If you are willing to attempt to create a draft of an answer key, to be reviewed by the course instructor, feel free to work this out with her/him.
 - **Audio-visual presentations** including preparing and showing videos and assisting during class demonstrations. Under normal circumstances, it is the instructor's responsibility to undertake lectures/presentations during regular class times, unless arrangements are made otherwise. Graduate and senior undergraduate TAs can occasionally gain beneficial experience by giving a partial lecture, or full lecture. A class presentation/lecture can consist of an audio-visual presentation, which may form a portion of a lecture. The context for undertaking this task should be clear to the TA.
 - **Assisting** and **tutoring** students in lecture, lab, office hours, or review sessions.
 - **Preparation** of scoring sheet to accompany the multiple-choice portion of any tests and exams to be scored at **the Centre for Academic Technology (CAT) (Atrium 107)** - An example of this consists of completing the bubble answer sheet used for machine scoring. This typically follows from an answer key prepared by the instructor.
 - Some Professors may require the **marking** of any and all open-ended questions on tests or examinations
 - **Prompt and timely delivery** of examination and test materials to **the Centre for Academic Technology (CAT) (Atrium 107)**, with a prompt return of these items to the instructor for grade recording.
 - **Prompt and timely distribution** of test and exams scores to students.
 - **Prompt and timely distribution** of marked assignments to students.

- **In all cases** of returning graded work to students, the goal is to return results to students within one to two weeks.
- **Attend class from time to time** as needed.
- **Prepare handouts;** Distribute these to class(es) as needed.
- **Proctor** tests and examinations to aid the instructor in guarding against inappropriate test-taking behaviour, i.e., cheating.
- **Complete** all assigned duties and tasks according to identified deadlines.

Expectations of Teaching Assistants

- Foremost, TAs are honest in all dealings, while acting and serving as a Teaching Assistant. Honesty is a mainstay of academic integrity, which is essential to the endeavour of higher learning.
- TAs are conscientious and diligent in carrying out her/his TA related duties.
- TAs are organized in the carrying out of her/his assigned tasks and duties.
- TAs are punctual at all times especially in matters (as applicable) involving students, including but not limited to being on time for test administration and proctoring; test scoring and grading, marking of written assignments; any and all appointments with students; any and all appointments with the course instructor.
- TAs have a high level of knowledge of the course for which s/he is involved. This usually means having completed the course with at least a grade of A minus, though instructors vary in their selection criteria. This may include sitting in on the instructor's lecture or reading course materials as needed to refresh your knowledge. It is the responsibility of the TA to remain current with the course material.
- The TA is mindful that s/he represents the University in the carrying out of his or her duties and has an obligation to do so in a professional manner.
- TAs should recognize when a student is cheating, either on a test/exam or on a written assignment, and know the steps to take accordingly. Appropriate steps can consist of relocating a student, or students, during the examination, and keeping detailed notes on what took place.
- When marking written assignments TAs should screen for evidence of plagiarism – course instructors can provide helpful ways to do this, and should be notified accordingly.

- TAs conduct themselves according to ethical standards and apply specified rigorous academic standards.
- Standards consist of the assignment of points or marks according to the marking scheme for the task at-hand and for no other reason whatsoever.
- Grade allocation is to be determined by the course instructor.
- TAs must not provide unfair assistance, such as doing an assignment or editing a paper, which may result in an increased grade.
- If TAs have been approached to provide unfair assistance, they must inform the instructor immediately.
- TAs listen and communicate well, and must make reasonable efforts to aid students in acceptable ways, and by acceptable means, in her/his academic course-related endeavours.
- TAs must feel comfortable interacting with students on a one-to-one basis, including answering course-related questions – TAs should not place themselves in a compromising situation, and should be aware of even the perception of impropriety from the view of other students in the course.
- TAs should be able to create documents and undertake basic statistical analyses (calculation of mean, median and mode) using computer software programs, such as Word and Excel. TAs may be asked to perform additional tasks using computer hardware/software depending on the instructor's needs.
- If appropriate, TAs are expected to provide at least basic written feedback on written assignments. The best means for accomplishing this task is to something to be worked out with the course instructor.
 - Familiarity with APA Style requirements will be helpful to all TAs. Copies of the APA Style manual are available to borrow at the library and from the Psychology Secretary
- TAs must be mindful that all test and exam scores and scores on written assignments are strictly confidential – do not make available a grade or mark to someone other than the actual student without proper consent; do not leave any student work visible to other students.
- Please note that returning graded student work is something you must do with great care.
- At no time may students be allowed to view each other's grades, tests or assignments. It is against university policy for marked assignments or tests to be in full or partial view of anyone excepting the rightful owner. A stack of tests and assignments are not to be left outside an office door, at any location in a classroom, or even in a box in a public place for pick-up such as during office hours.

- Marks, if posted, must state that they are the unofficial grades, and must have identifying information removed. Permission must be gained from each student in order to post her/his grade in a public location.
- At no time may TAs discuss the marks of students with their peers or other students. The TA may only discuss a student's mark with the course instructor or with another TA for that course, when some clarification is needed.
- Under no circumstances are TAs to adversely impact upon a student's efforts to accomplish his or her academic goals. Possible ways that this can take place can be discussed with your course instructor.
- TAs are to govern their interactions with students treating others with respect and as equals.
- TAs are not to engage in any form of discrimination or prejudice against or among students.
- TAs are mindful to avoid conflicts of interest including sexual relations with students in the course or marking written work for family members.
- If a TA feels unable to fairly mark an assignment of a "friend" s/he must declare this to the Instructor. No penalty shall result for such a declaration; TAs are expected to be open about such instances.
- TAs must avoid impropriety, for example, TAs should not be in a position where they may be compromised e.g., if money is owed, perhaps due to the nature of the friendship with a student. Any instance of this must be rectified prior to you becoming a TA, but if it exists, you must review it with the course instructor.
- Any conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest must be brought to the attention of the instructor immediately.
- TAs are mindful of any student seeking special consideration.
- TAs are mindful of any student or person seeking an opportunity to complain about another person, including another TA and/or Professor.
- Professional conduct requires a TA to direct a person with a complaint to the appropriate person including the person who is the target of the complaint. TAs are very cautious in supporting or reinforcing negative behaviour from students.
- TAs are aware of the need for fairness in all dealings with students therefore they must not undermine even the appearance of fairness by engaging in any act or verbalization that might create the impression of impropriety or appearance of impropriety.

- TAs are mindful of any “overly friendly” student. Past experience has shown this is often a warning sign of impending inappropriate requests. Maintain your professionalism, and report the student to the professor if you are wary.
- In any matter that you judge it necessary, feel free to seek guidance from the course instructor at any and all times.

The Instructor’s Responsibilities

While the aforementioned section on Expectations also applies to the course instructor, s/he has a larger level over-arching responsibility for matters relating to the course and students in the course. By way of an exception or limitation to a course instructor’s responsibilities s/he is not responsible for any actions involving misconduct, if any, on the part of the TA.

By way of illustration, instructors (1) prepare the course material, (2) decide on the content, (3) execute the method of delivery (e.g., lecture, discussion groups, etc.), (4) implement & monitor the method of evaluation, and (5) supervise any participation by a TA in a course.

By way of a helpful suggestion, TAs should gain and be familiar with a copy of the course outline to fully understand its content as it pertains to the instructor carrying out his/her course-related responsibilities. Acceptable duties for a TA can vary from course to course, and person to person. However, there are boundaries as to what is acceptable; all requests to perform tasks by the instructor need to be reasonable and within acceptable limits – an example of a potentially unacceptable expectation is for the instructor to ask the TA to fetch daily coffee, or run unrelated personal errands. Similarly, TAs are not normally expected to “fill in” for an instructor except under occasional circumstances that warrant this. TAs should only do so if s/he feels able to undertake the challenge. If a TA is willing to gain some experience with lecturing, there should be ample opportunity to prepare. Instructors understand the anxiety a request to “run” a class can generate; however, the instructor should realize that a TA could best do so only with the proper training and supervision. Generally, TAs are not expected to lecture or run a class without the instructor present, nor are TAs to bear the main responsibility for a class, on a regular basis. In any all related matters, TAs should feel comfortable addressing her/his concerns or questions.

By way of information, from time to time, the University’s governing body, including Senate, revises the academic regulations. It is the responsibility of the instructor to check for any recent changes and to ensure that her/his course outline complies with any and all current applicable academic regulations. As the TA for a course, if any students should bring a discrepancy or issue relating to academic regulations and a course, it is your responsibility to then promptly inform the course instructor.

Generally speaking, the course instructor is responsible for providing the TA with the training and resources required to complete a specific task. While the TA Training and TA Handbook are designed to help a TA perform his duties, it is not designed as a substitute for proper discussion

between an instructor and TA. The course instructor is also responsible for providing a detailed explanation of grade allocation as is appropriate.

If the TA has any questions or concerns it is the course instructor's responsibility to provide the TA with sufficient information.

Instructors must deal with any improprieties on the part of student(s) including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, or any other course related misconduct. Therefore, if a TA becomes aware of any misconduct they must bring it to the attention of the instructor immediately.

If preferable, or unable to satisfy a student's queries, a TA can **refer** a student to the instructor; **under no circumstance** is a TA to make a decision regarding any matter related to a student if s/he feels uncomfortable doing so.

TAs can communicate with the instructor via e-mail, telephone and voice mail. TAs can meet with the instructor from time to time, as needed. Each TA should work out with her/his TA supervisor the preferred method of communication, and when and how meetings will occur.

Hours of Service

In general, **Undergraduate TAs (UTAs)** are expected to **work, on average**, 4 hours per week; in general, **Graduate TAs (GTAs)** are expected to **work, on average**, 13 hours per week.

In both cases, the understanding regarding the hours of required work is that some weeks will have fewer requirements and the required hours will be made up in other weeks, such as those when written assignments or tests are due. In short, actual weekly duties vary from week to week. It is because of this variability in duties from week to week that TAs must plan her/his time well.

The weeks that will require the most extensive hours will be during exam times or when other assignments or papers are due. This means each TA must be very familiar with the Syllabus or Course Outline for each course. It is highly recommended that each TA make a schedule for the semester identifying his or her own deadlines, marking clearly the times when s/he is required to work as a TA! In short, as a TA you need to effectively manage your **time**. You must be well prepared for your own classes and perform well your TA duties.

- The TA **must be available** during set office hours each week during the academic semester
 - Office hours are to be considered a very serious obligation to your students, even if it is not convenient on a particular day for you to uphold. By way of illustration, even though you may not have frequent visits, it is for the occasional student who is struggling with material that you are promising to be there.
 - You must be prepared for your office hours, which means that you have easy access to marked work, have completed the required readings, and are informed about upcoming assignments or examinations.

- In the rare event that you cannot meet your office-hours obligation (i.e., serious illness), the course instructor may expect that you inform them, inform the class, and post a notice on the door of the office hours location. Speak with your TA supervisor to **clarify** the procedures expected in the event that you ever must cancel office hours (you may be expected to make up the hour the next week, for example).

TA Salary Scale 2010-2011

Wages for TAs is based on level of education:

	Per Semester
Enrolled in Undergraduate Degree	\$470
Enrolled in Final Year Honours	\$540
Completed Undergraduate Degree	\$565
Enrolled in Graduate Program	\$585

Each TAs actual salary depends on the number of agreed upon hours of service and the pay rate for her/his education level

Payroll Processing

Payroll processing requires that you have a contract, and that this contract must be completed and given to the payroll office. You can pick up and drop off this contract to the Department of Psychology secretary.

To be paid, you must allow direct deposit to your bank account, and complete a personal tax credit form.

Graduate & Advanced Undergraduate TAs

As a graduate or advanced undergraduate student you will most likely be asked to take on more responsibility than typical undergraduate TAs. Speak with your course instructor to determine what additional tasks he/she expects of you. The following is a list of some of the possible additional tasks:

- Graduate and advanced undergraduate TAs may prepare and deliver **laboratory** lectures and exercises, group activities, discussion and review sessions, or **guest** lectures, depending upon the course, level of expertise, and ability to do so.
- Graduate and advanced undergraduate TAs should be familiar with PowerPoint and able to **create basic presentations**. If you do not yet have this skill, there are resources to provide

tutorials on campus; in your job as a TA it is your duty to seek out this training and to practice your new skills.

- Graduate and advanced undergraduate TAs may be expected to work from a marking guide to **score longer written assignments, including term papers** – a clear marking scheme should be available for this purpose.
- Graduate and advanced undergraduate TAs **must feel comfortable speaking to a group**. If you are not yet experienced in this area, your TA job is an opportunity to learn and grow in your public speaking skills. Here are some helpful hints:
 1. **Prepare well**, especially your introduction. Have specific points that you want to cover; focus on these points.
 2. It's **normal to feel nervous** – even experienced instructors feel nervous on their first day.
 3. **Build rapport with students** by arriving early for class and chatting as students arrive.
 4. **Breathe deeply**, drink water; speak slowly and clearly - find a pace that works for your audience.
 5. **Regarding finding answers** to students' questions: If unsure, admit it, then undertake at least one of the following: promise to find out the answer, suggest a reference, refer the question back to the class, or ask a student to find the answer – make every effort, if applicable, to report back to the class.
 6. **“Stay confident!** Concentrate on the ideas you want to get across, not on your nervousness.”

(Points 1 to 5 derived from: A Handbook on Teaching and Learning for New TAs at York University; Point 6 quoted from, p. 5).

The first day of teaching can be the most difficult. Here are some helpful ideas to assist you:

1. **Familiarize yourself with the course outline** - be prepared to explain rather than simply present the objectives to your students.
2. **Obtain a high level of knowledge of the course** by attending class, reading course materials, consulting with the instructor and speaking with other TAs in the class.
3. **Make eye contact** with your students; if you are nervous admit it – many of them will be nervous too.
4. In a small class have students **introduce themselves**; in large classes have the students introduce themselves to the student on either side, and/or front and back of them.
5. **Make your expectations of the students explicit**. Clearly explain the course objectives and how students will be evaluated.
6. **Describe in detail the penalties** for late submissions, plagiarism and missed assignments.

(Points 1 to 6 derived from: An Instructional Resource Guide for Graduate Student Teachers at the University of Saskatchewan)

Guidelines for Using Psychology Office and Lab Spaces

The lab and office spaces in the Psychology Department are sometimes shared with several individuals undertaking various academic tasks. Listed are some guidelines for the use of this space; because Instructors can vary in their preferences you should clarify the proper use of your assigned space, if applicable.

Permission

- Instructors may require **written permission** to use the office or lab space – oftentimes labs and offices are left open with no one present, and sometimes students visit or congregate in a space, spending sometime socializing, however, open unattended spaces are vulnerable to visits by unauthorized individuals – theft is a problem at the university, in part because spaces are left unattended, even for brief periods of time. If someone is in a space, but unauthorized as such, s/he might be asked to present proof of permission, or be asked to leave immediately. Report unusual or suspect individuals immediately. Supervision of shared spaces is everyone's responsibility in the sense that unfamiliar persons should be asked to identify themselves, along with her/his reason for occupying the space.
- With permission, a **key**, if required, for accessing the lab is to be obtained according to established University procedures.
- The key is **not** be copied for any reason.
- You are to sign a Psychology Key Agreement form which you can obtain from the Secretary. Any violation of this agreement may lead to penalties including payment for the cost of a key and/or lock(s) replaced or a \$100 charge added to your student fees account with a hold put on registrations/graduation until paid.

Proper Use - Your workspace should generally be used for academic related tasks only. Clarify with your supervisor what s/he considers proper use.

Computers -If there are computers in your work space, clarify whether your TA supervisor restricts their use, e.g., for research purposes only.

Responsibilities - Any and all materials, personal items, etc. left in labs and office spaces are the **responsibility** of the owner. Be extremely **careful** about leaving work areas unattended with the door open, as tests and other sensitive information may be stored there.

- Please bring to your TA supervisor's attention any and all **problems** or difficulties to do with the use of the lab or office space ASAP.
- Please keep the lab neat and tidy since the space is shared with others. Leave it as you found it!

Socializing -While workspaces might be a place to meet, and socialize, to a reasonable extent, its primary use is **not** for social occasions. Again, your supervisor can clarify his or her expectations regarding socializing in the workspace.

- Importantly, **under no circumstance**, or at any time, will anyone in the space smoke, or consume any alcoholic beverage. This is University policy.

Trash -Any and all **garbage** or trash is to be removed from the lab daily.

Harassment

“Saint Mary’s University is committed to promoting an environment, free from discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment based on the protective characteristics set out in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act (<http://www.gov.ns.ca/humanrights/human-rights-act.asp>). Such discrimination and harassment undermine the mission of the University by discouraging individuals from fully participating in academic and professional work. Not only do discrimination and harassment negate the principles of university life, they are also against the law and will not be condoned at Saint Mary’s University. It is the responsibility of all members of the University community to contribute to a respectful environment for work and study.”

(Quoted from the Saint Mary’s University Policy on the Prevention and Resolution of Harassment and Discrimination, August 2010)

In your role as a TA you might have an experience with harassment and/or discrimination in some form. As such these are very important issues that must be taken seriously. It is recommended that you develop familiarity such that you are able to recognize what each of harassment, sexual harassment, and discrimination “looks like”. Familiarity serves at least three purposes: (1) to ensure your students do not misperceive your actions; (2) perhaps as a personal benefit so that you know what to do if you are ever harassed in any form; and (3) so that you will be better prepared to deal with a student’s complaint of harassment, should one arise.

For **further information** about the policies relating to harassment and discrimination at Saint Mary’s University, please visit the full document, posted on the web at:

http://www.smu.ca/administration/hr/documents/Harassment_policy.pdf

Setting Boundaries

As a TA, it is best if you can forestall any foreseeable difficulties. The following tips are useful in setting appropriate boundaries in your relations with students:

- TAs are in a **position of authority**, and viewed as an authority figure, as such need to be **careful** not to use their position for personal gain or to intimidate a student – be very clear as to what constitutes acceptable behaviour, and what behaviours are problematic.

- TAs must **avoid physical contact** with students, especially if that contact that might be perceived as problematic, suggestive or harassing – by way of illustration, any “touching” of a student in what might seem an innocent gesture can be perceived/judged as unacceptable.
- It is wise to keep your **office door open** during any and all interactions with students – doing so avoids any misperception of what is taking place, and avoids a situation of defending yourself against the word of another.
- Maintain a **professional relationship** with your students. Do not try to be friends with your students – your position precludes close relationships. If you feel that you cannot objectively evaluate the work of a peer, perhaps because of a friendship per se, declare this to the course instructor so appropriate action can be taken.
- If you feel that a student is “making advances” towards you, make it **clear** that you are not interested. If the student persists inform your supervisor immediately.
- **Sexual relationships with students** in your TA course constitute a conflict of interest. As such they are generally best avoided while acting as the TA; it is expected you would report any such conflict of interest to your instructor so that marking any work of the student involved is not done by you.
- When having conversations with students **avoid commenting** on student clothing or appearance.
- If a student approaches you with a problem that may undermine your professional relationship with them, **refer** them to the course supervisor or the appropriate campus resource.

(Partially derived from: A Handbook on Teaching and Learning for New TAs at York University)

Dealing with Difficult Students

As a TA you may have encounters with students who are upset or angry about a mark or some other aspect of the course. The following are some suggestions for dealing with these circumstances.

1. Remain calm and polite. Keep your own emotions in check.
2. Maintain eye contact and speak clearly without raising your voice.
3. Listen and attempt to comprehend what the student is upset about.
4. Summarize and clarify your understanding of the student’s concerns.
5. Be careful when disagreeing, rather, build on what has been said.
6. Encourage the student to generate solutions to the problem.
7. Make the student aware of what you can and cannot do and if the student’s request is outside your authority (i.e. changing a mark) refer him/her to the course instructor.

(Points 1-6 are quoted from the Handbook on Teaching and Learning for New TAs at York University, pg 10, 2004, point 7 is derived from this source).

If you judge that a student is becoming overly aggressive, or threatening, the following suggestions may be helpful.

1. Explain clearly and directly, perhaps with a third party present, both acceptable, and unacceptable behaviours - start with what “calm” looks like.
2. If the student still does not calm down you may ask them to leave the office, perhaps to return at a time when s/he is calm.
3. If s/he will not leave, gently repeat the request to promptly end the meeting so the situation does not worsen; request s/he leave the office.
4. If need be, leave the office space to avoid escalating the situation. Have a plan in place for such eventualities. Do not be caught off guard. Report the incidence to the course instructor who can then speak with you about the situation.

(Points 1 to 4 derived from: A Handbook on Teaching and Learning for New TAs at York University)

Teaching Assistant Guidelines for Undertaking Tests & Examinations

Teaching Assistants are very often required to aid in the **preparation, administration and collection**, and **scoring** of tests and examinations. Specific tasks related to these activities follow.

Plan ahead with your TA supervisor so that you know when assignments and tests are due. You may need to change work and other schedules to accommodate exam and other due dates.

Test Preparation

At each test session, TAs need to ensure there is a copy of the examination or set of test questions, a sharp pencil (HB) and a multiple choice answer (bubble) sheet for each student registered in a course.

If the test or exam consists of long answer or essay type questions, students may require some lined paper or foolscap on which to write their answers. Check with your professor before each test to determine what materials you should obtain and make available.

Generally speaking, TAs must ensure there are sufficient materials available for students use, including consideration of the possibility that some tests, pencils or answer sheets require replacement. Always bring extras, just in case.

- Available from the Department of Psychology secretary’s office are:
 - Sharpened **HP pencils** (approximately one box is sufficient for every 20 enrolments) - although TAs are sometimes required to actually sharpen these. Ensure adequate lead time when planning on picking up pencils just in case you need to sharpen several boxes!

➤ **Multiple Choice Answer, or Bubble Sheets**

➤ **Foolscap** and/or test booklets for any written answers

- The instructor or professor typically prepares the test or examination. TAs may be asked to **aid** the test preparation, e.g., by proof reading test questions. Under normal circumstances, TAs are not responsible for making up test questions, but can take the opportunity to participate in the process by way of gaining additional experience. The ultimate responsibility for test materials, including any answer key, is the responsibility of the instructor.
- Importantly, tests need to be **organized** in advance of the test date. Typically all materials are to be prepared at least the day before a test date. This includes **collating** different versions of tests, copying/printing exams, as well as **numbering** of the tests and any long answer booklets. Larger classes will require more preparation time. IKON Print Centre (the University copy center) requires a minimum of 48 hours to prepare copies.
- Tests, and any long-answer paper (foolscap), may be **numbered sequentially** in the upper right hand corner, as they are collated or different versions are merged. Check with the course instructor to determine the method they use for numbering tests.
- TAs often prepare a test package for each student, consisting of a test or examination, a multiple choice or bubble answer sheet, and if appropriate, any (e.g., one) legal size sheet of foolscap for any questions requiring written answers.
- TAs often prepare a Student Signature Sheet consisting of the Course Name, Test Date, Test # (e.g., Test #1 for the course), a list of Test ID Numbers down the left column, with the heading Test Number, and a corresponding heading for the Student's Name.
 - According to the number of Tests, write the numbers in a vertical column down the side, and if appropriate, down the middle of a sheet of paper. To illustrate:

Psychology 1260	Test #1	October 14th, 2010	
Test ID Number	Student's Name	Test ID Number	Student's Name
1		26	
2		27	
3		28	
4		29	
5		.	
6		.	

If the course has more than 50 or so students, the headings are to be duplicated, i.e., the Test Number and Student Name headings are to continue each successive page, correspondingly.

- Distribute this sheet during the test; direct students to sign his/her name beside the appropriate test identification number. (Please check with the course instructor to determine if they prefer a different method).

Test Administration

- Course instructors oftentimes can use a TA's help with proctoring an exam. Normally, Undergraduate TAs do not administer a test on her/his own.
- TAs are generally expected to arrive at least 15 minutes before a scheduled test or examination to help with preparations. Your TA supervisor may prefer you to arrive even earlier because of the length of time it takes to set up for an examination. Ask to clarify.

Test Proctoring Procedures that Work

The test proctoring procedures in the next sections might be useful to you! These are procedures shown by past experience to help combat cheating and maximize organization. These are typical examples; please check with the course instructor to determine the preferred procedures.

Small Class Procedures

- Before distributing any test related materials ensure that students have put away their study materials. You might ask them to place everything under their seat, on the floor, or place their items at the front and sides of the classroom, except for any writing instruments and ID.
 - Note that some students need to be reassured that is it safe to comply with the request to place materials away from their person due to a fear that someone might attempt to steal something from their bag, for example.
- The procedure for test administration **depends** upon the class size. **If** the class enrolment is **less than 40**, and the room allows easy access to each seat, then the test packages (reviewed above) can be distributed **after** students have been seated, and **all** test related study materials have been properly **put away**. Arrive to the test location in plenty of time to **ensure** students have ample time to complete the test.

Large Class Procedures

- **If** the class enrolment is **larger than 40**, and/or the room does not allow easy access to each seat, it is oftentimes best to set out the test packages at each desk before students have been let into the test room. This means arriving at the test location in plenty of time to accomplish this task. By way of suggestion, set out the test materials in an orderly manner, one that allows easy distribution of the Sign up sheet.

- By way of an alternative, it might be possible to have students pick up a test package before taking a seat. Given this procedure, there needs to be an acceptable means for students to find a seat and put away their books, coat, etc.
- An important consideration is that test materials remain secure, especially if the course instructor does not allow the test to be removed from the exam room after its completion.
- If choosing to set up the desks beforehand, no students are allowed in the exam room (e.g., class room, or gym) until the test materials are distributed throughout.
- Oftentimes large classes have several versions of a test to help avoid the temptation to copy from a fellow student. Ensure that when students enter the room, they do not swap exams such that the same version is in close proximity to one another, e.g., right beside each other.
- To **set up** the room for the test, materials are to be set at each student seat with no same version test materials right beside another. In all cases, set test materials such that there is at least one **seating space** between students. If the room does not allow for this, then use multiple versions of the test, stagger the layout, and/or arrange in advance for multiple testing locations.
- If the number of students writing a test cannot be properly and comfortably seated in a single location, plan ahead to arrange for more than one test location to be available. By way of suggestion, split the students according the seating capacity of the booked rooms. Book rooms through Conference Services.
- For example, direct students with surnames A – J to classroom “A”, and those with surnames beginning with the letter K – Z to classroom “B”. Classroom “A” might hold 70 students, and classroom “B” might hold 100. To assign students, count the number of students on the enrolment master list, identifying how many are at what point in the alphabet. To illustrate, the number of students with surnames beginning with the letters A – J might be 65, while those with surnames K – Z number 85. Place the students in the appropriate sized classroom accordingly. If choosing this procedure, announce this in class, well in advance of the test date.
- Importantly, the test materials are to be distributed in an orderly fashion that facilitates the gathering of Student Signatures on the Student Name Sign-up Sheet. If students complete the test before signing this sheet, have a back up sheet at the front of the class. This way you can ensure students sign the sheet thereby associating a test booklet with her/his identity.
- Once students are allowed into the room TAs are to monitor carefully the seating of students, e.g., to ensure students space themselves, and to ensure no one leaves with any test materials, subsequently.

Verbal Test Instructions

- Any and all verbal test instructions are to be given before starting the test. For example, students are to be informed of the need for them to write their names on the Student Sign-up sheet that will be distributed during the examination. They are to be clearly told to put their name beside the Test Number on the sign-up sheet. This number is found in the upper right hand corner of their test. Ensure that your instructor uses this format before proceeding – sometime there is a version letter, or different colors used to signify different exams.
- In addition, students are told to follow carefully, all written instructions on Page One of the test itself.
- Students are instructed to write their name and student number on all test materials, including the test book, any long answer sheet, and the multiple choice or bubble sheet.
- Tell them how long they have to write the exam. During the exam, keep track of this somehow (on a dry erase board, chalk board, or even on an overhead). Mark the start time, time, and end time in large letters for everyone to see, and update this approximately every 15 minutes. Inform the students when there are 10 minutes and 5 minutes remaining.
- There should be no talking once the students have settled into their seats and are told the test is about to begin. Once students have notified that the test has “started”, it is important to remind them, if necessary, to remain quiet. Students can be told in class the reasons for this procedure, that it for instance, avoids the perception of impropriety. For example, if two students are “talking” after the test has been distributed, it might well be the case that one is asking the other for a pencil, however, in another student’s view, this “chatting” can be viewed as an opportunity to “cheat”. Maintaining proper test procedures helps to prevent problems such as these.
- For sake of accuracy, the Sign-up Sheet is best circulated in a manner that has each student sign under Student Names starting at Test #1, proceeding to #2, then #3 until all students have put their name beside their respective Test Number. During this process, TAs are to ensure that students put their name beside the correct Test Number. As a means of checking for this, ask each student at the time of handing in his/her test, if they signed the sheet, and check to see if the signature matches the test number, and number on the sign up sheet.

Other Tried-and-True Exam Instructions

The following instructions are commonly given by proctors and seem to work well with any class size:

- Turn all ball caps backwards or take them off
- All cell phones off and stowed

- Anyone who arrives so late that a completed test has been handed in will not be allowed to write the test on that day - direct the student to the instructor or suitable designate to arrange for an alternative time to take the test
- Look only at your own paper
- Physically spread students out as much as the venue will allow
- If you are suspicious of a student looking at another's paper, relocate them to a different area in the room but with minimal disturbance to others around them - do so promptly to avoid the possibility of cheating, and to prevent the likelihood of having to document a possible "cheating" event

Once the test is underway, ensure the number of students writing the test matches the number of tests that have been distributed. Collect any extra tests immediately to minimize the possibility that one will be taken from the examination room.

Test Collection

- As students pass in their test, it is essential to ensure all test materials are returned.
- In addition, it is an opportune time to ensure a student has his or her name where required, including completion of the "bubbles" on the Multiple Choice Answer Sheet.
- Test Materials are to be organized by Test Number (this provides the opportunity to note any missing tests), and according to their respective content. By way of illustration, tests are separated from Multiple Choice Answer Sheets.
- Multiple Choice Answer Sheets are to be separated and organized by test versions since each requires its own answer key.
- Ensure all tests are returned, i.e., the numbering sequence of the returned set of test should be intact – as the number of students remaining becomes smaller, it is a good time to verify the number of tests not yet handed in matches the number of students still writing.
- Be sure to not provide any one student with a time advantage by letting a student have a longer period of time to write a test than is given to all students.
- Return the test booklets to the professor, or store them as directed by the instructor.
- Collect, sharpen and return pencils so these are ready for another time.
- If any students, other than those allowed in the test room, enter the test room before completion of the test, request they wait outside, e.g., students scheduled for a class in the next time period.

- Students often start talking to each other about the test as soon as they've submitted it, and often while waiting for a friend to finish writing. Actively discourage this chatter, as it is very distracting to the students who are still writing, and might constitute a form of cheating if they are providing answers. Usually simply asking students to leave or be quiet is sufficient.

Test Scoring

The following is a general guide to typical expectations surrounding test marking. Your TA position may or may not include grading of exams. Your TA supervisor may have different marking expectations or procedures. Use the checklist at the end of the guide to clarify the expectations surrounding exams with your TA supervisor.

Multiple Choice Tests:

- If not already completed, fill out a Multiple Choice Answer Bubble Sheet answer key. This must accompany the completed Answer Bubble Sheets. Ensure that you use the right key for the right exam, especially if there is more than one test version. Label them accordingly.
- Complete the Administrative request form for the Centre for Academic Technology (CAT) (Atrium 107). This form is available from the Psychology Secretary.
 - Be sure to accurately complete the request for printouts and scoring information.
- Following the exam, the scored answer sheets are to be placed in an envelope identified with the instructor's name, full course name, and exam date, and delivered to the CAT, AT107.

These envelopes should contain, in the following order:

- a completed Multiple Choice Scan/Score Request Form
- the instructor's answer key
- all completed student answer sheets (arranged face up, cut corner aligned)

On delivery, the package will be signed in for scanning and processing.

- The following protocols are norms which are applied to scanning processes:
 - If the scanner records two marks for a question, the student's answer sheet will be checked
 - If the student's intent is clear (an incomplete erasure or an answer crossed out instead of erased), the student's intended answer will be recorded
 - If the student's intent is unclear, a zero (no answer) will be recorded
 - A list of all changes will be included in the exam report.

A CSV file containing the raw data and an Excel file of student marks will also be provided. Student scores will be sorted by name and "A" number

- When the report is ready, the instructor will be notified as requested on the Scan/Score Request Form. Reports will usually be ready within two working days.
- If reports or files are emailed, a Saint Mary's email address must be used. Provincial law prohibits sending students' personal information to an email service hosted outside Canada.

As a general rule, take your time to check your work!

- If the instructor has requested, enter these marks into a database (check with the instructor to find out what database). Recheck all scores at least once. Calculate means, standard deviations, and median scores. Take your time; be extra careful, it is easy to make a mistake at this stage!
- Return the above materials to the instructor, promptly. Be sure to return all answer keys! Do not copy these for any reason.

Short Answer:

- Obtain an answer key for marking short answer questions from the course instructor.
- Ask the instructor if there are any instructions pursuant to the accurate marking of these questions. For instance, some instructors request any remarks made on the assignment be in pencil, that remarks are gentle, and/or clearly written.
- Feel free to ask the instructor any related questions and to ask her/him to review your work! It is well understood that your marking of assignments is a learning experience that requires appropriate feedback, as needed.
- Total the marks carefully, and then double-check your addition.
- If the instructor has requested, enter these marks into a database.
- Be sure to return all answer keys!
- Place the tests in alphabetical order by last name. This is usually very helpful to the professor but ask to ensure his/her requirements.
- Note: Whenever possible the test scoring should be completed in enough time for the instructor to return test scores within 1-2 weeks after the date of the test.

Teaching Assistant Guidelines for Grading of Assignments

- Gain a copy of any and all assignments from course instructor.
- Gain a copy of the answer key and marking criteria from course instructor.

- Gain a copy of the criteria sheet that is to accompany each student assignment. Usually instructors use a sheet with the grade breakdown that serves as a feedback form. This completed sheet oftentimes accompanies assignments returned to students. Students then can look over the sheet and determine readily why they received the given mark.
- Be sure to include the student's full name on each sheet.
- Grade assignments according to the answer key and marking criteria for that assignment - this ensures the grade assigned is objectively determined.
- Be sure to ask the instructor for guidance, and if need be, after marking several assignments seek assurance and feedback if warranted.
- Complete the scoring on the criteria sheet in each case.
- Upon satisfactory completion of the marking of all Assignments, and review of these, photocopy them along with the marking criteria for each assignment - a copy is useful for a variety of reasons -check with your instructor if s/he has a different idea in this area.
- Afterwards, ensure the original assignments, their copies, and the criteria sheets are arranged in alphabetical order.
- If directed to do so, attach the copied criteria sheet for each student to his or her respective copied assignment.
- Keep separate the original assignment and original completed criteria sheet.
- Return all materials to the Instructor; whenever possible return all materials within one week, and in larger classes (i.e., over 100 students) within one and a half weeks. Do not rush marking such that you increase the possibility of making careless errors, but be efficient. Be prepared to devote the necessary time for marking, rather than making a poor, rushed effort. As you no doubt can appreciate, accurate feedback/evaluation is a very serious endeavour, and deserves your full attention.
- The separated criteria sheet is to be returned to the students (if that is the procedure of your instructor) but only after the scores are recorded for each student.
- By way of a checklist, there should be three alphabetized stacks: (1) the original completed assignments, (2) the original marking criteria sheets, and (3) photocopies of both.
 - Note that this is a specific example, therefore, you must check with your course instructor to find out if he/she wants something done differently.

Teaching Assistant Checklist

Each TA should set up an appointment with his or her course Instructor to go over individual expectations and job requirements. This checklist is suggested as a guide for that conversation. Take notes so you both have a record of the decisions. Realize also that not all tasks can be anticipated in advance; as such, this is a good starting “plan.”

REQUIREMENTS	Yes/No	Comments
<p>Will I be lecturing?</p> <p>*On a regular basis? *Occasionally? *When the instructor is absent?</p>		
<p>Will I be leading discussion?</p> <p>*On a regular basis? *Occasionally? *When the instructor is absent?</p>		
<p>If yes, should I:</p> <p>*Stay close to the text? *Stay close to the lectures? *Encourage all students to talk? *Do most of the talking? *Deal only with their problems in discussions?</p>		
<p>Will I be tutoring and/or giving individual assistance?</p> <p>*How much help is too much? *What kind of assistance shouldn't I give? *Should I organize group help/review sessions?</p>		
<p>Will I be conducting/supervising Tutorials/ Labs?</p> <p>*Keeping track of supplies and materials? *Obtaining supplies and materials? *Designing or revising experiments? *Giving demonstrations? *In case of emergency or accident, what do I do?</p>		
<p>Will I be using A V material/equipment?</p> <p>*What type of equipment will be used?</p>		

<p>*Am I responsible for getting and returning it? *Who do I call to schedule equipment?</p>		
REQUIREMENTS	Yes/No	Comments
<p>Will I be evaluating/grading papers, projects, reports, quizzes, examinations, and student participation?</p> <p>*How will marks be recorded? *Who is responsible for maintaining marks records? *Is the process/formula for combining graded work to come up with final course grade clear? *How much lead-time and how much time will I receive for grading? *Are there penalties for late work-submissions--what are they? *Will instructor spot-check my work? *How will extensions, if any, be determined and by whom? *What procedure should I use if I suspect cheating or plagiarism? *Will the instructor provide marking keys or marking schemes? *How much and what kind of feedback does instructor want on tests and assignments?</p>		
REQUIREMENTS	Yes/No	Comments
<p>How much autonomy will I have?</p> <p>*To try things? *To present new ideas? *To present perspectives different from the instructor's?</p>		
<p>What about my office hours?</p> <p>*How many hours per week? *When? *Should they be coordinated with the instructor's?</p>		
<p>Who will supervise me?</p> <p>*Will I receive feedback on my performance? *How?</p>		
<p>What should I do, whom should I contact, if I can't make a lab/ class/ tutorial/ exam?</p>		

What other responsibilities will I have?		
REQUIREMENTS	Yes/No	Comments
Will I be asked to proctor in-class exams and/or the final exam? *Are there any special requirements for proctoring?		
Course structure *How many midterms, tests are planned for the course? *What is class schedule? *Are there copies of course outlines, handouts/course notes, textbooks, available for my use? *Are there any reference materials I should have?		
Division of duties *How will duties be organized if more than one TA is assigned to the course? *Will there be regular TA meetings? *If you have work for me beyond any required 10 hrs/week, what is the best way to tell you so as not to create conflict? *What is the best way to contact you--email, mailbox, telephone message, or appointments? *What other responsibilities will I have?		

TAs Space for Points of Interest or Notes

TAs Space for Points of Interest or Notes