

Examples from students of how to do well as a TA.

Don't Try to Fake It

- Promise to get back to them after I read about the topic (or get back to the whole class if necessary)
- Work through the problem with them on the spot
- Don't fake answers to questions, instead be honest and find the correct answer
- Give honest feedback for students and professors
- When grading, don't fake descriptions for lost points and don't just give full points to avoid an explanation
- Don't fake preparation or discussion sections, instead come prepared to class
- Don't fake understanding of course material
- Admit when you don't know something and direct them where they can find an answer
- Prepare for discussion sections/lab and think of what questions might be asked

Attention to Detail

- For effective grading, point out the shortcomings in the solution
- For discussions, explain every step of the solution in detail
- For projects, the problem setup and explanation has to be in detail
- Attention to detail allows the TA to be more observational of the students' needs and makes it easier to satisfy them
- Understanding how books and other material describe concepts and ideas that TAs have to give a lecture on

Care about the Students

- Sharing empathy leads to building a rapport with the students
- Giving leeway in case of unavoidable circumstances
- Show genuine interest in the students' learning. Students should be comfortable with the TA
- Tell students if failing grades consistently. Tell in advance, not at the last moment
- Help out with good advice about difficult material
- Give an extension based on legitimate reason
- Don't give answers
- Seek out students who are struggling
- Post email, be responsive to email
- Run midterm/final review
- Tailor discussion section based on forum or questions in class
- Consistency, attention to detail with your demeanor, grading, explanations

Praise in public, admonish in private

- Any good answer in class... praise it.... Makes student confident and improves class involvement
- Even if the student is not sure of answer, they will still express their opinion
- Give examples of students' good ideas in discussion section, etc.
- Handing out graded papers to be done in private so students who perform poorly are not embarrassed
- In the case of student does not understand a topic in class then one may ask them to meet offline
- Address problem in generic manner in class, eg talking with class, and later talk privately with the concerned people
- Example: student comes up with an incorrect answer, but some of the steps are correct and in the right direction. Praise for doing correct steps, and point out mistakes in private and tell how to fix it

Be a Team Player

- If another TA is sick, help take over their responsibilities
- Encourage students to help each other
- Help guide group discussions
- Compromise, sharing responsibilities (ex: answer forum posts, review sessions)

Resourcefulness

- Being resourceful and able to solve difficult situations is a key for being an effective TA
- Example: For a programming lab, if the infrastructure for say assignment submission is not set up, then all students will approach TA for help. A resourceful TA should be able to come up with a proper solution (even though he might have to put in a little more effort). In this case, students and professor will be happy with the TA
- Consolidating important snippets from textbook
- Providing good (real-world) examples
- Stepping back from material specifics to give big picture perspective
- Creative grading techniques for efficiency and quality

Give Examples that relate to the Students

- 9 planets – Interview
- queue - grocery store
- Stacks – stack of plates
- TCP handshake: explain as a human conversation
- Inheritance: brownies!
- Examples allow students to relate to the problem and makes them comfortable. It makes stuff easy to remember. Core concepts are hard to grasp with first seen because they are abstract when sometimes students have seen them in life and don't know it. They can help students learn to be more flexible in their thought process rather than memorizing a pattern.
- NP – easy to recognize good music, hard to make good music
- OOP – like a factory, instances are like items off an assembly line

Communication

- Be clear and concise
- Being more interactive with the students
- Tuning the message to accommodate varying backgrounds amongst your students
- Make your audience more at ease with the subject material using humor and not monotone
- Multiple approaches to explaining a particular problem
- Try to encourage group discussion to tackle issues
- In discussion session, TAs give students the ways/directions to solve student's problems
- When one student in discussion session has a problem, TAs should answer the problem not only for that student, but also let other students know the problem and the answer so that other students can know the problem they might not think before
- Encourage students to ask questions
- Students appreciate timely responses
- Important for students to know what is expected of them
- Clear communication with students helps focus on serving their needs
- Tone/respect in communications helps students feel comfortable
- Communication with professor may help ensure TA fulfills expectations
- Engaging TAs inspire interest in students – students enjoy the class more