

5 CONVERSATIONS EVERY TA SHOULD HAVE WITH THEIR COURSE INSTRUCTOR BEFORE (OR JUST AFTER) THE SEMESTER STARTS

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

1 *What is my role as a TA?*

Discuss in conjunction with *Duties Specification Letter*

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

TIP: Map out the semester: Ask for the syllabus in advance and add test/exam, marking and exam prep, and other expected busy dates into your calendar.

2

May I help **develop lab, discussion or tutorial material**?

What is my role specifically related to marking?

- What will I be responsible for marking and what are the marking timeline?
- Are their **rubrics**? If not, may I construct one? (ensure this is reflected in your hours)
- Do you have **sample 'A, B, C, D and F' papers**?
- Will there be a **marking exchange** (with other TAs or the instructor) to check consistency?
- What kinds of **feedback** would you like on papers (i.e., comments throughout, edits)?
- Would you like **marking summaries** (i.e., notes on patterns among the students)?
- Which one of us **posts** the grades to OWL?
- If a student requests an assignment or test is **re-graded**, how would you like me to proceed?

3

What should I do if I am approaching my maximum semester TA hour limit (140hrs)?

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

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

4

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

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

5

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

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