

Tips for First Day as a TA

The first day of labs/tutorials sets the tone for the rest of the semester. That is why it is important to set the example, plan the session ahead of time, and be prepared for the unexpected.

Preparation for the First Day

Before coming to your first day on the job, there are a few things you need to prepare to ensure that the lab/tutorial runs smoothly.

1. **Know what textbook will be used in the course.** It is important to know this information in case you discuss notions from the textbook during your session. Furthermore, students may ask you questions related to something they've read and you want to give them an answer that corresponds with what the textbook says.
2. **Know your room or lab layout.** Before the first class, visit the room where you will be teaching and examine its layout. This will help you determine what materials are available to you and which ones you will need to bring in order for the session to run smoothly. Some questions you can ask yourself are:
 - a. Do I need a key to unlock the door? If so, where do I get it from?
 - b. Is there a whiteboard or chalkboard? Do I need to bring markers/chalk/erasers?
 - c. Is there a projector and a computer? If not, are there adapters available or do I need to bring one?
 - d. Is any of the equipment I might need locked away in cabinets – if so, from whom do I get a key
3. **Obtain the syllabus of the course.** Especially on the first day, students may ask you to clarify certain assessments or may have questions about the grade distribution in the course and you need to be able to answer them. It is also important to know the class policies, such as the late submission policy, so that you can enforce it.
4. **Plan your session.** Before the lab/tutorial, make a plan of the session that includes how much time you will spend on each activity, which activities you'll do, if the work will be done individually or not, etc. Don't forget to give yourself some time for introductions, a conclusion, and a question period from students.
 - Note: Don't forget that some things are unpredictable, and the session may not always go how you planned. That is why you should have a plan B in your head in case some activities/material that you planned for cannot be completed. Do not panic if things don't always go your way, it is normal and it is not always a representation of your teaching abilities.
5. **Obtain all necessary handouts/materials from the instructor.** If attendance is required, ensure that you have a list of the students in your session. Also, make sure to get all necessary materials and handouts from the course instructor (if applicable).

Getting to Know Your Role

How to Introduce Yourself and How to Make a Good Impression

- Tell students your name (and write it down on the board/powerpoint), and if you're comfortable, your program/specialization, and why you are excited to teach this subject or course.
- Be professional. How you present yourself will tell the students how they should act with and towards you.
- Create a comfortable atmosphere for everyone.

What You Should Cover on the First Day

- The instructor of the course may tell you what they'd like you to cover on your first day, but here are some good elements to include in your first session:
 - Introductions: If your students will have to interact with each other a lot during the lab/tutorial, give them the opportunity to get to know each other. Do a few ice breaker games, have discussions, ask students why they chose this course.
 - Class objectives: Be clear about what you expect from your students. Set the standard for the class. Determine the rules of the lab/tutorial.
 - Go over the syllabus: Go over the most important parts of the syllabus. Ask if the students have questions and clarify if there is confusion on any aspect of the course.
 - Go over the material: Do the activities or go over the material the instructor has given to you. While the students are working, interact with them, ask them questions, get to know them better.
 - Note: It is normal for students to be shy or nervous if you try to interact with them. Remember, just like you might be nervous or overwhelmed, they might be too!

Getting to Know Your Role

General Tip for the First (and every) Day

- It's ok if you're nervous because the students may also be nervous! It is a learning experience for both the teaching assistant and the students.
- It's ok if you don't know the answer to everything. If you don't know how to respond to a question a student is asking, tell them it's a good question, tell them that you are unsure of the answer but that you will find it and follow-up with them.
- Anticipate the questions students will ask you regarding the material you present in the session and prepare some answers.
- Ensure that you have all the material necessary for the session. If the instructor is providing the handouts, pick them up as soon as possible so that you don't forget them for the session and so you can familiarize yourself with them.
- Always be mindful of student confidentiality and privacy.
- Have fun! This is a learning experience for you and you are getting to teach what you are passionate about!