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Teaching Assistant Handbook

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank You!

WELCOME

Welcome to your Teaching Assistant role within the UTM Department of Biology. We hope that you will find it to be a rewarding experience and that this handbook will help you along the way.

The University has a myriad of resources for Teaching Assistants to draw upon in order to enhance their effectiveness as well as to make the most of their teaching experience. Our goal in creating this handbook, therefore, was not to fill a gap, but rather to make it easier to benefit from these resources by collecting, and streamlining, them into a single place.

We hope that we have created something that will be of value to both new Teaching Assistants as well as those with years of experience. As a first introduction to the Teaching Assistant role, we hope this handbook will help you to better understand and prepare for this new challenge. For seasoned Teaching Assistants, we see this as a refresher and an opportunity to reflect upon your experiences, but also hope that you will find useful nuggets of information amongst these pages. Regardless of your experience level, we encourage you to think critically about your teaching style and how you can maximize the experience for both yourself and your students.

We welcome your feedback on this new resource as we hope it will become a living document that will evolve over time. Your experience as a TA is invaluable to this evolution and we hope that you will share it with us.

Yours Truly,

Cindy Short   Fiona Rawle   Christoph Richter   Diane Matias

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1.0 TEACHING ASSISTANT EXPECTATIONS

1.1 PROFESSIONALISM

As a Teaching Assistant (TA) you are part of a community of educators that contribute to the experiences of a generation of undergraduate students. The most important thing you can bring to your role as a TA is a degree of professionalism that honours and reflects the importance of this job. At the most basic level this includes investing the time and energy necessary for the core functions of your role -- to come prepared to each lab and/or tutorial, to facilitate small group learning experiences, and to critically evaluate and provide timely feedback on student work. This expectation of professionalism also includes demonstrating respect for your colleagues by coming prepared and contributing to TA meetings, communicating clearly with other course staff, and conducting yourself in a way that reflects well on the Biology Department and the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) as an institution. In short, there is an expectation that you approach your role as a Teaching Assistant with the same professionalism that you bring to your own work and studies.

1.2 TA RESPONSIBILITIES WITH RESPECT TO UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Over the course of your commitments as a TA you are likely to be involved in delivering course content, grading student work and possibly assisting in the administration of entire courses. Regardless of your specific TA role you will also play a role in creating a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment. This means that you will need to be familiar with UTM policies and practices that guide us in our work. You will be expected to carry out your role in accordance with these policies and have a responsibility for ensuring that they are adhered to.

There are many policies that must be followed by TAs within the University. This section addresses the policies which will almost certainly intersect with your day-to-day role as a TA. In particular, we want to draw your attention to four key areas that you need to be aware of:

1. Upholding Academic Integrity
2. Protecting Privacy
3. Avoiding Conflicts of Interest
4. Safeguarding Equity & Safety

The content in the following sections (1.2.1 – 1.2.4) has been adapted from the U of T Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation's section on TA Responsibilities[1].

1.2.1 UPHOLDING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Principles of honesty and fairness, including academic integrity, are core values of the University and are reflected in our policies and procedures. Promotion of, and adherence to, these policies are ways in which the University instills and reinforces these values within the UTM community.

The University's policies and procedures that deal with cases of cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct, are designed to protect the integrity of the institution and to maintain a community where competition is fair. These policies and procedures are contained within The Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters[2]. Chapter 4 of this handbook is dedicated to the topic of academic integrity and your related responsibilities as a TA.

1.2.2 PROTECTING PRIVACY

The University of Toronto Mississauga values and respects the privacy of its members and is subject to Ontario's Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act (FIPPA)[3]. The most significant implication of FIPPA from a TA's perspective surrounds the collection and handling of confidential information contained in student records.

Teaching Assistants regularly have access to students' personal information including full name, student number, contact information (e.g., e-mail), assignments and grades. This information is made available only for the management and administration of the course and should not be used or shared for any other purpose.

Unless you are accustomed to thinking about these things (and most of us are not!) you might not realize some of the seemingly innocuous TA practices that have the potential to compromise student privacy. Whether you're a first time TA or have years of experience under your belt, here are some practices worth paying attention to:

Do Not:	Instead:
• Take attendance by passing around a sheet where students record their full names and student numbers	• Create a seating plan and take attendance yourself by circulating through the room OR • Have students sign-in using the last 4 digits of their student number
• Return student work by leaving it in a pile at the front of the room or outside of your work area	• Return assignments individually (this will also help you learn your students names)
• Allow students to collect work belonging to their friends	• Explain that this would be a breach of another student's privacy
• Write student grades on the front page of their assignment/test since they can easily be seen by other students	• Record grades and comments on the inside cover of their assignment/test OR • Use a separate page to record grades, and attach it within the assignment
• Share student emails • Forward student emails to persons not involved in administering the course.	• Use the email tool within Blackboard OR • Use the BCC field for student addresses

Do Not:	Instead:
• Post student grades in public places • Verbally tell students their grades	• Only use the Grade Centre on Blackboard to post grades
• Share grade files via USB key or non-U of T email	• If necessary to email grade files, use your @utoronto.ca email account • Any grades saved on your computer must be encrypted.

At the end of the course, and once you've completed you TA responsibilities, you should shred any printed class lists and return any uncollected student work (e.g., quizzes, assignments, midterms) to the course instructor. The course instructor will keep this material for one year before shredding it.

The University's FIPPA Questions & Answers for Instructors[4] provides best practices for handling student information, many of which are also highly relevant to TAs.

More information about the University's policy on privacy can be found at www.utoronto.ca/privacy[5].

1.2.3 AVOIDING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Although the University can sometimes feel like a giant institution filled with nameless faces, the old adage of "It's a small world" regularly holds true. It's not uncommon therefore, that in your role as a TA you will come across situations wherein you have previously, or will develop, a close personal relationship with a student you are responsible for instructing and assessing. This constitutes a **conflict of interest**. Regardless of the type of relationship – friendship, romantic, sexual, familial or business – you are required to immediately disclose such a relationship to the course instructor, even if you believe that you can remain objective and unbiased in your treatment of the student. Just the perception of bias can leave other students feeling disadvantaged, disrupt the classroom dynamic, and can reflect poorly on your reputation, the reputations of other course staff, and even the Department.

Bringing a conflict of interest to the attention of the course instructor allows for appropriate arrangements to be made to ensure that all students are treated fairly. At the very least this will include ensuring that you are not responsible for assigning any part of the student's grade, and it may also include other accommodations (e.g., switching assigned lab sections of the student or yourself).

University policy does not prohibit sexual relations between consenting adults. That said, becoming romantically or sexually involved with a student can leave you open to allegations of sexual harassment. See the Sexual Harassment Office's Information for Graduate Students and Teaching Assistants[6] for more information.

For more information about this topic you can access the Provost's statement on Conflict of Interest and Close Personal Relations[7].

1.2.4 SAFEGUARDING EQUITY AND SAFETY

The University strives to ensure the full participation of all of its members in all aspects of the university experience and has enshrined a commitment to "vigilant protection for individual human rights, and a resolute commitment to the principle of equal opportunity, equity and justice" within its statement of Mission & Purpose[8]. TAs play an important role in helping to create norms within the classroom that foster dignity and mutual respect.

In addition to the Ontario Human Rights Code[9], which dictates every person's right to equal treatment, free from discrimination based on "race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or disability", the University is also compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)[10]. More information about the AODA including information on the standards, best practices and online training modules can be found at www.aoda.utoronto.ca[11].

All members of UTM, including TAs, have access to information and support through the many tri-campus equity offices including:
- Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office[12]
- Community Safety Office[13]
- Family Care Office[14]
- Sexual & Gender Diversity Office[15]
- Sexual Harassment Office[16]
- Status of Women Office[17]

These offices are also resources that you can refer your students to when appropriate.

You may also want to familiarize yourself with the following resources and policies that contribute to creating an equitable and safe learning environment:
- Code of Student Conduct[18]
- U of T Sexual Harassment Policies & Procedures[19]
- U of T Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment[20]
- UTM Access*Ability* Resource Centre[21]: www.utm.utoronto.ca/access
- Appropriate Use of Information & Communication Technology[22]

The U of T Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation[23] (CTSI) outlines 9 additional guidelines, ideals and expectations of educators in Ethical Principles In University Teaching[24] that you should consider as you prepare for your role as TA.

1.3 RESPONDING TO STUDENT DIVERSITY

The University of Toronto Mississauga has an incredibly diverse student body. Institutionally, we strive to honour the unique identities and range of experiences that our students possess and value the opportunities that presents for enhancing the learning experience. As TAs you should

strive to create a learning environment that is inclusive and welcoming. The following guidelines were adapted from CTSI strategies for [Responding to Student Diversity](#)[25]:

General Suggestions:
- Promote a respectful classroom climate, starting with the first class/tutorial/lab. Openly discuss your "ground rules" for respectful interactions.
- Treat your students with respect and treat them as individuals. Encourage them to share their experiences and observations, but do not call on them to speak for their race/gender/culture.
- Do not make assumptions about students based on your own perception of their culture, however, do try to anticipate issues of sexuality, religion, or other values as you give assignments and lead discussion.
- Use diverse examples rather than ones that assume a particular background or experiences.
- Do not assume the identity or racial affiliation of a student based on his or her physical appearance. Be aware of the diverse composition of many ethnic communities.
- Be aware that an international student may have a different perspective regarding classroom practices and may require time to adapt to a new style of teaching and learning.
- Always be respectful in your tone and choice of words.

Communication:
- Avoid highly idiomatic English, although don't avoid idioms completely. The only way that learners of English will master idiomatic language is if they hear it used properly and in context by native speakers. Try to explain or clarify idiomatic expressions that you use.
- Provide some linguistic redundancy (i.e., through the use of Blackboard, handouts, or an overhead projector).

Participation:
- Do not assume that students who don't talk don't know the material. Students from certain cultures or those who have had past negative experiences with participation may require additional encouragement. Speak to students outside class if necessary.
- Encourage full participation, making use of strategies to include less assertive/more reflective students (e.g., giving time to write down a question for the instructor to be handed in at the end of the class, or a more lengthy response to a problem of question raised in class – take in the written responses and then start the following lesson with some ideas raised by students in their written comments).

1.4 INVIGILATION

One function that every TA will carry out at some point is that of an invigilator (or proctor). The primary functions of an invigilator are to assist in the smooth administration of tests and to ensure a fair testing environment. The aim of an invigilator is not merely to catch students cheating. Equally, if not more, important is to prevent cheating by being vigilant and limiting the opportunities for academic dishonesty.

Here are some best practices for TAs invigilating a test:
- Arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the test to help distribute testing materials (for larger classes you may be asked to come up to 15 minutes early).
- Check with the course instructor about what type of aids student are allowed to have and keep an eye out for non-permitted aids.
- Check with the course instructor about what types of questions, if any, you can answer for students.
- Let the course instructor/supervising TA know about common questions you encounter or any errors in the test so that they can decide whether a class announcement is necessary.
- Walk around the examination room so that you can observe all students.
- If you witness suspicious behaviour or suspect a student of cheating, inform the course instructor or supervising TA immediately. You may also discretely let other TAs know so that they can monitor the situation.
- As you collect student tests check to make sure that they have written their name and student number on the test paper, and check Scantrons to make sure they have bubbled in their student number

Watching other people write a test can be tedious. You may be tempted to either chat with other invigilators, do your own work, or to use your phone. These and other distracting TA behaviours should be kept to a necessary minimum and should not be permitted to interfere with your responsibilities as an invigilator.

1.4.1 FINAL EXAM INVIGILATION

Unlike term tests and midterms, final exams are administered by the Office of the Registrar who appoints a Chief Presiding Officer (CPO) to take primary responsibility for the conduct of the final exam. Teaching Assistants are required to arrive **20 minutes** prior to the start of the exam to assist in set-up and to receive instructions from the CPO. Teaching Assistants are also required to review the "Exam Instructions for Instructors & Teaching Assistants" document prior to the exam.

2.0 EMERGENCY INFORMATION

2.1 EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Prior to the first lab, be sure to find the location of the telephones. In most cases these phones are located in the lab Technician's prep room.

Peel Police	9-1-1*	
Fire Department	9-1-1*	
UTM Campus Police	905-569-4333	DV 3116
UTM Health & Counselling Centre	905-828-5255	DV 1123
Credit Valley Hospital	905-820-6800	
Ambulance	905-844-4242*	
Poison Information	1-800-268-9017	
Environnemental Protection Services	416-978-7000	

*If the situation requires you to call emergency services to campus (e.g., fire, police, ambulance) then you should also notify Campus Police so that they can ensure that the emergency route is not obstructed.

2.2 GENERAL SAFETY RULES

On the first day of class, and as reminders are needed, please advise your students of the following rules of conduct in the lab rooms:

1. No food or drink (even water) is allowed in the labs.
2. Wear appropriate clothing in the labs:
   - Wear a lab coat and disposable gloves if chemicals, microorganisms, or potentially disease-causing organisms are handled (gloves are provided when required). Do not wear open-toed shoes (or shorts or short skirts) in the lab.
3. Do not behave in any way that endangers the health and safety of other people in the class.
4. Report any accidents, breakage, or damage of equipment to the Teaching Assistant (who reports them to the Technician).
5. Clean up after yourself. Dispose of waste in the appropriate containers—broken glassware (and ONLY broken glassware) goes in the specially marked pail.
6. Wash your hands before leaving the lab.
7. Do not wear disposable gloves outside the lab.

Invite students to privately advise you of any health conditions they may have which you should know about in the event of an emergency.

2.3   HANDLING CHEMICALS, LIQUID SOLUTIONS, AND MICROORGANISMS

1. Always wear protective clothing.
2. Do not pipette solutions by mouth. Use the dispensers provided.
3. Keep solutions capped when not in use.
4. Dispose of solutions in the specially labeled containers. Do not put solutions down the drain.
5. Read the safety data on the chemicals you will use so that you know what to do in case of a spill or emergency.
6. Wash your hands thoroughly before leaving the lab.

2.4 EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

2.4.1 GENERAL FIRST AID

For a minor injury: First aid kits, an information guide, Emergency Response Guide, and Accident Report Forms are found in the lab. **All** injuries should be reported to your Technician.

For a serious injury or illness: Inform the course Technician immediately who will call Campus Police and other emergency services as needed.

2.4.2 CHEMICAL FIRST AID

Check the relevant material safety data sheets (MSDS) for the recommended first aid procedure for each chemical you are using in a given lab. These sheets are available at the entrance to the lab. The three common chemical hazards are inhalation, ingestion, and skin/eye contact. For most chemicals the following basic first-aid procedures apply:

Inhalation: Move patient to fresh air.

Ingestion: Call and notify poison control (1-800-268-9017).

Skin/eye contact: Flush area with water for 15 minutes. Wash skin with soap and water. Consult physician if irritation persists. All labs are equipped with an eye-wash station.

2.4.3 FIRE

Familiarize yourself with the location of fire exits and fire extinguishers at the beginning of your first lab, so you are prepared in case a fire breaks out in any of your labs.

In case a fire does happen:
1. Send a student to tell the lab Technician immediately.

2. Attempt to extinguish a fire only if you can do so safely. Each lab room has a fire extinguisher next to the door.
3. Activate the nearest wall-mounted fire alarm located in the hallways near the exits and phone Campus Police (x4333).
4. Tell the students to evacuate the room and building- if you can quickly find your coat (in winter) and personal belongings, take these with you. Leave everything else.
5. Report to Campus Police if anyone is suspected of being in the building after general evacuation.

2.4.4 CHEMICAL [OR LIQUID SOLUTIONS - ESPECIALLY MICROORGANISMS] SPILL

For a minor spill:
1. Alert the Technician.
2. Wearing gloves, soak up the liquid with paper towels.
3. Dispose of the contaminated towels in the appropriate waste container (ask your Technician which container to use).

For a major spill: Alert your Technician who will decide to either evacuate the room and call Facilities Resources (x5301), or to contain and clean up the spill with the special equipment provided in the prep room.

2.4.5 DAMAGED EQUIPMENT

Report broken or damaged equipment promptly to your Technician and describe the nature of the problem as best you can. Be as specific as possible so the Technician can begin formulating potential solutions. "Broken" or "not working" is usually not a sufficient description to diagnose a problem.

Report spills in/on equipment immediately to your Technician. Some chemicals will permanently damage the equipment if not cleaned up properly and quickly.

2.4.6 GLASS AND "SHARPS"

For broken glass or other sharp equipment:
1. Dispose of broken glass in the white buckets, and razor blades in the specially-marked "sharps/glass" containers. Do not put paper waste in these "sharps" containers. Never throw glass into the garbage bins.
2. Use a brush and pan to sweep up broken glass. Ensure that all broken glass is cleaned up (brush and pan are in the prep room).
3. Report breakage of equipment to your instructor or Technician.

2.4.7 HANDLING LIVE ANIMALS

Extra precautions must be taken when handling live organisms because of the potential for bites and scratches and the production of aerosols. Live organisms can also escape. Experiments in undergraduate labs will not involve the intentional infection of animals with human pathogens, though natural infections may be present. The course instructor and/or lab Technician will advise you of potential biohazards and the proper way to handle organisms/material. You are responsible for sharing this information with your students.

2.5 WHMIS

Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is a national catalogue and training system dealing with hazardous chemicals. It consists of three parts: (1) standardized labels on all dangerous and controlled products; (2) a material safety data sheet (or MSDS) for each product, and (3) a training program for staff working with dangerous and controlled products.

All TAs are required to have up to date WHIMS training. For more information, and to register for WHIMIS courses please visit the UofT Environmental Health & Safety Online Learning[1] page.

3.0 ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

3.1 WHO'S WHO

An enjoyable TA experience and the successful running of courses hinges on the collective efforts of you and many other staff and faculty in the Department. This means that as a Teaching Assistant you will need to be in contact with a variety of people for a variety of reasons so it's helpful to know who to go to for what (and who's likely to seek you out). **Communication is key!** Sometimes you will find that there may be some overlap in responsibility and when that occurs, you can speak to either contact. The following is a breakdown of your main points of contact and when/why you should see them.

3.1.1 UNDERGRADUATE ADVISOR, DIANE MATIAS

Diane oversees all TAs in Biology and is your main contact for all TA matters. Posting and receiving applications, assigning courses, and preparing contracts are just some of what Diane takes care of for the Department. Chances are you have already been in contact with Diane when receiving and accepting your TA offer.

You should speak with Diane (d.matias@utoronto.ca; 905-828-3999; DV 3057) if you have any questions about the following:
- Your application (such as questions on correct application procedure and deadlines)
- Positions and assignments
- Contracts and job descriptions
- Training
- Course administrative matters (Scantrons, medical notes, audio-visual reservations, etc.)

3.1.2 LAB COORDINATOR, CINDY SHORT

Cindy Short is the lab coordinator for the first year labs, and is responsible for devising training for our undergraduate TAs. (cindy.short@utoronto.ca)

3.1.3 COURSE INSTRUCTORS

The instructor for the course that you are TAing will be your supervisor for the length of the contract. For TAs that are involved in multiple courses or courses that have multiple instructors, you will be working with more than one supervisor.

Your supervisor administers the course, develops course content, determines your job description and the breakdown of your hours (i.e., marking, contact hours with students in lab, invigilation,

etc.). It is always a good idea to stay in regular contact with the course instructor. This may be as part of a recurring TA meeting, or meetings that you set up with the instructor.

You should check in with your supervisor(s) when you have concerns about the following:
- Your duties and responsibilities
- Course content
- Student issues (e.g. disruptive students, belligerent or aggressive encounters, etc.)
- Suspected academic offences
- Attendance (i.e., sick days, conferences, etc.)

3.1.4 LAB TECHNICIANS

Lab Technicians are responsible for the daily set-up of lab equipment in courses with practicals. Although they will do the bulk of the set-up themselves, you may still be responsible for some set-up in your specific lab area and you will be expected to run your lab independently (including ensuring a proper clean-up!). Technicians are almost always available in the lab rooms during a lab session to help out when needed.

You should seek out the lab Technician when you need assistance with the following:
- Lab equipment (including specimens, reagents, etc.)
- Lab set-up and take-down
- In-lab emergencies (see Chapter 2)

3.2 CONTRACTS

You will be notified by e-mail when contracts are ready. They are typically available for review and signing within the Undergraduate Biology Office (DV 3057) the first week of classes although the contracts themselves begin on the first of the month when term starts (i.e., September, January, May, and July). Please bring a piece of identification with you when you come to sign your contract. You will receive a hard copy of your contract, which you should retain for your own records.

3.2.1 CUPE 3092

The University of Toronto Education Workers, CUPE Local 3092[1], is the trade union that represents, amongst others, all Teaching Assistants at UTM. CUPE documents, in particular, the collective agreement define the terms and conditions of your employment, including salary, benefits, grievance procedures, vacations, etc. More information about CUPE Local 3092 can be found at their website (cupe3902.org).

3.2.2 CONTRACT DATES

Your TA contract begins on the first day of the month that term starts and will end on either the last day of the month that term ends or one week after the last day of the regular final exam period (whichever comes later). **You are expected to be available and ready to perform your TA duties during these contract dates even if there are no classes scheduled. Please schedule vacations only after the date of the final exam has been determined and after speaking with the course instructor. All marks (from assignments, labs, reports, quizzes, tests, exams) must be submitted to the admin TA or to the instructor by the date specified by the instructor.**

3.2.3 PAYROLL

Payment is made by direct deposit on the 28th of each month in equal payments. Contracts must be signed before payroll is set up, so be sure to sign your contract at least several days prior to the payroll deadline, otherwise you risk having your payment delayed by a month. Pay statements are available on-line through the Administrative Management System[2].

3.2.4 TRACKING HOURS & CONTRACT REVIEW

You are responsible for keeping track of the number of hours spent completing work related to the administration of the course. Contract hours allotted to most TA duties can be accurately estimated at the outset of a course, however it is usual to expect some small degree of variability around the hours allotted to marking. Marking hours are estimated based upon the average marking speed and are informed by past experience with similar/identical work. If you find you are taking significantly more, or less, time marking then you should check-in with the course instructor for feedback on your marking process as soon as possible.

In the second half of the contract term, a review of your job description should be completed. This requires you and your supervisor to meet and discuss how you have utilized your hours to date, if this has been in-line with the original job description, and how the remainder of your hours will be allotted. This check is to ensure that your hours were allotted accurately at the start of term and to give an opportunity to re-adjust your remaining hours, if needed. Any changes should be recorded on the job description form and both you and your supervisor must sign and date the form.

3.3 SCANTRONS

Many courses will utilize Scantron sheets for their tests. Scantrons are available through Diane Matias in DV 3057. If the course instructor has asked you to obtain Scantrons, please e-mail Diane at d.matias@utoronto.ca with the date of the test and number of Scantrons required (approx.). Pick up can be made on the morning of the test or the day before the test in the case of a test that starts at 9 am. Please return any unused Scantrons to Diane Matias after the test.

It is important that the confidentiality and integrity of the Scantrons be maintained at all times.

Be sure to be mindful with the handling and storage of Scantron sheets. Do not leave them (completed or blank) somewhere students can have access to them. Ideally they should be stored in a locked place on campus at all times.

Scantron marking is done through Computing Services in CCT 3133. If marking is part of your contract then you will need to reserve the Scantron marking machine on-line[3]: http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/iits/services/instructional-technology. You will need to bring a Scantron sheet with the answer key and an encrypted USB key to store the file output. Be sure to save both the original file and the export file in case there are any changes in the marking of the multiple choice questions. It is also helpful to bring a pencil, eraser and liquid paper to fill in missing information or to remove erroneous marks.

3.4 DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

3.4.1 ABSENCES

Any absences must be reported in advance (whenever possible) to, and have the approval of, your supervisor. In situations where you are not able to perform your duties and a substitute TA needs to be arranged, it is your responsibility to find an appropriate TA to fill-in for you from among the other TAs assigned to the course. You are required to advise and seek approval from your supervisor of the situation and of which TA is taking over your class on those specific dates. If appropriate, your contract hours and pay will be adjusted accordingly.

If you are going to be away for a period of more than one business day (even if you are not scheduled to be in class) you are encouraged, as a courtesy, to inform your supervisor so that they are aware that you will be unavailable should the need arise and may not be e-mail accessible.

3.4.2 MAILBOX

All TAs will have a mailbox in the Biology Mailroom (DV 3055). Entrance to this room utilizes a keypad and requires a four-digit code. For TAs who are already UTM Biology graduate students, you will have your own four-digit code to use during your years here as a graduate student. TAs who are not part of this group will be assigned an entry code at the start of term. These codes change with each semester.

3.4.3 OFFICE SPACE

Office space is available to all TAs. There is a dedicated TA space for any TA to use for the purposes of holding office hours, marking, and to carry out other TA related duties. This is shared space among all TAs in the department so please do not leave personal belongings or any course materials in the room. If you have not been told where this space is please contact the staff in the Biology Department Office (DV3056).

3.4.4 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

All first-time TAs are entitled to 3 hours of paid training[4] on top of their assigned TAing hours. This can be a combination of mandatory Departmental training and TATP (Teaching Assistant

Training Program) workshops. If you attend a training session organized by the department, the department will take attendance and will use that as proof of your participation. If you attend a training session offered by TATP to fulfill your mandatory 3-hour training for first-time teaching assistants, download the CUPE Unit 1 Paid Training Request form and have it signed by Diane Matias BEFORE you attend the session. After you attend the session, have the TATP presenter sign the form for you. Completed forms, signed by you, Diane Matias and the TATP presenter should be submitted to Diane Matias. For more information, see Information for CUPE 3902 Unit 1 Teaching Assistants[5]. If you are a returning TA it is recommended that you attend a one hour training session through the TATP.

In addition, if you are being asked to lead tutorials you should receive training that focuses on the particular kind of tutorial teaching that you have been assigned: discussion-based teaching, skills-based teaching, review sessions, or laboratories and practicals. If you are a new TA this training will be built into the mandatory 3-hour training. For information regarding tutorial training please see the CTSI's Tutorial Training Information[6].

4.0 GETTING READY FOR YOUR 1ST TUTORIAL OR LAB

Whether you're just starting to work as a Teaching Assistant or are a seasoned veteran, chances are you're a bit nervous and excited about stepping into the classroom. There are several things you can do to ensure your first lab or tutorial goes well and is enjoyable – for you and your students. This chapter gives you some general and practical pointers about how you can prepare for your labs or tutorials (…though for the sake of brevity we use "lab" throughout this chapter to refer to both labs and tutorials).

4.1 BEFORE THE FIRST LAB

Before classes begin, there are many ways that you can choose to invest your time and energy in order to enhance your skills as a TA. A good starting point may be to collect all relevant materials and information about the course you are responsible for and clarify your specific role. Likely, the course instructor will organize a meeting to go through many of these points, but it's always helpful if you:

- Know what your course responsibilities are, e.g., are you supposed to run labs, mark exams, and meet with students? This info is in your TA contract (see Chapter 3.2).
- Meet with the instructor to talk about your role, the course and the expectations for the labs. This also has the benefit of allowing you to know where the instructor's office is, in case you have to refer students to it. For more on your relationship with the instructor, refer to the CTSI document [Your Relationship with the Course Instructor](#)[1].
- Find out who else is involved in the course, e.g., lab Technician, TA coordinator, or librarian, as these people can be important resources for you (see Chapter 3).
- Obtain a copy of the course syllabus and read it thoroughly – you will likely have to refer students to it regularly. Also make sure that you are familiar with the relevant university and departmental policies (see Chapter 2).
- Check out the course textbook. Most instructors will provide you with a copy of the textbook. However, sometimes you may have to share a copy with other TAs or get it from the library.
- Collect all other materials required, such as lab manuals, papers, etc.
- Visit the course website/blackboard page and familiarize yourself with it.
- Chat with other TAs who will also be doing the same course or who have previously been involved with course.

Knowing the expectations of you as a TA and being familiar with the resources and materials available to both you and your students will help you along the way to becoming a better TA. The point here is not to know all these materials inside out and become an expert, so don't worry about reading the textbook cover to cover before the first lab has even started. Instead, the goal is to be familiar with the available resources so that you can do your job as effectively as possible and be able to refer students to the appropriate resources.

Course instructors typically organize regular TA meetings that will cover many aspects of the course administration; however, there are also some practical steps you can take to be prepared:

- Familiarize yourself with the lab room you will be using
    - find out if you need a key to access the space
    - locate any important devices/equipment and acquaint yourself with their operation
    - imagine yourself giving a presentation in this room filled with students, maybe even practice the intro talk (see below).
- Read through the instructions for the upcoming lab and visualize yourself leading the class.
- Make sure that you are comfortable with all the techniques, tools and resources that will be used.
- Try to anticipate possible problems or questions students may have. If you don't know how to solve them, bring it up during the lab meeting or check with the instructor, lab Technician or other TAs.
- Obtain a copy of the relevant class or section list that shows the names of students registered in your lab section. In some courses this will be provided by the course instructor, Technician or admin TA but can also be downloaded using Blackboard[2].

For a more comprehensive list of useful things to do before the lab, check out CTSI's resource The First Class[3].

4.2 DURING THE FIRST LAB

Now you are in the classroom, and it's slowly filling up with students – it's **your** lab, they're **your** students! What should you do next?

Depending on the course and instructor, you may have been given a more or less detailed outline of this first lab, which may include some of the elements discussed below. One of the main aspects of your job is to create an atmosphere that allows students to study and explore effectively, safely and enjoyably. This starts with how you welcome them into the first lab.

- Arrive in the lab room at least 15 minutes before you lab begins, or even earlier if you have to prepare displays or materials.
- Create a rapport by chatting with students as they enter the lab room – about the weather, the latest episode of The Big Bang Theory - anything really.
- Start the lab on time. **The start time is 10 minutes after the time listed on ROSI (usually ten minutes past the hour).**
- Begin with an introduction and offer some background on yourself (e.g., where you are from, what lab you are working in, what you are studying, what you find interesting and exciting about this course).
- Consider a game or activity to allow the students to introduce themselves to you and each other, (for example, Ice-Breakers: Getting to Know Your Class[4]) but be mindful of the amount of time that this will take.
- Introduce the lab structure, policies and schedules, referring to lab manuals, the website/blackboard and other relevant material. Do not forget to talk about aspects that may be specific to your labs and teaching style (e.g., how students may contact you outside of the lab or how you handle discussions).

- Make sure you review relevant safety information and point out emergency equipment (see Chapter 2).
- Lead into the contents of the first lab.

4.3 DURING EACH LAB

Usually labs begin with a short (10-15 minutes) introductory talk by you, which sets up the lab topic and schedule, and explains methods and techniques to be used by the students, or materials they have to explore. Depending on the course, you may be provided with finished slides, or you may be asked to design your own intro talk. Either way, don't take this short talk lightly – it sets the tone for your labs and can be an effective tool in getting students interested in the topic to be covered. For example, you could highlight a cool or surprising aspect related to the topic, or connect the content to a related news story to get going.

Your job isn't done once you have finished the talk and students are working on lab content. Circulate through the lab and check on how students progress, whether there are problems or questions, and monitor safety. Try to talk to each student or group at least once, asking about their progress, questions or thoughts and ideas.

You will get a range of questions from students, but there are two quick rules to keep in mind when answering them:
1. If students ask whether their answer or solution is correct, don't answer with a yes or no. Instead, have the students support their decision with facts and let them explain their reasoning for the decision they've made.
2. If students ask you a question you cannot answer, don't try to come up with an answer or refuse to answer it. Nobody expects you to be an expert in all areas of the course, so it is perfectly acceptable to state that you do not know the answer. Be honest. Make a note of the question and let the students know that you will try to find the answer for them, or sit down with the students and discuss how they might go about finding the answer themselves.

Keep time in mind and ensure that all students or groups schedule their time properly to finish the lab program. Check out CTSI [Time Management in the Classroom](#)[5] page for some useful tips.

Also remember that students need sufficient time to clean up their work stations. In most labs, it is the students' responsibility to clean up work benches and put away equipment or material once they have finished their work. However, at the end of the lab it is your responsibility to leave a clean, organized and ready lab room for the next lab period and TA. This means that you need to ensure students clean up properly, and if not, you will need to finish up for them. Leave your lab room in the state that you want to find it when you start your lab!

Get in the habit of jotting down notes about what works and what doesn't work during each lab, and whether you had a lot of questions regarding a particular aspect. Labs are a work in progress, and the team running the course will be interested in hearing these points for future offerings. For further tips on lab teaching visit the [Effective Lab Teaching](#)[6] page from the CTSI.

Don't expect to get everything right during the first lab, or that every lab will go equally well. Teaching is a continuing process of learning, and part of that process involves making mistakes - and learning from them! Consider the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation's list of [10 commonly made TA mistakes][7]:

Reference: Buskist, William (2000). Common mistakes made by graduate teaching assistants and suggestions for correcting them. Teaching of Psychology, 27 (4),280-282.

1. **Starting class cold** – Rather than jumping right in with the assigned material, Buskist suggests asking yourself a few questions first. "*Are students already familiar with this concept? Is there an everyday example I could use to pique students' interest in the concept? How might the concept relate to recent events in students' lives?*" (p. 280)

2. **Reviewing graded materials at the beginning of class** – Unfortunately, this often leaves students mulling over the feedback and not focusing on the material. Wait until the end of class to distribute the graded material. Let the students know they can speak to you after class if they have any questions or concerns.

3. **Projecting a nervous presence** - Most beginning teachers (and some experienced ones, too) feel uncomfortable and look it. Consider having your teaching recorded then reviewed by you and others. The Teaching Assistant Training Program offers [Microteaching][8] sessions that may be of help to you.

4. **Difficulty integrating major points** - It is sometimes difficult for beginning teachers to use effective links and connections between major points of the material. Buskist has another set of questions that will help you develop transitions and a more coherent whole. *"How can I link these topics together? Is there an example or demonstration I can use to link these topics? What questions might I pose to help students see such linkages?"* (p. 281)

5. **Relying too heavily on notes** – As a graduate student, you are most likely used to writing long complicated sentences. However, these are meant to be read not heard. Reading these notes aloud can quickly bore even a motivated crowd. Solution: make an outline of the material. Put it on the board or overhead and lecture from that. It has the added advantage of helping students organize their notes.

6. **Not talking to the class** – Students are more likely to respond and engage with the material if you face them and speak to them directly.

7. **Giving ambiguous demonstrations** - Demonstrations are an excellent, active learning technique with great potential for getting students' attention and making important points in the process. Those benefits accrue only if the point of the demonstration is clear.

8. **Posing vague questions** - Often the "vague" question is really just a very open one designed to give students lots of latitude when they respond. Unfortunately, they don't know that. Many believe that all questions have right answers and since they don't know the answer to this one, they must not understand the question. Buskist includes an example of a vague

question: *"What do we know about attribution?"* Compare that question with these more effective ones: *"What are the key elements of attributions?"* or *"In attribution, what is the relationship among consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness?"*

9. **Not reinforcing student participation** – You should always acknowledge student effort and give praise when it is merited. Students will not participate if their comments and answers are ignored.

10. **Not repeating students' questions or comments** – This is especially important in a larger class. Repeat the question or comment or ask the student to say it again so that everyone can hear.

Keep track of what worked and what didn't, where you felt comfortable and where you didn't, and how you solved problems or didn't manage to. You will eventually find the teaching style and approach that works best for you.

5.0 MARKING

Marking will likely be an important component of your TA position. Whatever specific assignment you are grading, your overall aim is to strive to be fair and consistent.

- **Being Fair.** You should assign grades based on student performance in the given assignment.

- **Being Consistent**. You should apply standards equally between students and across assignments.

Consider why you are marking a specific assignment. There are several goals the course instructor may have for the marking of a given assessment. These may include:
- To provide feedback to the students about their learning.
- Assess student learning and evaluate performance.

5.1 BEFORE YOU START TO MARK

Deciding where marking will take place is an important first consideration:

Exams/Midterms: Marking of exams and midterms should be done in a secure on-campus location, like a lab, prep-room or office. As a rule, test papers should not be taken off campus and any exceptions should be approved by the course instructor. Test papers should be stored on campus under lock and key.

Other Work: Unlike with exams and midterms, TAs can usually choose where to mark other types of student work (e.g., quizzes, assignments), but it is best to not take student work off campus. One strategy for keeping track of student work if you are going to be moving between different locations, is to count the number of pieces of student work before and after marking in a particular location.

Before you start to mark any student work, be sure to:
1. Review the rubric, or marking scheme provided by the course instructor.
2. If you have any questions about the marking rubric, then ask your course instructor to clarify them **prior** to beginning to mark.
3. Double-check what the course policy is on accepting late submissions, and whether or not they will receive a penalty.
4. If many TAs will be marking the same test or assignment it may be effective to organize a Peer Marking session. Form a group with several TAs (be sure to include one experienced TA in a group of inexperienced TAs) and mark 2-3 tests or assignments together. Once everyone feels comfortable marking consistently with the provided rubric or answer keys you can go your separate ways to finish marking the rest. Although it may not seem so at first, this initial peer marking session does speed up the process and helps with consistency in marking!

You may find these links useful on what you should do prior to marking:
- [What Comes Before Marking](#)[1]:
- [Effective Lab Teaching](#)[2]:

5.2 THE MARKING PROCESS

When you start to mark the assignment, be sure to:
- Do a quick scan of several papers prior to writing anything on them. Double check the rubric or marking scheme to make sure you understand it. Some TAs find it helpful to do an initial sort of the papers into excellent, good, fair, and poor categories.
- Mark student work in pen. It is alright to do an initial round of marking in pencil, but you must be sure to mark the final round in pen. Note that students are not able to request a remark of their work if it is written in pencil, or if it is marked in pencil. Do not use the same coloured ink for marking that the student used to write with.
- Write feedback to the student on the assessment. This feedback should be succinct, helpful, and respectful. Always attempt to highlight positive aspects of the work in addition to suggestions. In general, it is best to start with a positive comment, followed by a criticism.
- Remember to put a line through (strike out) any blank areas of the assessment. This will clearly show that work was not written on those areas should the student re-submit their assignment or test for remarking.
- Your comments and marks should help a student understand why she/he did not get a mark for a particular aspect of her/his work. These comments should also help you explain your decision when students request it.
- If you are marking an assignment or test with multiple questions/sections, you may find it helpful to mark page 1 of the test on all submissions, and then move on to page 2 of the test for all submissions, and so on.
- When you finish marking, you should check your consistency by reviewing the first few papers you marked, to be sure they weren't marked harder or easier than the following papers.
- Note that the department of biology does **not** "grade on a curve". Never adjust student grades unless you have received explicit instructions from the course instructor to do so. (e.g., if a question is removed from a midterm test due to ambiguity).
- Plagiarism and academic dishonesty: If you think that a student has plagiarized a submission or committed any other form of academic dishonesty, you are required to bring it to the attention of the course instructor immediately. Do not approach the student regarding the suspected office (see Chapter 6).
- Enter the grades into the appropriate gradebook platform (such as Blackboard) as directed by the course instructor. Be sure to always keep a back-up file of the grades you have entered. Note that any file that contains student numbers needs to be encrypted.

You may find that using abbreviations such as those in the following table to be helpful in speeding up the marking process, especially with larger or very numerous assignments:

Marking Symbol	Meaning
¶	new paragraph
awk.	Awkward
colloq.	colloquial usage of a term or phrase
consol.	consolidate two sentences into one
del.	delete
frag.	sentence fragment
ital.	italicize
ref?	reference missing
repet.	repetitive
run-on	run-on sentence
sp.	spelling error
w.c.	word choice
w.m.	word missing

If you choose to use these or other forms of short hand, be sure to let your students know what they each mean.

5.3 RETURNING GRADED WORK

Marked assignments and tests should be returned to the students punctually. Always check with the instructor when the desired time is to return the work to the students.

When you return the graded work to the student, keep in mind that:
- You need to return the work directly to the student, and never leave a pile of submissions unattended. For example, never leave a pile of assignments outside your lab to be picked up by the students.
- If you are going to return assignments during the lab period, then it will likely be best to do this at the end of the lab, rather than at the beginning.
- Student records, student numbers, and grades, are considered confidential. Thus, never post test scores or assignment scores to let your students know their grade and never verbally tell students their grades.
- If a student wants you to re-grade their work, then refer them to the UTM policy on requesting a remark[3]. Also, check with your course instructor to see what their guidelines are on remarking assignments and tests. Usually, most instructors would like the TA that marked the assignment to do the first re-mark. If the student is still concerned that the grade is not reflective of the quality of the work, then the instructor may participate in a second remark.

You may also find it helpful to refer to the CTSI's resource for [handling common student complaints](#) [4].

6.0 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

[The Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#)[1] outlines the academic integrity expectations that UTM students are expected to abide by. Alas, some students will try to cut corners in dishonest ways. Often, these attempts are triggered by stressful situations such as family emergencies or health problems. It is crucial that as a TA you be vigilant to such attempts and follow the protocols set out at UTM for responding to cases where an academic offence is suspected.

6.1 ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

At UTM, any of the following are considered academic misconduct:
- Forgery
- Use or possession of unauthorized aids
- Impersonation
- Plagiarism
- Resubmission of work
- False or concocted references

The [Definition of Academic Misconduct](#)[2] and a detailed description of what constitutes academic misconduct are available through the Office of Student Academic Integrity (OSAI). Certainly, the ideal situation is to prevent such offences from occurring altogether. One strategy to help with this is to ensure students know what constitutes academic misconduct. Most likely, students will have been introduced to UTM's definition of academic dishonesty already, but it is worth reinforcing the message. The Office of Student Academic Integrity offers tips for [how to promote academic integrity](#)[3] and you may also find it helpful to refer to the University's [online academic integrity](#)[2] resources.

Another strategy is to make detection of offences more likely. To this effect, many courses at UTM use an electronic submission process to facilitate the detection of plagiarism. In these courses, students are asked to submit their work through Turnitin (http://www.turnitin.com[4]), where their submission is then compared to a repository of other students' work and websites. Turnitin can then display the overall similarity to other work and highlight portions of the students' submissions with a high degree of similarity to other sources. Based on this 'originality report', you then make the decision on whether to forward your findings to the course instructor or not. Keep in mind that Turnitin does not detect plagiarism; it merely provides you a measure that can be used to determine whether plagiarism has likely occurred. It is the course instructor who decides whether the amount of overlap between a student's work and other source material is sufficient to warrant the accusation of plagiarism. This amount can vary depending on the type of work submitted. For instance, when students have to answer questions for an assignment, they may repeat the question before they provide their answer, which may result in a significant percentage of their assignment matching with other students' submissions. Clearly, however, this would not constitute plagiarism.

6.2 SUSPECTED ACADEMIC OFFENCES

While some offences are more likely than others, and the circumstances in which they can occur also differ, the procedure to deal with them is always the same. If you suspect a student of having committed an academic offence, you **must**:
- Inform the instructor immediately.
- Retain the work submitted by the student if the alleged offence relates to this submission.
- Pass on all relevant material to the instructor, such as assignments, doctor's notes, emails, etc.

Do **not**:
- Hand back the student's work.
- Post the mark for the allegedly dishonest work, or inform the student in any other way of the mark. If you suspect that a student has plagiarized an assignment you should immediately stop marking the assignment.
- Inform the student that she/he is suspected of having committed an academic offence. **If the student insists on asking you about the reasons for the missing mark, refer her/him to the course instructor.**

The instructor will then, based on the submitted material, request a meeting with the student. If the student admits to the offence, the matter will be passed on to the chair of the department or the dean, depending on the severity of the offence (e.g., weight of assignment, repeated offence). If the student does not admit to the offence, matters will be passed on to the divisional level. You can refer to a complete online description of these steps for [how to handle a suspected academic offence](#)[5]. Note that these are the responsibility of the instructor. You may be asked to provide additional documents or information if necessary, but once you have informed the instructor and passed on relevant material/information, you will no longer be involved in the process.

Keep in mind that you should not comment in any way to the student about the case. If the student inquires about the consequences or the progress of her/his case, refer the student to the instructor or undergraduate advisor. Reviewing the frequently asked questions (FAQ) resources maintained by the [OSAI](#)[6] and the [CTSI](#)[7] will help ensure you respond appropriately.

7.0 SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

7.1 RECOGNIZING A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

The smaller nature of tutorial and practical sessions helps to promote a learning environment that is collaborative, interactive and more personal than most lecture formats. These environments put Teaching Assistants in unique positions to identify students who are experiencing personal difficulty. Recognizing the signs of distress and responding with care and concern could prove to be a significant factor in helping students resolve problems that might otherwise interfere with their academic and personal success.

Signs of distress include a range of behavioural indicators that can appear on their own or in combination and in varying magnitude. It's important to remember that "normal" behaviour looks different for everyone so there is no one set of signs to look out for. What's often most helpful, and what TAs are well situated to do, is to recognize behaviours as different from how a student usually behaves. These changes are often important and create an opportunity to check in with a student to see if you can facilitate a helping connection.

Some of the behaviour changes that might indicate that a student is experiencing difficulty may include:
- Changes in mood or behaviour: withdrawal, extreme sadness, anger, anxiety, disruptive behaviour, unprovoked hostility or anger
- Performance or academic indicators: deteriorating academic performance, unexplained absences, missed assignments and deadlines, disruptive or unusual classroom behaviour
- Personal indicators: expressing a need for help, feelings of sadness or distress, helplessness, or worthlessness
- Physical indicators: deterioration in appearance, lack of personal hygiene, excessive fatigue and irritability.

Remember that these indicators can vary in degree and may appear/occur alone or in combination.

7.2 KNOWING WHEN TO ACT

Other than situations where there is a clear threat to life, it can be difficult to know when it's appropriate to act on your concern that a student may be experiencing difficulty. If you notice one or more of the indicators identified in section 7.1 or you simply have a "gut" feeling that something is amiss, this is an opportunity for you to check-in with the student to learn more and get a better sense of her/his situation. You may learn that the indicators that are your reasons for expressing concern are simply the result of the student having an "off-day" as we all do from time-to-time. If, however, you are still concerned about the student you should let your course instructor know about your concerns.

7.3 Steps to Making an Effective Referral

Depending on your comfort level, and your degree of concern, you may choose to share information about campus resources to support and suggest that a student seek out these resources. This section provides one way of approaching making such a suggestion, however, rest assured that in any given situation there are several "right ways" to reach out to a student in a caring manner. The only real risk is in doing nothing at all.

Listen, Empathize & Understand the Situation
- Listen carefully to the student as s/he describes the situation. Take the situation seriously and non-judgmentally, and show concern using supportive communication.
- Acknowledge the student's thoughts and feelings. Ask questions to clarify that you understand his/her specific needs.
- As best as possible, set aside personal judgment, biases and assumptions to determine what the student needs from you, and how you can be most helpful.
- Do not promise confidentiality. Instead, reassure the student that you will treat what the student chooses to share with sensitivity and discretion.

Identify the Problem & Opportunities for Help
Describe to the student what it is that you hear her/him saying. This is reassurance that you are truly listening, and will help you to identify the source of distress, but do not try to diagnose the student. If you believe that the student should speak to someone else, consider asking "Are you talking to anyone about this?" Encourage her/him to choose the most appropriate option, but do so in a manner that demonstrates your care, support and concern.

When advising a student to seek counselling, remember that doing so is optional. The University cannot require/mandate a student to engage in therapeutic/psychological care. Do not use deception or tricks to convince the student to seek help – supporting his/her independent decision to speak with a professional is the best option.

Try to communicate that your recommendation for the student to seek counseling is based upon your judgment and observed behaviours. Be specific about the behaviours, and avoid generalizing the health of the individual.

Making the Referral
Let the student know why you aren't the appropriate person to speak to. Honestly acknowledging your own limitations can help to build rapport and trust. Reassure the student that the staff in the UTM Health & Counselling Centre[1] (www.utm.utoronto.ca/health) work with students with a wide range of concerns and that they are better equipped to help individuals before the situation grows in complexity or severity.

Sometimes, helping a student decide to contact a counsellor or other professional helper can take some work. Often this is because of fear or apprehension about seeking additional help. Sharing whatever information you have about support service can help to help alleviate fear and apprehension. You may also want to consider the potential of the following supportive phrases to help overcome the fear:

"We all need some kind of help at some time, even if it is only talking to someone who can listen without criticism."

"Seeking help is a sign of strength and courage rather than a sign of weakness or failure."

"It is a sign of increasing maturity when a person knows when it is time to seek some help."

"Seeking professional help for other problems (e.g., medical, legal, car problems) is considered good judgment and an appropriate use of resources. If you had a broken arm, you would go to a doctor rather than set it yourself."

"The services at the Health & Counselling Centre are free and confidential."

Know your own limitations, and consult with Student Affairs (905.828.3872) or the Health & Counselling Centre (905.828.5255) to determine what referral is appropriate. Your responsibility as a TA is to report problems and to make appropriate referrals. You are not responsible for providing ongoing support and, outside of emergency situations, you are not responsible for protecting someone's wellbeing.

Regardless of whether a student expresses a willingness to seek help or not, if you are concerned about a student you should **report the situation to the course instructor**. Sometimes issues and situations are complex, and the course instructor may choose to connect with the Office of Student Affairs or the Health & Counselling Centre to help facilitate the appropriate and relevant support services and potential response.

DEALING WITH AN EMERGENCY
An emergency is defined as a situation in which a person's life is in immediate danger (e.g., suicidal or homicidal threat). In emergency situations involving students who are unwilling or unable to seek help on their own, Teaching Assistants are required to call the Health & Counselling Centre, the Office of Student Affairs, or UTM Campus Police.

If you have any indication that someone will be of harm to her/himself, or to others, you should take action and contact the appropriate university officials. However, do not compromise your own safety and security (both physical and emotional) in doing so.

7.4 safeTALK: Suicide Alertness For Everyone

safeTALK is a 4-hour training session that prepares participants to identify people with thoughts of suicide and to connect them with suicide first aid resources in our community. safeTALK is available to anyone at UTM. In addition to helping to make our community safer from suicide, participants will receive a certificate for completion of this internationally recognized training.

Most people with thoughts of suicide invite help to stay safe. safeTALK-trained alert helpers know how to use these opportunities to support that desire for safety. Through examples, discussion and practice, you will learn practical steps to help activate a suicide alert that connects someone having thoughts of suicide with more specialized intervention care.

Teaching Assistants may [register online for safeTALK](#)[2] through the Health & Counselling Centre webpage.

$\textbf{8.0}$ TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL TEACHING

8.1 IMPROVING YOUR TEACHING

If you choose to continue on in academia teaching will likely be a major component of your career. Fortunately, there are numerous resources available to help you improve on your teaching. Every university has a teaching and learning centre that you can go to for assistance. For example, the University of Toronto has the Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation[1] (CTSI; www.teaching.utoronto.ca). The CTSI webpage has numerous resources that you may find useful including:
- A section dedicated to Graduate Students and TAs[2]
- Teaching Assistants' Training Program[3]
- Professional Development Workshops[4]
- Effective Lab Teaching[5]

8.2 DEVELOPING YOUR TEACHING PORTFOLIO

A teaching portfolio is a means by which you can express your experience, opinions and philosophy on teaching, accompanied by supporting material. Keep in mind that it is a representative sample of your work, and is not an "all-inclusive-everything-I've-ever-done-catchall".

Most teaching dossiers consist of two parts:
> (1) Your teaching philosophy and summary of teaching experiences, and
> (2) the evidence that provides support for Part 1.

A sample teaching dossier table of contents may look like this:
1. Teaching philosophy (~2 pages)
2. Teaching experiences, strategies, and reflections
3. List of courses you have taught or been a TA for
4. Sample syllabi
5. Teaching evaluations, by students, course instructors, and supervisors.
6. Evidence of professional development (such as abstracts from conference presentations, and professional development course descriptions)
7. List of teaching awards
8. Student letters of thanks; student reflections on your teaching.

When writing your teaching philosophy and reflective statement, you may find that asking yourself questions about your teaching to be helpful. Potential questions may include:
- How do you approach teaching?
- What is your teaching style?
- What teaching methods do you use?

- Do you teach differently depending on what students you have?
- How have you helped students to learn?
- What steps have you taken to actively improve your teaching?
- What evidence do you have that your teaching is effective?

For further information on developing your teaching portfolio, please refer to the following resources:
- UofT [Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation](#)[6]
- [Canadian Association of University Teachers](#)[7] (CAUT)
- [University of Guelph Teaching Support Services](#)[8]
- [University of British Columbia Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology](#)[9]
- [Queen's University Centre for Teaching and Learning](#)[10]
- Seldin, Peter, & Miller, Elizabeth. *The Academic Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Documenting Teaching, Research, and Service.* San Francisco, CA: 2009.

The staff at the [Robert Gillespie Academic Resource Centre](#)[11] (www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc) at UTM are also an excellent resource for getting started on a teaching portfolio.

8.3 SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, or "SoTL", is a field that is quickly growing throughout secondary and post-secondary education. It involves the thorough scholarly analysis of student learning and teaching strategies, followed by the communication of those strategies to the larger academic community through publication and presentation. If you are interested in learning more about the scholarship of teaching and learning, you could peruse some of these journals:

[CBE Life Sciences Education](#)[12]
[Journal of Biological Education](#)[13]
[Journal of Chemical Education](#)[14]
[Journal of Research in Science Teaching](#)[15]
[Bioscience Education](#)[16]

9.0 LIBRARY RESOURCES

Every course is a little different and depending on the assignments and the content covered, different resources will be relevant to your role as a Teaching Assistant. This section is meant to ensure you are aware of a range of available resources for you to pick and choose depending on your individual context. And, of course, if in doubt, you can always contact the Biology Liaison Librarian, Mindy Thuna at mindy.thuna@utoronto.ca.

9.1 LIBRARY RESOURCES

Rather than walk you through all the myriad encyclopedias, dictionaries, journals, and databases available to you as a Biology TA at UTM, here are Library web links that can tell you everything you will likely need to know (and then some):

UTM Library Biology Page[1] – This webpage is geared towards biology undergraduate students and includes information tweaked to their more specific needs.

UTM Library Excel Pages[2] – Ahh… Excel. This page covers the use of Excel from the basics as well as some of the statistical features of the program that might be required in a biology course.

UTM Library Blackboard for Teaching Page[3] – Your involvement with Bb for teaching will depend on the course and the course instructor, but for those of you who need this link, it will be very helpful. Click on the subtopics on the left hand side of the page for detailed instructions on a range of Blackboard related topics.

9.2 WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM YOUR STUDENTS

The students in your lab will have already had some exposure to the Library and its resources. As part of BIO 152, a required course for Biology, students begin to learn about the Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre as well as research at a post-secondary level. To give you an idea of the baseline level of knowledge you can expect from your students, what follows is an entire appendix that is included in the BIO 152 lab manual.

9.3 A PRIMER ON THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

Peer review refers to a process used by journals to prevent the publication of irrelevant experiments, unsupported interpretations, bad science and biased opinions. When an article is submitted to a peer reviewed journal, the editors locate peers (i.e., other scientists in a similar or related field) and have them critique the article based on a range of criteria, including the writing itself, the methodology used, the assumptions made, the validity of the hypothesis, the appropriateness of the experimental design, the relevance of the research to the field of study, the conclusions drawn and the interpretations made. Peer review may also be called *refereed* as the peers are expected to be neutral, have authority within the field, and their judgment is used to make a final 'call' or decision. These peers recommend whether or not an article is acceptable for publication. Depending on the areas of weakness identified, the author is given the opportunity to fix/address the problems and resubmit the article for further review.

A **Scholarly Article** is an article that is published in a peer-reviewed journal (also called a *scholarly journal*). These articles may be written by one person or by many people. A scholarly article is intended for a professional or academic reader and the language in which it is written tends to be formal and scientific (i.e., lots of hard to understand terminology!). Be aware that not all items in a scholarly journal are scholarly articles. A peer-reviewed journal will also publish opinions (also called editorials), news items, letters to the editor, and book reviews. Some of these other items might include a reference or two but a scholarly article ALWAYS includes a list of references.

Another type of publication that you might find is a **Magazine** and/or **Newspaper Article** (also called a *popular article* as they are written in a language that is easily understood by the majority of the population). Unless your assignment indicates you can use these as a source, they are best avoided as they are not peer-reviewed and are not original research.
Another set of terms that you need to be aware of are **Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources**. These terms define a resource based on how close to the original research the information is. Thus, a **primary source** comes first and contains original research on which other research is based. This is usually the first formal appearance of experimental results and MUST contain a results section and be written in the first person, e.g., "I (or we) conducted this experiment". A **secondary source** comes next and describes, interprets, analyzes, evaluates, comments on, and discusses the content found in the primary source. In other words, the content of a secondary source repackages and reorganizes the already published information. The final level is a **tertiary source**, which compiles, analyzes and condenses secondary sources into a convenient, easy-to-read form.

Resources
This video defines and explains the peer review process from start to finish.
http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/pr/

Citation and Citation Management
A **citation** is a reference to a specific work or portion of a work (e.g. a book chapter). A citation is composed of different pieces of information depending on what type of material is being cited. Therefore if you know how to read a citation and an item is cited correctly, you can tell

immediately if you are looking for a journal, a book, a magazine, or a different source. To confuse things further, there are different citations styles. You have probably heard of some of them – MLA, APA, Chicago, ACS, CSE (to name a few acronyms). The most important thing to remember is that the style is just the way a journal or organization has decided they want the information in the citation to look – i.e. the order and formatting of the information, but MOST of the information you need should be there regardless of the style used. For this course you need to be familiar with the Citation Style used by the journal Nature. In the sections below, I have colour coded examples of the most common items you will need to cite to help you identify the required information from each source.

Books
A citation to a book always includes publisher information. As journals, magazines and newspapers do not, books are relatively easy to identify.

A typical book citation looks like this:
Author. *Book Title.* (Publisher,Year).
Karl T. R., Melillo J. M., Peterson T. C. Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

The one tricky thing about a book is that sometimes you will have a citation that refers to a particular chapter in a book. This means you will have more than one title – the book title and the chapter title BUT, unlike journals, magazines, and newspapers, you will still have the publisher information included at the end.

Here is an example of what I mean:
Debe, M. K. in Handbook of Fuel Cells—Fundamentals, Technology and Applications (eds Vielstich, W., Lamm, A. & Gasteiger, H. A.) Ch. 45 (John Wiley & Sons, 2003)

As you can see, there is a lot of extra information that was not in a 'typical' book citation.

Journal Articles
There are two key pieces to a journal article citation – one is that you have two titles (one for the article and one for the journal) and the other is that you will have a volume, sometimes an issue, and then page numbers for the article.

A typical journal citation looks like this:
Author. Article Title*. Journal Title, Volume*(Issue)*,* Pages (Year)
Vörösmarty, C. J., Green, P., Salisbury, J. & Lammers, R. Global water resources: vulnerability from climate change and population growth. Science *289*, 284–288 (2000)

Webpage
References to websites should give authors if known, title of cited page, URL in full, and year of posting in parentheses.

A typical webpage citation looks like this:

Author. Page Title*. URL.* (Year)

Convention on Biological Diversity. Text of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
http://www.biodiv.org/convention/articles.asp. (2004)

Resources
- How to cite references in Nature Style:
  http://www.nature.com/nature/authors/gta/index.html#a5.4
- Sample Nature Paper:
  http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=http://simplelink.library.utoronto.ca/url.cfm/128294

Citation Management - Refworks
In class you will be (or have been) introduced to the citation management tool called Refworks.
Here is a step by step guide to the key things you need to know/understand/do to make it work
for you.

Step A. Set up an account
1. Go to Refworks - either via the Library Resources link in portal OR via the biology webpage
   of the UTM library www.library.utm.utoronto.ca/biology
2. Click on "Sign up for an Individual Account" and fill out the form to complete your
   registration.

Step B. Create a folder (or folders)
1. Click on Folders tab.
2. Create a new folder for your course.

Step C. Bring references into your folders
1. There are 2 steps to bringing your references into your folders, but which two steps they
   are depends on the database you choose to search.
2. Direct Download:
   a. In certain databases you can download citations directly into Refworks with the
      click of a button.
   b. Once they are imported into RefWorks you need to move them to your folder.
3. Indirect Download:
   a. In certain databases you must download your citations into a file.
   b. Once you have downloaded the file you can then import it into Refworks directly
      into the folder of your choice.
4. To determine which method you need to use, click on the pull down Help menu and choose
   Launch Help Menu
5. Within the Help Menu click on the Index. Type Data Vendors into the search box. This will
   pull up a list called "Importing from online data vendors", which gives instructions for
   importing from any database.

Step D. Get references out of your folders and into Microsoft Word (Mac and PC)
1. Click on the pull down Tools menu and choose Write-N-Cite.
2. Choose the version that you want and download the utility.
3. How utility displays depends on which version of Microsoft Word you have on your computer. If you have MS Vista or Word 2007 an icon will be visible in the Add-Ins tab. In earlier versions, an icon will be visible in the top menu.
4. When you are ready to cite a source, click on the icon, it will open up RefWorks. Choose the items you wish to cite and they will be placed in your document. The document will look odd as the computer will use it's own code. When you are finished, click on Bibliography and choose the format you want. Your document will be reformatted and your bibliography will be automatically generated.

Searching (and finding) the literature:

Keywords are descriptive words used when you search for information on any topic. Typically, your results will include these words in the title, abstract, or subject heading/descriptor, depending on where you conduct your search. These words can be broad or narrow depending on the information that you are trying to find. A good way to come up with keywords is to use the same types of terms you would use when designing a concept map (see Appendix 1).

A **database** is a collection of data that has been systematically organized. The University of Toronto Library purchases access to databases that include citations to scholarly journal articles to help you find these articles more easily using keywords relating to your topic. The UTM library's biology webpage includes links to the most important databases for searching and finding biology papers – www.library.utm.utoronto.ca/biology

10.0 RESOURCES & REFERENCES

CHAPTER 1

1. TA Responsibilities: Policies Your Need to Know
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/ta-toolkit/ta-responsibilities.htm

2. Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters
   http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm

3. Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act (FIPPA)
   http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90f31_e.htm

4. FIPPA Questions & Answers for Instructors
   http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/Assets/Provost+Digital+Assets/Provost/Provost+Digital+Assets/Provost/fippa+Q$!26A+for+Faculty.pdf

5. FIPPA and the Application to the University of Toronto
   http://www.fippa.utoronto.ca/

6. Sexual Harassment on Campus: Information for Graduate Students and Teaching Assistants
   http://sho.utoronto.ca/guides/information-for-graduate-students/

7. Conflict of Interest and Close Personal Relations
   http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/policy/relations.htm

8. University of Toronto Mission & Purpose
   http://www.utoronto.ca/about-uoft/mission-and-purpose.htm

9. Ontario Human Rights Code
   http://www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ohrc/Default.asp

10. Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
    http://www.aoda.ca/

11. UofT Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
    http://www.aoda.utoronto.ca/

12. Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office
    http://www.antiracism.utoronto.ca/

13. Community Safety Office
    http://www.communitysafety.utoronto.ca/about-us.htm

14. Family Care Office
    http://www.familycare.utoronto.ca/

15. Sexual & Gender Diversity Office

http://www.sgdo.utoronto.ca/

16. Sexual Harassment Office
    http://sho.utoronto.ca/welcome/

17. Status of Women Office
    http://www.status-women.utoronto.ca/

18. Code of Student Conduct
    http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/studentc.htm

19. UofT Sexual Harassment Policies & Procedures
    http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/sexual.htm

20. UofT Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment
    http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/harass.htm

21. Access*Ability* Resource Centre
    http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/accessability/

22. Appropriate Use of Information & Communication Technology
    http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/policy/use.htm

23. Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation
    http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/home.htm

24. Ethical Principles In University Teaching
    http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/ta-toolkit/ethical-principles.htm

25. Responding to Student Diversity
    http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/student-diversity.htm

CHAPTER 2

1. Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System
   http://www.ehs.utoronto.ca/Training/Learning.htm

CHAPTER 3

1. CUPE Local 3092
   http://cupe3902.org/

2. UofT Administrative Management System
   http://www.hrandequity.utoronto.ca/resources/ess/opsafnae.htm

3. UTM Computing Services – Scantron Booking
   http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/computing-services/

4. Paid Training Opportunities for Teaching Assistants

http://cupe3902.org/unit-1/ta-training/paid-training/

5. Information for CUPE 3902 Unit 1 Teaching Assistants
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/training/cupe3902-1.htm

6. CTSI's Tutorial Training Information
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/training/tutorial/ta.htm

CHAPTER 4

1. Your Relationship with the Course Instructor
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/course-instructor.htm

2. Class Lists using Blackboard
   http://library.utm.utoronto.ca/faculty/blackboard/hurry3

3. The First Class
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/first-class-ta.htm

4. Ice-Breakers: Getting to Know Your Class
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/ice-breakers.htm

5. Time Management in the Classroom
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/time-management.htm

6. Effective Lab Teaching
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/lab-teaching.htm

7. 10 Common Teaching Mistakes TAs Make
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/ta-toolkit/common-mistakes.htm

8. TATP Microteaching
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/events/microteaching.htm

CHAPTER 5

1. What Comes Before Marking?
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/before-marking.htm

2. Effective Lab Teaching
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/lab-teaching.htm

3. Remarking Pieces of Term Work
   https://registrar.utm.utoronto.ca/student/calendar/calendar_detail2.pl?Topic=Term%20Work%20Regulations

4. Handling Common Student Complaints

http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/student-complaints.htm

CHAPTER 6

1. Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters
   http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm

2. Academic Offenses: Definition
   http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/what-is-academic-misconduct

3. Smart Strategies for Promotion of Academic Integrity
   http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/smart-strategies

4. Turnitin
   http://www.turnitin.com

5. How To Handle a Suspected Academic Offense – 5 Steps
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching/academicintegrity/ai-instructor/5-steps.htm

6. OSAI – Frequently Asked Questions from Instructors and Staff
   http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/instructors-and-staff/faq-instructors-and-staff

7. Academic Integrity and the Role of the TA
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teachingtopics/academic_intregrity-ta.htm

CHAPTER 7

1. UTM Health & Counselling Centre
   http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/

2. safeTALK
   http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/health-promotion/safetalk

CHAPTER 8

1. Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/

2. CTSI: Graduate Students and TAs
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta.htm

3. CTSI: Teaching Assistants' Training Program
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/about-tatp.htm

4. CTSI: Workshops & Events
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/events.htm

5. CTSI: Effective Lab Teaching
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/teaching-essentials/lab-teaching.htm

6. CTSI: Teaching Dossier
   http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/topics/documenting-teaching/teaching-dossier.htm

7. CAUT: Teaching Dossier
   http://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/professional-advice/teaching-dossier.pdf

8. University of Guelph: Teaching Dossier
   http://www.uoguelph.ca/tss/resources/idres/packagetd.html

9. University of British Columbia: Teaching Dossier
   http://ctlt.ubc.ca/resources/teaching/portfolios/

10. Queen's University: Teaching
    http://www.queensu.ca/ctl/resources/publications/teachingdossier.html

11. UTM Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre
    http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/

12. CBE Life Sciences Education
    http://www.lifescied.org/

13. Journal of Biological Education
    http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjbe20/current

14. Journal of Chemical Education
    http://pubs.acs.org/journal/jceda8/

15. Journal of Research in Science Teaching
    http://www.utoronto.ca/sho/index.htm

16. Bioscience Education
    http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/journal/

CHAPTER 9

1. UTM Library - Biology
   http://library.utm.utoronto.ca/biology

2. UTM Library - Excel
   http://library.utm.utoronto.ca/excel

3. UTM Library – Blackboard for Teaching
   http://library.utm.utoronto.ca/faculty/blackboard