Resources for Teaching Assistants

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Teaching assistants perform a wide range of tasks within and across different academic departments. In the past, most teaching assistants had learned their tasks simply by doing them. However, teaching assistants do not have to learn everything on their own. Learning from others can be a valuable and timesaving component to completing one’s responsibilities. The purpose of this short paper is to provide teaching assistants with a (partial) list of resources that can be used to help teaching assistants successfully carry out their responsibilities. I have divided the resources into several (overlapping) categories: Other People, Publications, Web Resources, and Centres of Teaching and Learning. However, the most useful resource teaching assistants have is themselves. So that’s where we will start...

One’s self: to improve one’s TA skills, one needs to recognize that there is help available. For example, there are: (1) others that have experienced similar TA situations, including supervisory faculty members, (2) publications, such as journal articles, books, and videos, on effective practices, (3) web-based resources, and (4) Centres of Teaching and Learning, all of which can be excellent resources for learning more about your TA issue(s).

Knowing that such resources exist is a first step. Figuring out how to tap or utilize each resource effectively is next.

(1) Others (TA peers, graduate students, and faculty supervisor):

- **TA Peers**
  - Find out who was the previous TA and talk to them about your responsibilities
  - Ask if they have any tips for you

- **Graduate Students**
  - Find out which graduate students have had TA or teaching experience and talk to them about their experiences
  - Ask about teaching tips, and how to balance TA workload with your own course and research work.

- **Faculty Supervisors**
  - Get to know your faculty supervisor and his/her expectations
  - Have these expectations listed on a graduate teaching workload agreement, which can be downloaded at:
    - CSAM - [http://www.unbc.ca/csam/forms.html](http://www.unbc.ca/csam/forms.html) then click on “a graduate teaching workload agreement”
    - CASHS - [http://www.unbc.ca/cashs/forms.html](http://www.unbc.ca/cashs/forms.html) then click on “a graduate teaching workload agreement”
  - See if the faculty supervisor would be willing to give you feedback on how you are doing (e.g., after marking one or two papers, or after teaching a couple of labs/classes). You may also want to ask your students about how you are doing
  - Ask them for tips regarding how to effectively carry out your TA responsibilities
(2) Publications: There are many publications dedicated to teaching in general that can assist you with your TA responsibilities. Some of these publications will be for a general audience (e.g., both chemistry and international studies students), whereas others are discipline specific.

- **Activities Handbooks** These are usually discipline-specific books or manuals that contain classroom exercises. Check with faculty supervisors, the library, on-line book stores such as Amazon or Chapters, or web-based teaching sites by typing in your discipline’s name “+ teaching activities” into a search engine such as GOOGLE.

- **Discipline Specific Teaching Journals** Most, if not all, academic disciplines now have at least one journal dedicated to teaching in their discipline. You can find these journals by typing in your discipline’s name “+ teaching journal” into a search engine such as GOOGLE or via one of the library’s search tools.

- **Books on Teaching** Although each academic discipline has its idiosyncrasies, some of the same teaching and TA issues can be found to be similar in other disciplines. A couple of good books on teaching are listed in the Appendix to this document.

- **Newsletters** National or international research communities or groups, such as the Canadian Psychology Association (CPA) or the American Chemistry Society (ACS), often have teaching divisions that produce newsletters. Other, more general teaching organizations also have newsletters. For example, the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education has a newsletter of general appeal ([http://www.mcmaster.ca/stlhe/welcome.html](http://www.mcmaster.ca/stlhe/welcome.html)).

(3) Web-Based Resources: There are many web-based resources that can help your teaching and TA skills. Again, most national or international research communities or groups have websites that are dedicated to teaching issues. Similarly, there are national and international societies for teaching that have very useful websites. Below is a list of some web-based resources:

The On-Line Faculty Development Associates website has links to over 80 topics, organizations, conferences, etc. This website provides information on issues such as: Active Learning, Classroom Assessment Techniques, Classroom Management, Grade Inflation, Syllabus Development, Student Survival Skills, and many more topics...


(4) Centres of Teaching and Learning: Most universities have a centre for teaching and learning. These centres are gathering points for faculty and teaching assistants so that ideas and resources can be shared. Several centres of teaching and learning post their resources on the web. Below is a list of a few centres of teaching and learning that have useful resources for teachers and teaching assistants...

- **UNBC:** [http://ctl.unbc.ca/](http://ctl.unbc.ca/)
  - Our CTL offers regular brown bag sessions on topics of current interest to faculty and teaching assistants.
  - Fall workshop on teaching
  - Workshops specific to teaching assistants.
“Tech Tips” offers tips for best utilizing technology in the classroom...
http://ctl.unbc.ca/tt/

Teaching Tips: http://ctl.unbc.ca/teach/index.html

- Canada: http://www.ku.edu/~cte/resources/websites/canada.html
  - Has links to 20 CTLs across Canada

- University of Saskatchewan: http://www.usask.ca/ctl/
  - Has information for graduate student teachers, including an on-line Handbook for Grad Student Teachers (found under the “resources” link)
  - Slide presentations for several guest talks can also be found under the “resources” link. Some of the topics include: “why not lecture?” and “on-line learning…”

There are many resources to help you with your teaching assistantship responsibilities. One of the best strategies for helping you with your teaching and teaching assistantships is to talk; talk to other TAs, fellow graduate students, your faculty supervisor, people at UNBC’s Centre for Teaching and Learning, and people on the web.

Examples of Research Societies with Teaching Divisions and/or Teaching Resources

Chemistry: http://www.anachem.umu.se/eks/pointers.htm

Political Science: http://www.apsanet.org/section_168.cfm
   Journal of Political Science Education

Physics: http://www.iop.org/Our_Activities/Schools_and_Colleges/
   http://www.aapt.org/

General: http://www.developfaculty.com/online/index.html

Examples of Books


General teaching tips:

- http://www.csuohio.edu/uctl/tchtips1.html has tips for your first day, including 101 things you can try in the first few weeks.
If you are teaching first year students, you may want to check out this web site: [http://www.flinders.edu.au/teach/teach/firstindex.htm](http://www.flinders.edu.au/teach/teach/firstindex.htm)

**UNBC Resources:**

- Submit Reserve Reading requests to the library (note: reserve request forms can be downloaded from: [http://lib.unbc.ca/pages/services/faculty/reserves.asp](http://lib.unbc.ca/pages/services/faculty/reserves.asp), processing takes up to 5 days)
- Book teaching aids (e.g., computer/projector system, VCR) through Education Media Services (EMS: 6470; [http://www.unbc.ca/ems/](http://www.unbc.ca/ems/))
- Take your course syllabus and other photocopying needs to Copy Services, or submit it on-line at: [http://www.unbc.ca/copy/](http://www.unbc.ca/copy/)
- Order your textbooks and lab manuals via the bookstore [http://www.bookstore.unbc.ca/](http://www.bookstore.unbc.ca/)