



Teaching Tips for International Teaching Assistants

Teaching can be a daunting experience, and the outcome can rely heavily on the relationships that instructors forge with their students. Anxiety about teaching is felt by most graduate teaching instructors, and moreso by students who have English as a second or third language. You may discover that, on occasion, you have trouble understanding your students and they have trouble understanding you. The suggestions below may help with these problems. The following list was provided by Craig Carbol for the 2011 FGSR Teaching Development Week session on Teaching with English as a Second Language.

Tips

1. **Relax.** Those teaching for the first time routinely feel anxious and nervous about their teaching skills and about how their students will receive them. If you are a foreign graduate student and are also adjusting to a new culture and/or language, you may be doubly nervous. But self-confidence will come. Remember: you are very knowledgeable in your subject or you would not have been chosen to teach.
2. **Be well prepared.** If you have been asked to lecture, organize your notes well. Prepare an outline to which you can easily refer. If you are a discussion leader, prepare some questions before coming to class. Try to anticipate student questions.
3. **Improve your English.** Effective communication skills are important to your success as a teacher. Avoid using words you cannot readily pronounce. If your terms might be misunderstood, write them on the chalkboard.
4. **Consult with your professor/supervisor or with other TA's.** If you have difficulties with any aspect of teaching, not acknowledging your need for help will only worsen the situation and may yield poor student evaluations. Talking to others who may have encountered in similar situations alleviate the pressure you feel.
5. **Observe successful teachers.** There are many outstanding teachers at this university. Sit in on sections of successful TAs in your department, especially if they are teaching the same course.
6. **Have students write their questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class.** Planning for your sections, as mentioned earlier, is an important key to your success as a TA. In addition to specifying and sequencing your instructional objectives and selecting appropriate materials and strategies of accomplishing your section goals, you might want to consider the following suggestions in planning your sections:
 7. **Hand-outs.** Develop written materials (i.e., handouts) which summarize or highlight what you intend to cover in a 'given section. The use of handouts can serve as an effective teaching supplement for any TA, but they may be especially useful for you if there is a chance that your students will have difficulty understanding your spoken word.
 8. **Get feedback.** Create an atmosphere in your classroom which promotes open dialogue between you and your students. If you're willing, acknowledge that your English isn't quite perfect (but you're working on it) and encourage students to ask you to clarify what you've said or to help you out if you're mispronouncing something.

9. **Encourage students.** Teach your students to use the phrase, "I do not understand..." The freedom for students to say this may help to further promote open discussions in your sections.
10. **Write it out.** Write new terms or concepts on the board as you introduce them (you should have them on the list you made when planning your section). This will serve to reinforce the new term in writing as you say it. Your students will quickly learn to associate what they see on the board with what you are saying.
11. **Avoid talking with your back to your students.** You will increase the probability of being understood by facing your class while speaking to them. You also provide students with an opportunity to see how you form your words.
12. **Pacing.** Try to speak slowly and clearly so that students will have every opportunity to understand what you are saying.
13. **Clarity.** If you don't understand a question that a student has asked, you can:
 - a. ask the student to repeat or rephrase the question;
 - b. ask another student to rephrase it;
 - c. redirect the question back to the class (e.g., "That's a good question...can someone answer it?");
 - d. attempt to rephrase the question yourself and answer it only after you are sure of what the student is asking.