

First-Day Checklist for TAs

This is a one stop resource for new—and not so new—TAs. Print it out and use it as a guide rather than a mandate and it should get your first section off on the right foot.

As soon as you can

- Meet with your professor and other TAs, obtain copies of section rosters, the course syllabus and texts; clarify the goals for the section and the various roles and responsibilities the TAs and the professor will have to each other and their students. (See CIDR Teaching and Learning Bulletin, v. 9, no. 1 (2005), “Planning Guide for Faculty and TAs” at <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/Bulletin/FacultyTAGuide.html>).
- Immediately after receiving your section assignments, contact your department’s Time Schedule Coordinator and have your section assignments added to your MyUW page. Your professor may want to notify the coordinator, but be sure to follow-up.
- Once your section assignments are activated on MyUW, the class listings, with access to rosters, classroom information, and such, will appear under the Teaching tab in your MyUW account beneath the heading “Teaching Class Schedule.” As soon as it is active, review the information and submit a request to establish a mailing list for each section (mailing list requests are processed overnight).
- Examine your teaching schedule and your own course-load and then schedule your office hours. Before or after lectures or sections are often good times; ask for advice from your professor and other TAs.
- Check out your classroom(s). Does it have the equipment you expect to need? Is the equipment in good working order? Do you know how to operate it? Are there enough seats? If you need assistance or have problems, contact Classroom Support Services (<http://www.css.washington.edu/>). If you have sections in different buildings, identify the shortest route between them.
- Familiarize yourself with the classroom building and include a quick safety orientation. Where are the bathrooms? Drinking fountains? Locate the two nearest exits and the nearest fire alarm, fire extinguisher, and campus phone. Each building should have evacuation plans posted in the hallway; find them, and take a moment to walk the evacuation route and identify the Evacuation Assembly Point.
- Prepare your section syllabus, coordinating it with the course syllabus, and providing your name, office number, office hours, and contact information. It should also clearly outline your expectations of student performance and any specific policies you may have. Double check all dates against the course syllabus and the university’s academic calendar in order to avoid holiday conflicts. Have someone proofread your final draft and plan to have it copied off at least two days before your first section. (See *CIDR Teaching and Learning Bulletin*, v. 9, no. 3 (2006), “Planning the Course Syllabus” available on the CIDR website: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/Bulletin/Syllabus.html>, for more information on preparing a syllabus. Also ask other TAs in your department for samples of their section syllabi.)
- Obtain a binder and tabbed inserts for your section paperwork. See “A Section Binder: Five-Tab Organization” in this handout for ideas about organizing the binder.
- Assemble a classroom survival kit that includes chalk, dry erase markers, overhead pens, an extra pen and pencil, and a few paperclips. If you plan to use a laptop, include a monitor cable and an Ethernet cable.
- Review the course texts.
- If possible, meet with the other course TAs and discuss ideas for first-day lesson plans.
- Draft a lesson plan for the first day, assigning realistic time estimates for each item. Rehearse your lesson plan at least once and make any needed adjustments. That lesson plan should include:
 - An introduction of yourself, including how you would prefer to be addressed.
 - A method to begin learning student names.
 - An icebreaker and introductions.
 - An introduction to the learning goals and objectives of the section, an explanation of their relevance to the student and how the section links to the course.

- The establishment of clear expectations for student performance and behavior, including assessment/grading policies.
- A learning activity similar to those you expect to use throughout the quarter (this could be combined with the ice breaker).
- Time for student questions.
- A way to gather student input about their course-related concerns, motives, and interests (3x5 cards work well).
- Classroom management items such as calling roll and making announcements.
- A two-minute summation or review of that day's activities and a one-minute look ahead to the next section.

Also identify how you will keep track of time in the classroom. Beware: some classrooms do not have working clocks or, if they do, the timepiece is behind you.

Two days before your first section

- Email your students (send a separate email to each class list) a welcome message and include information about the section time and location as well as a reminder about any assignments they are expected to have completed prior to the first meeting.
- Obtain extra copies of the course syllabus and any handouts that the professor distributed.

The night before

- Review your lesson plan. Tweak, but avoid massive overhauls.
- Plan your first-day wardrobe. Aim for a semi-professional look a notch or two above the regular student dress, but don't overdo it. Use an iron if necessary.
- Go to bed at a reasonable hour. Make this a habit.

Showtime! The first day

- Get up early, eat breakfast, consume routine amounts of caffeinated beverages.
- Arrive early on campus and get to your first classroom at least 10 minutes early. If you are planning to use any media equipment, check to make sure it is in working condition.
- Be sure you have your section binder, the classroom survival kit, copies of your syllabus, and any handouts you intend to use as well as a few copies of the course syllabus and lecture handouts.
- Write the course name, section number, and your name on the board. Add other information, including an outline of the day's activities, if appropriate.
- Say hello to your students. Smile and welcome them into the classroom.
- Begin promptly on time.
- Follow your lesson plan, making notes on it as you go.
- Be sure to distribute your section syllabus.
- Check to make sure your students all received your email. Remind them they will need to regularly check their UW email account.
- End on time. Do not be tempted to excuse students early nor hold them "just one more minute."
- Erase anything you wrote on the board, remove transparencies from the overhead and videos from the VCR, gather any extra handouts, and vacate the room promptly for the next class and instructor.
- Repeat.
- After your last section, take a brief break and then find a quiet place to review your lesson plan and how the section went. For at least your first quarter, keep a journal recording what worked well for you in the classroom, what didn't, and your thoughts for improvement.

- Seek out other TAs to discuss experiences and insights.
- Relax and congratulate yourself: You made it and your first day is behind you.

A Section Binder: Five-Tab Organization

Syllabi	Your copies of the course and section syllabi.
Assignments	Clean copies of course and section assignments and handouts, suitable for copying.
Lesson Plans	Each week's lesson plan with any supporting documents and overhead slides with the most recent on top.
Section XX Section YY	Preliminary and final class rosters/grade sheets (officially "First Day Class List" and "10th Day Class List" respectively), student paperwork such as Student Athlete Travel Notifications, disability letters from the director of Disabled Student Services, and Letters of Charges concerning academic misconduct.

Your section binder will contain sensitive and confidential information about your students and you should safeguard it accordingly. Make a habit of shielding grade sheets and student paperwork from prying eyes and store the binder in a safe place.

Online Resources

Three great CIDR links

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/TAHandbook/>

Wouldn't it be great if there were a handbook just for UW TAs? There is and you'll find it here. It is a gold mine—treasure it.

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/firstdaytools.html>

Here's one page with more ideas than you could possibly use as you think about your first day in section. If you have time, take a look at it now; if not, plan to revisit it before you teach again.

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/topics.html>

Got a question about "Preparing to Teach," "Understanding Your Students," "Engaging Students in Learning," "Types of Classes," or "Assessing and Improving Your Teaching"? Start here.

Some more handy-dandy links:

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/>

UW's F.R.O.G. (Faculty Resource on Grading). As it's home page says: "FROG covers a wide range of topics related to grading, including UW policies, procedures and forms, good practices, departmental averages, academic conduct issues, and student disability issues." It is a one-stop shop for information in navigating the university's 4.0 grading system.

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/conduct/honesty.html>

Part of the F.R.O.G. site, this page details UW's policies on "Academic Honesty: Cheating and Plagiarism." It provides good definitions of plagiarism and cheating as well as an overview of what happens if a student is suspected of academic misconduct and the possible penalties. I recommend that you require your students to review this page. You may also find useful links and information about "Academic Conduct" here:

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/conduct/index.html>

<http://faculty.washington.edu/jwholmes/uwwrite.html>

A page listing all the writing centers on campus, with short descriptions and contact information. Very useful when you have a student who needs more help with their writing than you can provide.

<http://depts.washington.edu/counsels/>

Sometimes everyone needs a little help and the UW Counseling Center can provide lots of it: The center does everything from mental health intervention and career counseling to hosting Study Smarter Workshops, providing light therapy for S.A.D. sufferers, and biofeedback for stress and anxiety. Good resource for your students and, perhaps, you too!

<http://depts.washington.edu/nse/podcast/>

This link takes you to a collection of undergraduate advising podcasts. Aimed at your students, these short broadcasts can give you insight into some of the questions and concerns undergrads have about their college experience. They are particularly recommended to TAs new to UW.

<http://www.css.washington.edu>

Classroom Support Services is a good place to start if you have questions about the media equipment and set up in classrooms. A couple of useful links from this page include those for reporting problems about classroom fixtures and media equipment, requesting media equipment, and the very useful “Classroom Schematics and Equipment” page (click “Classroom”). This page allows you to get a description of the classroom, its media equipment, a diagram of its layout, and any special instructions you need to use it. Of course, always verify the information is correct by visiting the room before your first section. While the CSS webpage is very useful, if you need help in a hurry, call (206) 543-9900 (from campus phones: 3-9900).

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/business/oem/>

Fires, floods, earthquakes, and a host of other minor annoyances can completely disrupt your well-planned quiz section. For information on what to do when bad things happen, look here. Take a moment, too, to sign up for UW Alert so you’ll receive notice in the event that something unpleasant does happen on or around campus. In an emergency, **dial 9-1-1** from any phone.

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/resources/safety.html>

On April 2, 2007, a UW staff member, Rebecca Jane Griego, was shot and killed in her office in Gould Hall by an ex-boyfriend. Two weeks later one of my honors students pulled me aside to apologize that her work had been slipping because she was trying to cope with being raped by a man in her dorm. Like it or not, the halls of the university can be a threatening place. But you can give yourself—and your students—an edge by learning what to look for and what to do to avoid worst-case scenarios. The CIDR site “Threatening Classroom Situations” is a great place to start. But, in an emergency, **dial 9-1-1** from any phone.

<http://www.washington.edu/computing/mailman/>

You probably are already subscribed to several university mailing lists and there may be other, public mailing lists you’d like to join—or maybe you just want to know how to manage those subscriptions effectively. This site allows you to do that and more.

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Your comments, suggestions, and feedback
on this handout are welcome.