

A Quick and Dirty Guide to Being a TA in the  
Department of History at York  
Second Edition



York Commons

Department of History  
Teaching Assistant Liaison Committee  
York University, Toronto  
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Graduate Students & Teaching Assistants

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## I. Introduction to the Quick and Dirty Guide

*A Quick and Dirty Guide to Being a TA in the Department of History at York* was a project created in 2003 by the History Department's Teaching Assistant Liaison Committee. The role of this committee is to ensure a positive working relationship between faculty and teaching assistants and to address any problems or challenges that confront either or both parties in the provision of service to the students of York University.

The committee is comprised of two faculty members and two graduate students and meets regularly to discuss issues that affect teaching as well as TA/faculty relations within the Department. The purpose of the Guide is to provide both new and experienced TAs with some practical advice and tips for teaching at York, as well as to ensure that all TAs are aware of their roles, rights, and responsibilities within the Department. Although much of the information in the Guide is applicable to teaching in general, we have designed the Guide to address teaching- and work-related issues that are specific to York's History Department. The idea for the Guide arose out of discussions regarding problems of overwork and time management, as well as concerns that TAs and faculty alike be made aware of their rights and responsibilities. From there, the Guide was born.

Although we'd like to be able to say that we already knew it all and that we wrote this entire thing off the top of our heads, such was not the case. Because we know you're pressed for time (who isn't in graduate school?), we've done a bunch of research on teaching strategies and philosophies and compiled the best of what we've found in this Guide. The resources listed in Section 9 of the booklet were invaluable to us in writing this manual. We'd like to thank Beverley Eadie, Ismael Musah Montana, Sarah Glassford, and Amanda Crocker for contributing their stories, and Marcel Martel, Tom Cohen, Amanda Crocker, and Stephen Brooke for their suggestions on earlier drafts.

Whether you're an old hand at teaching or just starting out, we hope that you will find interesting and helpful tips, anecdotes, and tricks to enhance your teaching and that the Guide will offer some insight into History at York. One of the main challenges that we face as TAs is balancing our time: between our responsibilities as TAs and our work as graduate students. We hope that this Guide will help you manage your dual role in the Department.

*A Quick and Dirty Guide* is meant to be a living document, available on the departmental website for updates from year to year.

Knowing that being a graduate student is all about reading, we have tried to make the Guide as interesting as possible. You will find anecdotes and asides throughout.

One further note on the text: except where *he* or *she* refers to a specific person, the use of the feminine pronoun should be considered to include the masculine.

Enjoy!

Leanne Dustan and Joseph Tohill

September 2003.

## Introduction to the Second Edition

In 2006 the TA liaison committee decided it was time to edit the guide to ensure that it stayed up to date and meaningful to new TAs in the History Department. To a great extent the original text is intact. We have updated the entire guide including all contact information and web sources. We have also updated and clarified numerous aspects of University and Department policy and procedure. Substantial changes were made in the layout of the guide which will hopefully make it a more accessible resource. The biggest change you will notice in the new guide is the consolidation of information about relationships between TAs and students in a new expanded section. We have also added a FAQ section at the beginning for the extremely time pressed student to get immediate answers to their most basic questions. Returning TAs will notice a number of new appendices which we hope you'll find useful. If you have any further questions you can find a contact list of experienced TAs near the end of the guide.

Like the original, the second edition of the TA Guide would not have been possible without the support and assistance of a number of people. First of all we would like to thank Leanne Dustin and Joseph Tohill for providing such an excellent base in the original TA Guide from which we could work. Thanks Tom Cohen for your guidance, insight and patience throughout the project. We would also like to thank Tarah Brookfield, Dan Bullard, Jenny Ellison, Brenda Ferguson, Sarah Glassford, Laura Godsoe, Nadine Hunt, Morgan Huseby, Greg Kennedy, Cindy Loch-Drake, Susana Miranda and Geoff Read for providing insight into their own methods/styles of teaching as well as help navigating the union website. As always the office staff went out of their way to help. In particular Maxine Hayle was instrumental in providing details of the work TAs do in the department and Attefa Salihi looked after the online version of the guide. Finally, we would like to thank our editorial committee of Stephen Brooke, Jeremy Trevett and Marcel Martel whose comments on the final draft were greatly appreciated.

Happy TAing!!!

Jodi Burkett and Ian McPhedran  
September 2006

## FAQ (I Wish I'd Known... )

When preparing the second edition of the guide we asked all TAs in the History department what they wish they had known before they started TAing. All of the issues raised are addressed in the guide, but for those of you who are extremely pressed for time we thought we'd make a quick two-page summary of some of them with references to where you can read more.

### 1) What is a tutorial?

A tutorial is a one – or two – hour session meant to complement the lecture part of a course. It is the place where students can meet in a smaller (sometimes much smaller) group, ask all their questions and get clarification on issues from lecture. It is the place where they can get direct access to an instructor (that's you!). It is up to your course director to tell you exactly what she wants to happen in tutorial, but generally the tutorial will consist of discussion about the assigned reading and/or discussion of what happened in lecture (less common)

A tutorial is **not** another lecture. (See section II for further information)

### 2) What exactly am I expected to do in a tutorial?

Your main job as the TA in tutorial is to facilitate discussion. Although it is sometimes necessary to clarify issues or answer specific factual questions, the best tutorials are the ones in which students get a chance to broaden and deepen their understanding of issues raised in lecture by discussing them with you and their peers (rather than simply being told the same information again).

### 3) How much time does TAing actually take?

There is no specific or right answer to this (although your contract does limit the amount of work you do to 135 hours per semester – 270 for a full year of TAing – after which you are entitled to extra pay). If you TA the same course several years in a row the number of hours you spend preparing will go down dramatically while you might spend more time on marking. A common rule of thumb is initially to spend two hours preparing for each hour of teaching (that includes doing the reading). As the year progresses make sure you keep track of the time you spend and adjust accordingly. You should contact your course director if you work more than 270 hours. Below we've put a sample breakdown of how much time TAing takes (this is from a TA of HIST 1010, a first year course with thirty students in one tutorial which is two hours long and is based on a 13 week semester). **You will need to adjust this to meet your own needs.**

Attending lectures – 2hrs/week	52 hrs/year
Prep – 2hrs/week	52 hrs/year
Teaching – 2hrs/week	52 hrs/year
Marking – 20min/assignment (5 assignments)	50 hrs/year
Exam invigilating/marking – 20 min each	12 hrs/year
Office hours – 1hr/week	26 hrs/year
Answering emails/incidentals – 1hr/week	26 hrs/year
Total	270 hours

### 4) Am I doing as much/more work than other TAs? Does it matter?

As eluded to above, each TA prepares differently. Sometimes you will come into the TA room before tutorial feeling prepared and then find out that your fellow TA has an elaborate game for her students. Sometimes you will enter the TA room only to find your fellow TA desperately trying to finish the reading for her tutorial that starts in half an hour. Always make sure that you feel prepared and don't worry about what everyone else is doing. We all prepare and teach differently.

**5) How much will first (second, third, etc.) years know about history?**

To some extent this will vary from student to student. More than one TA has been surprised by their third year's lack of historical background and their first year's historical knowledge. To some extent it depends on the background of the students (are they all biology majors or history majors?) which you can find out from the course list. It might be a good idea to try to assess this in the first couple of classes – you can certainly work in questions about your students' historical background into your icebreakers. You will also certainly have a variety of levels in each class and you'll have to work at finding a happy medium between boring the students with a lot of previous knowledge and talking right over the heads of those with little or no background (see section X for more tips).

**6) How do I judge good participation?**

Ideally when you step into the classroom for the first time you will already have a criterion for grading tutorial participation (which could be on your tutorial syllabus). But some of you may be asking 'how do I determine this initially?' or 'how do I determine if a student's participation is "excellent" or simply "good"?' You'll have to determine your goals for the tutorial (is it more important to you that everyone speak, no matter what they say, or that there be a lively discussion?), clearly spell them out for your students and judge them according to those goals (see section VII on grading and examples of how to mark tutorial participation in the appendices)

**7) How will I know what an 'A' paper is? What if I'm wrong?**

As unhelpful as this may sound to first time TAs, you'll get a sense of what is and is not a good paper. Make sure you are clear about what you are looking for before you start marking. However, it may be a good idea to read over (and give an initial mark to) your first batch of papers and then reassess your criteria and re-read. More often than not your gut impression of a paper will hold up under further scrutiny. As the year progresses you'll learn to trust your judgement.

However, marking is, at least to a certain degree, a subjective endeavour. Be prepared to re-read assignments if a student complains about their mark or to pass their paper on to a colleague or even the course director. Although it is difficult to have your grade overruled, your objective is fairness and student learning so try to check your ego at the door (as much as possible). See section VII for the specifics of York's grading structure and two sample marking sheets in the appendices.

**8) Do I have to hold set office hours?**

Every TA knows the joy of travelling an hour up to campus for their office hour only to sit in the TA room fruitlessly waiting for their students to show up (whether or not they've told you they were going to come). While it is impossible to avoid this completely there are a couple of strategies you can use. First, it is a good idea to schedule your office hour for the same day as either your tutorial or the course lectures – at least this will save you a trip. Second, many upper year TAs suggest holding office hours by appointment only. As long as you are accessible to your students via email this might be more efficient and actually ensure that your students take coming to see you seriously. If you are going to do this you may want to specify which days you are available for appointments (again, we're thinking about saving you a trip). You don't have to be available whenever they want to see you whether you hold a regular office hour or not.



## II. An Introduction to Teaching in the History Department

### What is a tutorial?

We know that for those of you who have already taught this will seem like a silly question. But think back a few years to your very first class. Did you know exactly what to do when confronted with a classroom full of eager students?

*A tutorial is a one- or two-hour session that is meant to complement the lecture given by the course director and other faculty.*

A tutorial is *not* another lecture given by the TA. Generally, the purpose of the tutorials is not to rehash and review the lecture materials (unless your course director tells you that this is what she *wants* you to do in tutorial). Your seminars should be designed to enhance the lecture material, to expand upon or highlight certain course themes and concepts. They should provide students with an opportunity to explore the course material in more depth and to work actively through issues in the material. Your seminars should create an *active* learning environment. If in doubt, discuss with your course director what they want you to do during tutorials.

So, what are we supposed to be teaching the students? History, to begin with! The course director will already have selected the students' reading materials for your tutorials. These assigned readings, which will appear on the course syllabus, should be all you need to teach the course. However, students should also be learning a set of skills that will help them to navigate through the material.

Here are some of the things we can teach students to do in the tutorial:

- ask questions and brainstorm
- synthesize material
- defend a position
- write a coherent essay
- develop independent thinking skills
- develop a sense of historical method and of the larger shape of the discipline
- identify and put into their own words the theses and main arguments of books or articles
- analyze and explain both the overt and the hidden meanings in primary sources
- identify various historians' points of view and evaluate historians' use of evidence
- differentiate between strong and weak arguments and conclusions
- compare critically the works of different authors
- extrapolate from the readings to come to their own conclusions
- learn to respect opinions expressed by others (even if they don't agree with them)
- discover the fun of doing history

This seems like a tall order. There are, however, ways to combine the material that you have to teach with the skills that the students should learn and yet still keep it interesting and lively.

What has been your most rewarding teaching experience?

*"Interaction with the students in the classroom, in office hours, and even after ceasing to be their TA. I really enjoy the "mentoring" aspect of being a TA: helping my students navigate academic life, the university, career and grad school options, etc., and seeing some of them make great strides in their work over the course of the year."*

*- Sarah Glassford*

What has been your most challenging experience as a TA?

*"Teaching a first year class with a lot of non-history majors. I found it challenging to stimulate interest among those just filling their humanities requirement and felt that history was a waste of time."*

*- Tarah Brookfield*

## What is Quality Teaching?

Now you have an idea of what you'll be doing, but how do you know if you're doing it well? How do you know if your teaching is *quality* teaching?

The first thing to recognize is that there are many ways to teach effectively, and no objective standard of teaching quality. You're an individual, after all, with your own personality and style, and you will bring your individuality to the classroom. No matter what your teaching style and methods are, *improved student learning* is the mark of quality teaching.

As a quality teacher you will:

- establish a positive learning environment
- motivate student engagement
- demonstrate knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject matter and your teaching
- provide challenges
- respond to students' learning needs, concerns, and opinions
- fairly evaluate student learning
- make yourself available and approachable to students

Keep in mind, however, that not every teacher will have the same strengths. With time, you'll learn what yours are; you'll also learn which of the above skills you need to work on.

(Adapted from *The Teaching Assessment and Evaluation Guide*, published by the SCOTL, York University)

## The Importance of TAs in the History Department at York

How important are TAs to the History department? In a word: very. The TA is the front line of the postsecondary field, offering support to both faculty and the undergrads enrolled in the courses. TAs hold tutorials, schedule office hours, answer e-mails, negotiate and enforce deadlines, invigilate and mark exams, and deal with students on a group and one-on-one basis. TAs might even be asked to write letters of reference for their students and to give advice on course selections. TAs also do a tremendous amount of the front-line teaching in the Department, especially in the large undergraduate courses where students have little contact with the professors other than in the large lecture halls. For many undergrads, you're it; you represent the History Department. This might give you an idea of how much teaching we do: in 2005/06, 68 people worked as History TAs in 23 courses, teaching 134 tutorials. If we multiply that by the average tutorial size (25 students), that works out to about 3350 students who were taught by History TAs. And these numbers are set to increase this coming year. As you can see, TAs are responsible for many students: not only for helping them learn the course material and giving them the grades (or not giving them the grades), but also for many other intangibles.

Surveys have shown that students like their TAs a lot and may prefer them to professors—often TAs have more direct contact with students and are therefore less intimidating! Students may also take upper level history courses because they had such a good initial classroom experience with their TA.

## III. Preparing for the first day

The first class *ever* can be a little frightening. Adequate preparation—and that includes mental preparation—will greatly reduce your stress level. Even if your course director hasn't yet called an official meeting, it's a good idea to discuss with them what they want you to cover the first day of class. Do they want you to begin discussing readings? Or should you simply use the first tutorial as an opportunity to introduce and explain the course to students and as a chance to get to know your students?

### *Before the tutorial.*

Review the assigned material. Are there any difficult topics or issues? Note them, and prepare to explain them if necessary. Think of a list of questions that you want to ask. What are the goals for the tutorial? What do you want students to take away with them that day? Try to think of different ways of teaching the material.

### *How much should you prepare for a tutorial?*

It's always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. In time you will figure out how much is enough. Most TAs will be over-prepared for the first few classes, but it's important to be well prepared if for no other reason than it will make you feel more at ease. Likely, the very first day will be an introduction to the tutorial and you won't get much real work done, so often you'll really need to get prepared for the *second* tutorial.

If you're teaching in a course that you're familiar with, the preparation will be much easier. But even if you're not, remember that (especially in first and second year courses) almost all of the students will know *much* less about the topic than you do. You'll be surprised at how much better you'll understand and how much more you'll get out of the readings than they do. Generally, most TAs will do between one and three hours of preparation for each tutorial. More than three and you'll find it hard to keep within your 270 hours for the year. Eventually, you will get faster. Set yourself a goal (for example, you'll spend no more than two hours per week on preparation) and make yourself stick to it.

### *Dealing with the first time jitters*

Remember that it's okay to be nervous. Even after several years of teaching, most people still get a little bit jittery before a class, so don't expect that you will be the poster-girl for calm your first time. Even professors, after several decades of teaching, still get those first-day jitters! Just be you...only *better!*

### *What if I don't know the answer?*

Nobody has all the answers. Not even you. If a student asks a question, to which you don't know the answer, be honest and say so. Redirect the question to the class and ask if anyone knows the answer. If not, promise the student that you will look into it and have an answer for her when you meet again. You can even make it an open challenge to the class. Tell them that you are going to look up the answer, but challenge them to find it out too. This is a teachable moment: when you meet again you can discuss the answer and the relevance of the question to the material at hand.

*"As I approached the room where I was supposed to hold my tutorial I was pretty much on the verge of throwing up, I'd like to say my nervousness evaporated once I entered the room, but it didn't - that took a few weeks (but it did go away). Once I sat down I suggested we play a complicated 'getting to know each other' game where you interview the person on your right and then present them to the class. Unfortunately, because of my jitters I ended up interviewing the person on my left, messing up the entire game and only noticing after one of my students pointed it out. I guess the lesson learned from this is that you either shouldn't play silly introduction games (I don't anymore), or you should only play ones that you yourself are capable of understanding."*

*- Laura Godsoe*

### *Getting to know your students names*

It is important to make a real effort to get to know your students names. They will feel more invested in your tutorial if you can call them by name. However, for some of us that is a very difficult task. Playing icebreakers in the first class should help. Other suggestions are to get your students to make nametags for their desks (fold a piece of paper lengthwise) that they will use for the first couple of classes; getting your students to sign in (for attendance) as this will allow you to put together names and faces. Above all, using their names as much as possible will help you remember them.

## Tutorial Syllabus

In every course, the course director will develop a general syllabus that contains information about the grade breakdown, lecture and tutorial schedules, and information on assignments. However, you may want to supplement this with your own tutorial syllabus, in which you establish expectations beyond those of the course syllabus. (Remember, however, that it is the Course Director (CD) who determines the grade breakdown for the course and you must not change this.) Students must also be informed in writing of all graded components of the course. York actually has a deadline for giving out your syllabus, usually the third week in September. If you plan to give your students pop-quizzes (sometimes a good way to scare them into doing the readings; but don't forget this makes more work for yourself) or have them do presentations in class, it's a good idea to include these in your tutorial syllabus (if it's not already in the course syllabus). You can use these assignments to help you determine a participation grade within the parameters of the grade breakdown established by the CD.

Your syllabus should contain:

- your up-to-date contact information
- your office hours
- the method you will use to evaluate participation and written assignments.

Make sufficient copies the first day for all students and keep a few extras on hand until your class list is finalized (students often switch courses in the first two weeks of the term).

*Remember that you are not expected to prepare a syllabus, but if you choose to hand out any additional information you should also give a copy to the CD and to the secretaries in the front office so they have it on file (especially in case a student later petitions to drop the course). After you've done a tutorial syllabus once, it's relatively easy to alter it slightly in future years.*

## Creating a "Critical Thinking" environment

Much more than a lecture, a tutorial provides an environment for stimulating the *critical thinking* that university educators talk so much about. If you spend your students' time getting them to regurgitate what they heard in yesterday's lecture, or even in merely summarizing the readings (although the ability to do this is important), you deny them the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills.

What does "critical thinking" mean exactly? Critical thinking skills include the ability to

- distinguish between facts and opinions
- distinguish between conclusions and interpretations
- identify cause and effect relationships
- identify errors in reasoning
- rate the relevance of arguments
- distinguish between warranted and unwarranted generalizations
- formulate valid conclusions from written material
- specify the unstated assumptions that are necessary to make conclusions true
- listen well and learn to respect opinions expressed by others if well-founded and accurate
- learn to read across and behind a text

## Using the Physical Space of the Classroom Effectively

Knowing how to use the classroom space effectively would seem like a no-brainer. For some people, it is. For others—well, let's just say it takes a little practice.

### *Furniture and Room Set-Up*

Be sure to arrive a bit early on the first day. Does the room have chalkboards? How is it set up? Do you need to move tables or desks around? Is there enough space and chairs for the number of students on your list?

Will everyone be able to see the boards and each other? How is the temperature in the room? Is there enough air? Is there enough light? The physical learning environment is very important in the overall scheme of the tutorial. Bring any problems with air, light, heat, and so on to the support staff in VH 2140 or, if the problem is bad, ask your CD to find another room.

### *Should you Sit or Stand?*

There's no right answer to this question. Sitting tends to give off a very relaxed vibe, and it puts you on the same level (literally) as your students. Some people feel more comfortable teaching this way. You can keep your hands on the table and don't have to worry about what to do with them when you're standing up there by the blackboard. On the other hand, sitting all the time is probably not a good idea. A little motion helps maintain people's attention, so get up and move around a little. Don't pace or do laps of the room, but vary your movements so that students aren't either lulled to sleep or unnerved by your excessive activity! Moving about the room a bit forces students to shift their physical focus and prevents them from getting tunnel vision. It also encourages them to look at one another.

### *Blackboards*

Try using the blackboard, especially when students are brainstorming. Be aware, however, that some students will copy down *everything* you put on the board, so if you are just writing down ideas, make that clear. Most TAs are surprised when they see themselves quoted in students' essays with a reference to a tutorial date!!

You can use the blackboard to help students organize their notes and the material that you would like to cover for the day. It is often helpful to write out your plan for the tutorial on the board so that students know what to expect. Write timelines and difficult words or names on the board so that they have the correct spelling.

### *Body Language*

Use your body language to signal transitions from one topic to the next or to emphasize important points. Hand gestures are good (as long as they are not too frenetic or repetitive). If you're sitting, stand up (or the reverse if you are standing) at a particularly important moment.

The thing to remember is that students—just like you—get bored sitting in the same spot for an hour or two. Just by using your space effectively, you can improve your learning environment.

## **Setting Reasonable and Clear Goals and Expectations**

After you have dealt with the administration of the tutorial including attendance and going over the syllabus together, you may want to take some time to talk about what you expect from the students and what they can expect from a tutorial. Some of the students may not even know what a tutorial is! Make it clear to students:

- that the tutorial is the centre of their contact with the course and that you are the source of their grade
- that you are their leader through the course, you are their teacher, their helper, their bridge to the course and the department
- that you really care that students come to class, and come prepared to really take part
- what the ground rules for your sessions are and that you will insist on tolerance, courtesy, and respect for others
- how you will grade participation and how other grades are determined
- what plagiarism is and how students can avoid it – not to mention the penalties they will face if they commit it!
- what you expect of them – such as weekly attendance, completed readings and participation
- what they can expect from you including office hours and how they can contact you

Some TAs have found it useful to create a “contract” that covers all of the above information for their students to sign to acknowledge that they understand and agree to abide by the expectations. Although optional, it is one way to ensure clarity and avoid conflicts with students down the road, particularly if they claim that “they didn’t know” some of the expectations.

#### **Checklist – when you walk into the room you should have:**

- The course syllabus
- Copies of your tutorial syllabus (if you’ve decided to make one)
- Student contract (if you have one – see above)
- Copies of the books or other reading material for the course (students like to see what the books look like – and get an idea of how expensive they are)
- Your markbook (or other form of taking attendance)
- A pen
- Materials for any ‘icebreaker’ you intend to undertake (markers, paper, etc.)
- Paper for nametags (optional)

## **IV. The First Class**

Okay, so now you’re ready to walk through that door for the first time. Need some last-minute advice? Here it is...

### **Go in With a Plan**

Make yourself an outline, even a rough one, for what you’re going to do. Once you get in there, you may find that the tutorial takes on a life of its own and that discussion will lead off in promising directions you hadn’t thought of. And that’s perfectly okay. Even so, it’s good to have something to refer back to in case students wander too far off the point (as surprising as this fact may be, some students *actually* have a habit of doing that!). Know where you want to go, but don’t get so hung up on it that you cut off a relevant and blossoming discussion just because it’s not exactly what you had planned. Be flexible! Your tutorial outline should include the major points that you want to stress that day and the major themes you want to bring out in the discussion of the readings. You should come up with a series of questions that will help students probe the readings. Try three broad questions for each tutorial hour, with a series of follow-up questions for each.

*“I find that the key to a successful tutorial is coming to class well-prepared and well-organized. If you have a set of questions that’s going to draw out what you see as the important lessons for the day, that allows you the flexibility to let discussion go where the students take it because you know you can bring it back on course as needs be.”*

*- Geoff Read*

### **Creating a Positive Atmosphere**

There are many things that you can do to assist in the learning process and make people feel comfortable and productive in your tutorial. It is especially important to establish a good rapport with the students on the first day. Some advise that you should hit the ground running. Keep in mind, however, that even if there are assigned readings for the first week, the vast majority of students will not have done them.

Whether or not you decide to hold a full class on the first day, you will want to try an icebreaker activity or two to make everyone more comfortable.

It is *essential* to get students *participating and discussing* as early as possible the first day of the year. You need to establish a pattern early. If you tell students that their participation is important, but spend most or all of the first class talking at your students, you send the signal that their input really isn't important. Many experts suggest using some kind of icebreaker immediately—even before you go over the course syllabus—that gets the students talking to each other. After an icebreaking activity or two, then go over your syllabus, as well as your expectations, code of conduct, and other such matters.

It's also a good idea to end your first class with a substantive discussion of issues related to the course. Give students a question about the course topic that they can discuss in small groups for a few minutes and then discuss the question as a class. Again, you need to establish a pattern of behaviour—both for yourself and your students—on the first day. You only get one chance per year to set the tone.

### **Icebreakers**

Icebreakers are normally tools used by motivational speakers at the beginning of seminars to bring people together and make them feel more comfortable with each other and the material at hand. We're not telling you that you need to turn into some big-white-toothed-smile-too-much-motivational-speaker-type-person, but using icebreaker activities can help you to ease a bit of the nervous tension in the room. In addition, you can learn the students' names while you are at it. Here are some ideas:

- **Pairing Up/Interviews**

Have the students pair up. Give them five minutes to get to know each other and then come back and introduce each other to the class. This often works best if you have them interview one another. You can even provide them with a list of interview topics or questions (perhaps as a hand-out), such as name, previous history courses, and something that makes them unique, and then ask them to choose a few positive words to describe their interviewee.

- **Introducing Themselves to You**

Hand out index cards and have the students write down their names, their major/minor, and why they are taking the course. You could write three or four questions on the board and have them answer the questions on the card as well. To help ease those speaking in front of others jitters you could introduce yourself first and answer the four questions. After this, the students can introduce themselves. Remember, the questions don't all have to be serious or related to history!!

- **Scrabble**

This exercise focuses participants on the subject matter, and it introduces the terminology to be used in the tutorial. Select two words that capture the essence of the tutorial or class and post them on a flipchart for each group of four. The words should be written like the board game, with one word written across and one word written down, with each word joined by a common letter. The groups have five minutes to fill the scrabble board with words that relate to the topic. The group with the most words wins.

- **Art for Learning's Sake**

In this exercise, you have students work in small groups to draw (that's right, *draw!*) pictures to illustrate their ideas of what the course is about. At first blush, this sounds somewhat silly. Moreover, you might feel like a bit of an idiot asking your students to draw pictures. Yet, by making the goals of the exercise clear, you can turn even the cynics into enthusiastic *artistes*. Bring some markers, pencil crayons, and several large sheets of paper (poster paper, brown wrapping paper, or bristol board). Ask students to draw—having not yet started the

course—an illustration of the major course theme(s). For example, in a course about the representation of “Britishness” in British popular culture, you could ask students to illustrate what they think “British” means, using whatever icons, symbols, and pictures they think best. Give them some time to plan and draw their pictures. Afterward, have the groups present and explain their illustrations to the rest of the class. Keep the drawings in a safe place until the end (or near the end) of the year. Then bring them back and have students assess their own drawings and talk about how the course has changed their view.

- **Birthdays**

Wait until students are settled into their spots, and then ask everyone to organize themselves in the classroom chronologically according to their birthdays (ONLY the day of birth, and NEVER the year). Say that you will give them one minute to consult with each other and place themselves in order around the room. It may be a quiet and well-organized activity, or it might be a wild scramble. Either way, it will be interesting to see how students negotiate within their space and with each other! As a variation on this, you can also have students do this activity in complete silence so that they must find non-verbal ways to organize themselves.

## V. TA/Student relationships

There are numerous facets to the relationship that you as a TA will have with your students. You are not only introducing them to the particular subject matter of your course but you are also the face of the department (and sometimes the University) for them. This not only gives you a lot of power, but also a lot of responsibility. The purpose of this section is to outline and engage with some of the major issues you will encounter in these relationships both inside and outside the classroom.

### In the Classroom

#### a) **Establishing your Authority and Boundaries**

In some ways, this can be the most difficult part of being a TA. Your relationship with the students will generally be different from what they will have with professors. Most, but not all, of us are closer in age to the students, and being students ourselves we’re usually closer to the undergrad experience than most professors. Initially, your demeanour and your personality will determine, at least in part, how hard you have to work to gain students’ respect. Some people just naturally command respect; others will have to work at it.

If you’re the kind of person that students find intimidating—and you’ll usually be able to tell fairly quickly—you might have to work at trying to loosen them up a little bit. Most TAs, however, usually have the opposite problem and need to build up their credibility with students. Sad as it is to say (at least based on anecdotal evidence), many women, people from minority groups, people with visible disabilities, or people who speak with an accent, find that they have a harder time establishing their authority in the classroom. Students (especially an unusually vocal minority of male students) often automatically treat male TAs and professors with more respect than they do female TAs and professors. That’s not to say this will be the case for everyone, but it’s something to be aware of when you enter the classroom. If you’re having trouble, it’s a good idea to discuss these issues confidentially with other experienced TAs or with the course director. Often, they will have encountered similar situations and might be able to offer some assistance.

The surest way to earn your student’s respect is to treat them *all*—even ones you find troublesome in some way—fairly and equally. It’s very important to be even-handed in dealing with students. Don’t play favourites or single someone out for either ridicule or too much praise. Trust us—they notice these things and, more often than not, will resent you for it.



### **b) TA-Student Contact**

You want your students to feel they can come to you for help, but also be sure to set some parameters around when and how much of your time you will give to students. In addition to your regular office hour, most TAs and faculty now maintain contact with their students via email. Most students have e-mail addresses (and you probably do too, unless you're a Luddite) and, more often than not, they will prefer to contact you this way rather than see you face-to-face.

However, e-mail, as you're probably well aware, has both a positive and a negative side. On the upside, e-mail simplifies and speeds up contact with students. If you collect e-mail addresses from all of your students at the beginning of the year, you can easily set up a mail string in most e-mail programs and then use this to send students such things as reminders about upcoming deadlines or copies of discussion questions for the following week. You can also set up a Listserv for your course (through York's computing services) that will allow you to send out these reminders to your students and enable them to speak to each other (with you monitoring of course).

On the downside, e-mail correspondence with students can suck up an incredible amount of your time. Departmental policy recommends that students use e-mail to contact their TAs to schedule appointments or for communication concerning emergencies. Your email address will be available to students via the department's web page. Discourage the use of e-mail for any other communication. Be sure to clearly tell your students that email is not a substitute for them coming to see you during your office hours. You can even refuse to answer email that was sent to you during the time of your office hour or refuse to give out your email address at all.

Even if you are in the habit of checking e-mail every day, it's a good idea to adjust students' expectations about email contact. Tell students at the beginning of the year that you *don't* check your e-mail everyday. Tell them you will try to respond to them as quickly as possible but that they shouldn't always expect you to respond the same day or even the next. You may want to tell your students that they can expect an answer to an e-mail within 48 to 72 hours (and tell them that you don't check over the weekend). Time spent on e-mail is hard to track, and students should be encouraged to take advantage of your office hour. Some TAs also give out their home phone number, but this is not recommended, unless you like being disturbed at home on your days (or hours!) off, or, in these cellular days, anywhere, any time! Students *will* call, especially right before a deadline.

### **c) Addressing Power Dynamics between Yourself and the Students**

The teacher/student relationship is inherently unequal, no matter how uncomfortable this fact may make us. In the end, *you* evaluate the quality of the students' work and make judgements about the worth of their contributions to class discussions. Although students get a chance to evaluate you at the end of the year in student evaluations, this is hardly the same thing as the power you have over their grades. Recognizing the power dynamics between yourself and your students is important. Although you can't entirely relinquish your position of authority – and in many situations there's good reason not to – you can work within existing power relations to create a positive learning atmosphere. In the classroom, you are in a position of authority, but this does not mean you have to be authoritarian or controlling. Exercising control in more subtle ways, however, is vital to creating the positive learning environment that we all strive for. While you may wish to negotiate some class rules with your students, you simply must insist upon and enforce others. None of us should tolerate racism, sexism, or ablism, for example. Abdicating your own position of authority can stimulate some creative discussions. For example, removing yourself almost entirely from a particularly lively discussion often leads to some of the most spontaneous interactions, as students start to talk more to each other directly rather than to each other through you as facilitator.

Giving up too much control, however, often leaves a power vacuum that allows some students to recreate the very relations of power that you are trying to avoid. Allowing a totally free-flowing discussion to take place often lets a small group of students – too often male students – dominate the class. Your unwillingness to exercise authority will allow some students to exclude others, often based on race, gender, cultural knowledge, or other privileges.

Remember, too, that students bring their own sets of assumptions about relations of power into the classroom, not all of them benign and many of them unconscious. Students raised in Canada and immersed in Canadian culture, for example, might not realize the extent to which discussions that assume a similar background or cultural knowledge exclude international students and immigrants. For all TAs, it is important to think about how the course material and the way we are teaching it might privilege some forms of knowledge and learning styles over others.

## Outside the classroom

### a) TA Code of Conduct (“Can I go for drinks with my students after class?”)

The answer, sadly for some, is no. You should act professionally at all times, particularly in your relationships with students. As discussed above, your relationship with your students is inherently one with an unequal power dynamic and as the one in the position of authority it is up to you keep a clear head and maintain appropriate professional distance. You can certainly be friendly with your students, but remember that being a TA is your job and the classroom is not the right place to make new friends. Hanging out with your students at the Grad Lounge after class is not a good idea. That’s not to say you should avoid them if you see them while you’re there, but as the one with the power in this relationship (such as it is), it’s incumbent upon you to behave appropriately.

*Behaving appropriately means that you should not enter into dual relationships with students.*

In plain language, this means that you must not enter into any type of relationship with a student that might detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favouritism. This includes not only the students in your own tutorial, but if your course is large enough to have multiple tutorials, this applies to all students in all tutorials in your course. Students in different tutorials (and even different courses) speak to one another and rumours about relationships between students and TAs spread rapidly and harm the reputation of those directly involved and the department as a whole. You are responsible for keeping your relationships with students focused on the requirements of the course and other academic matters.

Dual relationships with students include:

- sexual or other close relationships (including friendships)
- a teaching (or grading) role with respect to a family member, client, patient, or business partner
- socializing with students outside of class, either individually or as a group
- lending money to or borrowing money from students
- giving gifts to or accepting gifts from students
- introducing a course requirement that students participate in a political, religious, or other type of movement advocated by you.

You must avoid any semblance of unfairness or favouritism in your classroom.

(Taken from the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education website)

When meeting with a student in your office, *always keep the door open*, and sit in such a way that you are not between the student and the door. For your own protection and for theirs, it’s best to avoid even the merest hint of impropriety.

Respect the diversity of your classroom. While we all have our own biases and backgrounds, you must foster an environment of respect in your classroom. Ethnocentrism, sexism, heterosexism, discrimination, and stereotyping are not acceptable. See section X for more information.

***York's Policy on Sexual Harassment:***

*York University strives to provide an environment wherein all students, faculty and staff are able to learn, study, teach and work, free from sexual harassment, including harassment on the basis of gender identification and sexual orientation.*

*Sexual harassment is:*

- 1. Unwanted sexual attention of a persistent or abusive nature, made by a person who knows or ought reasonably to know that such attention is unwanted;*
- 2. The making of an implied or express promise of reward for complying with a sexually oriented request;*
- 3. The making of an implied or express threat of reprisal, in the form of actual reprisal or the denial of opportunity, for refusal to comply with a sexually oriented request;*
- 4. Sexually oriented remarks and behaviour that may reasonably be perceived to create a negative psychological and emotional environment for work and study.*

**b) The TA as Student Advisor**

Whether we like it or not, there are a few things that come along with the job of teaching that we might not have bargained for. Most first-year students have moved out of their secondary school comfort zones; others are mature students who have been working and have now come back to school. Almost all of them require a period of adjustment to university life. Second – and third – year students are often looking for direction, and fourth-year students may be in the process of making some hard decisions about their futures. You might be the person that students turn to for advice.

The transition from high school to university is tough for many students. Most enter York with at least a B+ average and many are shocked to find that the standards at university mean their marks drop substantially. Most students experience a drop of 10% in their grades from high school to university. If you're teaching a second-year survey course, you might find that a significant proportion of your students are first-year students, since History encourages first-years to take second-year courses. First and second year courses generally differ in pedagogical goals but not in difficulty. Either way, many aren't quite ready for the workload and the expectations of a first or second-year course, and may need a little extra hand-holding (not literally, of course!) and guidance, especially with essay-writing. Be aware of who these students are (this information will be on the course list you are given at the beginning of the year), and perhaps speak to them individually or as a group. You could ask them to stay a few minutes extra after the first introductory class so you can have a word with them and let them know you're available if they have questions or difficulties with the course.

**i) Student Counselling**

Occasionally, you'll encounter students who are suffering from stress or depression brought on by circumstances that may or may not be related to their academic work. Whatever the source, you should know – and let your students know – that help is available to them. As a TA, you are not and cannot be a student's saviour and counsellor. York has counselling services for students in crisis. Be sympathetic and supportive, but know where to draw the line to protect both students' privacy and your own.

If a student seems in acute need of professional help, it is often wise to alert your course director, who may have more experience dealing with such matters. Having a student come to you to disclose some personal trauma that is interfering with her schoolwork can be a very stressful experience for you both. You should try hard to respect students' privacy when they want to tell you they have personal troubles but might not want to divulge the details. A good formula: "Please tell me no more than you wish to. I accept your assurance that there is a problem." Students can then draw their own boundaries of discretion. You can also tell them that some issues – deferrals, late course drops, release from an exam, cancellation of a course or a failing grade – are the responsibility of the course director, and she will need to be informed in such cases. The student may also need to petition the Petitions Committee of the Faculty of Arts, where her name will be kept in strictest

confidence. The History Department's Undergraduate Director can help approach petitions. TAs need not worry about the procedures. The existence of these petitions procedures free the TA and the course director from having to make decisions based on very private matters.

If a student is clearly in distress, you might gently suggest that they seek some outside help. Here are some of the general counselling and support services offered at York:

- *Counselling and Development Centre* (CDC), 145 Behavioural Sciences Building, (416) 736-5297, <http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/>. In addition to offering one-on-one counselling, the CDC offers a variety of groups and workshops designed to meet the needs of the York University community. Some of these groups include: Assertiveness Training; Stress Management; Public Speaking; Avoiding Procrastination; Effective Parenting; Relaxation Techniques; Bereavement; Family Conflict Management; Survivors of Sexual Abuse; Eating Disorders and Weight Management; Adult Children of Alcoholics; Exam Anxiety. All proceedings in the sessions are confidential. The groups are led by CDC staff members and by experts from within the University and from the wider professional community.
- *The Student Peer Support Centre* (SPSC) serves the entire York University community and can provide assistance with academic concerns, stress, tutor referrals, and more. Students can call or e-mail the centre at (416) 736-5494, [spsc@yorku.ca](mailto:spsc@yorku.ca), or drop in to the office in Student Centre, room C499D (Fourth floor), Monday-Thursday 10:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m., Friday 10:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m.
- *The Centre for Women and Trans People* (formerly the *York Women's Centre*), is a progressive, pro-choice, anti-racist, queer-positive, trans-positive, feminist organisation funded by a student levy. They are committed to breaking the social isolation of women and trans people on campus, individual and collective empowerment, creating working relationships between students and the University administration and acting as a resource base for understanding, exposing and organising on issues of gender violence and social justice. They provide services such as peer-to-peer crisis intervention, peer counselling, advocacy and referrals from a feminist, anti-oppressive framework in order to achieve these objectives. Their office is in the Student Centre Room 322 and they are open Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. and outside those hours by appointment. To make an appointment or arrange a meeting you can call (416) 736-2100 ext. 33484, or email [ywc@riseup.net](mailto:ywc@riseup.net). You can find out more information about them and the services they provide by going to their website at [www.yorku.ca/ywc](http://www.yorku.ca/ywc).
- *The Transgendered Bisexual Lesbian Gay Alliance at York* (TBLGAY), Student Centre A449, (416) 736-2100 ext. 20494, <http://www.yorku.ca/tblgay>, is a student-run service supported by the York Federation of Students (YFS). TBLGAY provides services to York University's transgendered, bisexual, lesbian, and gay communities and their friends. It offers support, social, political, and educational programming, a safe space, community referrals and a small resource library.

#### ii) Crisis Intervention Services (at York and in the Community)

- *The Sexual Assault Survivors' Support Line* exists to provide unbiased and non-judgemental peer support and referrals to survivors of sexual violence. They provide a 24-hour crisis line (416-650-8056), referrals, public education and fund raising. Their office is located on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Student Centre Room B449 and is open Monday – Friday 8:30a.m. – 4:30p.m. You can reach the office by calling 416-736-2100 ext. 40345, emailing [sassl@yorku.ca](mailto:sassl@yorku.ca) or you can visit their website at [www.yorku.ca/sassl](http://www.yorku.ca/sassl).
- Students can also call the *Toronto Rape Crisis Centre Line* at 416- 597-8808 (or email [crisis@trccmwar.ca](mailto:crisis@trccmwar.ca)) and will be answered by a counsellor Monday-Friday during business hours.

Student in acute distress or at risk of committing suicide can get help from one of these services:

- *The Counselling And Development Centre*: call (416) 736-5297 for an appointment, or go to Room 145 Behavioural Sciences Building, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

- *Atkinson Counselling & Supervision Centre*: call (416) 736-5225 for an appointment, or go to Room 116 Atkinson College between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays..
- *Glendon College Counselling and Career Centre*: call (416) 487-6709 for an appointment or come to Glendon Hall Room E103 between the hours of 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. You can also contact them by email at [counselling@glendon.yorku.ca](mailto:counselling@glendon.yorku.ca) or visit their website <http://www.glendon.yorku.ca/counselling/career.html>.

***If the situation is critical***, students should go to a hospital emergency department. Note: Humber River Regional Hospital (formerly York Finch General Hospital) is located at 2111 Finch Avenue West, just east of Hwy. 400. The emergency department may be reached at (416) 747-3833.

*The Integrated Community Mental Health Crisis Response Program* serves the following Toronto districts: Etobicoke and North York. The service is free to anyone experiencing a serious mental health crisis and is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 416-498-0043. The crisis line offers prompt response by mobile crisis team, medical psychiatric backup and hospitalization if needed, pre-crisis support, follow-up home treatment/case management/support, emergency or respite housing, and support to family or caregivers, if desired.

## **VI. The Fine Art of Leading a Seminar (or how to keep students talking)**

Your seminars, much like an essay, should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Begin each day with a very brief overview of what you would like to accomplish during the discussion. Perhaps provide your students with a brief outline or the three major questions that you want to deal with during the hour. You don't need to give them a lecture or provide them with all the conclusions in advance. However, it helps to let students know where you are going with your questions.

Generally, the most beneficial part of a discussion will take place in the first 15 minutes. That's why it's a good idea to have three (but probably not many more) major questions or issues to deal with during each hour. Sometimes, you might have a fantastic discussion on one question that takes up the whole class. Remember, however, that you generally don't have time the next week to finish the previous week's work *and* complete that day's agenda. It's okay to not get through it all once in awhile, but if you make it a habit, students will feel that you are not managing the time well.

Make clear transitions between one topic and the next. Conclude discussion of a topic by asking "One more comment...?" or "Anyone else...?" (In this case, you want your body language and your words to suggest that the discussion is nearly over). *Briefly*, sum up the discussion so far and segue into the new topic. Every tutorial should end with a summation. At the end of the class, review what you have covered that day and talk about what you are doing in the next tutorial. If the discussion is flowing wonderfully, it's tempting to let it continue until the very end of the tutorial. Don't let this happen! Use the last two to four minutes of the tutorial to sum up the important points raised during the discussion, to draw out the larger themes and relate them back to the course and the lectures. Use stronger body language and a more forceful voice, to cue your students to the fact that you are reaching the end. Of course, you can also cue them by simply stating, "So, let's look at what we've learned today" or "Let's wrap up the discussion by summarizing the main points." This allows students to switch back to listening mode (many of them will write down what you say at this point). For the students, especially those who may not have kept up with the entire discussion, your summation will strongly reinforce the important points and make the relevance of the discussion clearer.

### *After the tutorial*

- Think about the tutorial. Is there anything that you are not happy with? What can you change?
- Evaluate yourself and the students' reaction to your teaching.
- How can you make the transition to the next tutorial?

### **Initiating Discussions and Keeping Them Going**

Generate discussion by asking questions. Never ask questions that require 'yes' or 'no' answers because these lead to dead-ends. There are four different types of questions, each of which seeks to generate a certain type of response:

- 1) *Factual*—Asks for specific information. Begins with who, what, where, or when.
- 2) *Divergent*—Asks for various ways to address or discuss an issue. Has no right or wrong answer.
- 3) *Probing*—Asks students to build on previous responses, to elaborate or clarify. Often, probing questions are used in series to get students to analyze material more deeply.
- 4) *Higher Order Questions*—Asks students to synthesize material. Requires more depth of analysis.

You need to be prepared to give students time to think of a response and, in many cases, to summon up the courage to go first. Don't give up and fill in the blanks yourself if people don't immediately answer your question. After posing a question, you should wait 10 *long* seconds. This can seem like an eternity when you have a couple of dozen blank faces staring at you, but students need time to consider what you've asked. If you get no response, try rephrasing and reposing the question, while you break up the silence by shifting your posture (this is a good moment to stand up if you're sitting, or move to a different part of the classroom).

Once you've got the discussion going, it's your job to keep it going by gently guiding it with more *probing* questions that stimulate further discussion.

Whenever possible, ask additional questions that flow from students' responses. Try to encourage everyone to talk. If no one raises a hand, try to prompt others to speak by using open-ended phrases such as "someone else...?" (without emphasizing either word) rather than "anyone else...?", which tends to suggest that the discussion is just about over.

And remember to give students time to think. A little bit of silence is okay! Call on individual students if you need to. Consistent non-participants are usually either shy or unprepared. Be gentle but persistent. You may need to call on some students more than once (but try not to do it more than once per class) to get them finally to say something. If they're consistently unprepared, calling on them can encourage them to start doing their readings. For the shy students, try prompting them with the more general questions that call on them to express their opinions or feelings, rather than ones that call for the right answer.

*Your three or four central questions for each tutorial should be of the higher order variety. However, don't begin the session by asking these. Instead, your first questions of the tutorial should be short, simple questions that do not have a right or wrong answer. Use divergent questions that emphasize that you are seeking students' personal thoughts, not a "right" answer. Try something general, such as "What did you think of the articles?" or "What stands out in your mind about the readings?" These are not incredibly analytical questions, but they often get the discussion going because students don't feel any pressure to be correct. Even if students respond with "I thought the readings were stupid," you can parlay this into further discussion by asking increasingly probing questions beginning with "What didn't you like about them?"*

(Adapted from "Using Discussion in Your Class" Reflections )

#### **a) Responding to Students: Active Listening & Positive Feedback**

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that how you respond to students will greatly influence their willingness to participate. You also don't need to know much about psychology to know that *positive* feedback produces the best results.

Be an active listener. Without repeating verbatim what someone has just said, try to paraphrase what the students are saying and give them feedback. “So you think that....” or “So you are saying that...” are examples of ways to paraphrase. Often, especially if many students are eager to participate, you can let a few students speak before commenting yourself. Refer positively back to the comments made by as many students as possible.

Try to *always* be positive in your responses and in some way treat positively *every* student who contributes. In addition, give equal time to both good and bad responses. This is much easier to do when students make brilliant comments. In such cases, feel free to be effusive and enthusiastic in your praise (but don't be patronizing). Use phrases such as “Excellent response!”, “That's a fantastic answer”, or “Very well put!”

*“When one of your students knows more about a certain subject than you do (and it will happen) and corrects something you say in class, resist the urge to die of shame (or get violent), the best response is a polite “Ok, thanks (insert student name here)” then move on quickly.”*  
- Laura Godsoe

But what do you do if a student's comments seem completely out to lunch? If a student answers your question incorrectly, don't say “No, that's not right.” Ask yourself, “Is there anything in the student's response that I can comment positively upon?” Even if her comments are not very relevant, you can still use positive feedback, such as “thank you for contributing...” or “that's interesting” and then ask “can anybody add to what she said?” or “do you agree with what has been said?” Again, be careful about singling out someone and don't let anyone else make negative comments in response to a student's contributions. You might say, “I agree with what you said about Y, but what about....”

Sometimes it's a good idea *not* to comment after each student speaks. Rather, allow several students to respond before making a general comment on the discussion. That way you can highlight the high-quality discussion threads and explain why others were a little off. If possible, try to find something to praise in each response, even if you're not dealing with the comments individually.

Eye contact reinforces positive feedback and encourages participation. Over the course of the tutorial, make eye contact with *all* your students. When students are speaking, look them in the eye. Smile or nod to encourage them and put them at ease. If a student is overly talkative and constantly raises her hand to speak, you can avoid making eye contact with her to encourage others to speak. When a student is making a lengthy comment, try to hold the attention of others by glancing around the room from time to time.

The end of the tutorial is another good time to provide students with some positive feedback. If the discussion was particularly good, let your class know it! Tell them what you thought went well that week. From time to time throughout the year, give students a sense of how they're doing as a group. This also helps to reinforce the fact that they are a group and not competitors.

### **b) How to Avoid Shutting Down Discussion**

The worst thing you can do is to humiliate students by making fun of them or what they've said (no matter how ridiculous it seems to you). You also don't want to turn students off the class and the course by ignoring them or dismissing their input. Once you've lost the students' trust, you'll have to work extremely hard to get it back. Always treat students' contributions with respect, no matter how ridiculous their interpretations may seem to you (unless they are clearly offensive, in which case you need to respond differently – see Section X below).

***Never, never laugh at a student or mock their contributions. Even gentle ribbing about a student's comments will likely be interpreted negatively.***

Don't talk too much yourself! One of the worst things you can do is to launch into a mini-lecture right at the beginning of the class or after only a couple of students have spoken. This sends the signal that the discussion is

*Be careful and gentle when singling out students by calling on them by name. While some will be prompted to speak up, others might feel put on the spot. One York TA had this experience: "I stopped calling on individuals entirely for a couple of years after a particularly uncomfortable incident in which I called on a shy student. After sputtering out a few words, he nearly burst into tears (of fear and embarrassment, I guess). Several students later privately expressed surprise at the student's reaction and also their sympathy for him. I too felt so terrible for the student that for a long time I couldn't bring myself to risk singling anyone out." - Anonymous*

over and students will immediately shift into a passive or listening mode. Give the students a chance to do their own learning! In many ways, your goal should be to talk as little as possible. Students get enough of passive learning (sitting and listening and, if we're lucky, taking notes) during the lectures. The tutorial hours are a time for active learning. It's best to resist the urge to jump into any awkward silences with a long dissertation on the topic at hand. Save your own extensive comments (your two to three minute mini-lectures) for the seminar's conclusion, or for points in the discussion when you want to wrap up one issue or question and make a transition to the next one.

### **c) Kick-starting Stalled Discussions**

Sometimes even the best-planned discussion can fizzle out. Every discussion-leader has or will have the experience of leading a discussion that (sometimes unexpectedly) grinds to a halt. Stalled discussions require you to think on your feet.

First, quickly ask yourself, "Why has the discussion stalled?" Reflect on what you've just been doing to see if there's something you did that you can undo. Did you just ask a whopper of a question that left the students stumped? If so, try rephrasing it or asking an easier question, such as one that requires students to talk about their reactions to or feelings about the material or issue under discussion.

Most times, flagging discussions are not your fault and the causes are largely beyond your control. Maybe students are tired because their essays were also due that day and most of them were up half the night writing them. Perhaps students are getting a little burnt-out because it's the end of the term. Sometimes discussions stall – or worse, never get off the ground – because students haven't done the readings. If this is an ongoing problem, it often requires more long-term strategies. Even so, you can often do something to get the discussion going again.

*"One helpful classroom strategy was asking students to periodically reflect upon lectures, tutorials, assignments and teaching to themselves, in groups and in anonymous comments. I found that this allowed students to better understand the framework and objectives of the class as well as giving them a venue for comments, questions and criticisms."*  
- Dan Bullard

### **Getting Students to Read the Material**

As any experienced tutorial leader will tell you, students often come to class without having done the readings or assignments. Even worse, students sometimes get into a cycle of unpreparedness. If they come to class unprepared and it doesn't seem to make any difference, they just keep on doing it. If you're not vigilant, you may find that the majority of the class gets into the habit of coming unprepared. It is your job to try to motivate students to read and to participate in the class discussion, and you can use a number of strategies to accomplish these goals.

Keep in mind, however, that students come unprepared for many reasons, most of which have nothing to do with you. Perhaps it isn't that they don't want to do their readings, but they are overwhelmed or don't



know how to read effectively. Give the students some encouragement, incentive, and prodding to get them to engage the material. Sure, they are old enough to know that they should be doing their reading, but part of being a TA is helping the students learn how to do it.

Here are a few strategies to encourage the students do the reading:

- Remind them that the more reading they do now, the less they will have to do later, when it is exam time. (Although you will probably get some eye-rolling because you sound like a parent)
- Assign questions the week before and have them hand in written responses at the start of the next class. Tell students that their written responses count as part of their participation grades.
- Have them write response papers to the readings. This could be anything from stream-of-consciousness writing to a response to the author.
- Tell them that there will be a debate in class the next week. Assign one half of the class to read for one point of view, and the other half for the opposite.
- Have them come up with three or four exam questions from the readings. They will have to bring them to class the next week and will have to explain why these are good exam questions.
- Print out and distribute copies of *Reading Skills for University: Tips to Help you Make the Grade* (York Learning Skills Program, Counselling and Development Centre, revised 2003), or have the students read it online at [http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/downloads/reading\\_brochure.PDF](http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/downloads/reading_brochure.PDF)

## Teaching Methods and Strategies

Pedagogically speaking, there's no single best way to run your tutorials *all of the time*. This section, however, discusses some of the tried and true methods of structuring your discussions. To spice up your teaching a little, intersperse your regular routine with some of the creative techniques below.

### a) Classroom Discussions

The simplest tutorial format is the class discussion, in which the entire tutorial acts as one large group. Your discussion will be centred on the questions that you come up with so make them broad and interesting enough to stimulate discussion. Some TAs prefer class discussions to other ways of running a seminar. Certainly, most weeks will probably include a significant portion of classroom discussion. Yet, unless you have a uniformly exceptional bunch of students, the class discussion often (even usually) leaves out some students. It's easier for students to avoid participating if you always conduct a large discussion with the entire class.

Often, especially if you have a good group of students, the discussion will flow organically from your initial question and lead off into all kinds of interesting directions. Be sure not to let it wander into the irrelevant. However interesting and exciting the discussion may become, you still need to cover the course materials in a way that will be helpful to the students. Try to steer the discussion back on track by saying something like "That's a really interesting point. Now can you relate that back to the original question..." Try to avoid shutting students down, however, by either implying or explicitly stating that their comments are irrelevant. Even under the best circumstances, if you do intend to spend the entire hour (or two) on an extended class discussion, it's important to have a plan. Put your outline on the board or on an overhead. Students will feel much more at ease if they have some idea of where your questions are leading.

### b) Group Work or Buzz Groups

A good technique to break up the monotony of always conducting class discussions is to break up the class into small groups or "buzz groups" occasionally. The best size for a small group is three to five students. If the groups are big, it becomes too easy for someone to hide behind fellow students and not contribute. Assign each group a question or portion of a question to discuss amongst themselves and have them try to come to a consensus on the issue. Picking the groups yourself is probably better than letting students pick their own groups. You can have students stay where they are (more or less) and work with their three closest neighbours. However, since the quiet students have a tendency to gravitate toward the most inconspicuous corner of the room, it's a good idea to make people get up and move around. Try just counting around the room, assigning

*“When I first starting teaching, I never used group work, mostly because I had hated it as an undergrad. But, to be honest, the reason that I didn’t like it was because I did well enough in larger discussions. Now, I use group work extensively in my tutorials, especially at the beginning of the year. I begin the very first day of the course with a small group exercise. Group work is a good way to get the majority of students talking early in the year and it also gets the students talking to one another as well as to me. Small groups allow students to get to know each other a little better and this creates a more productive atmosphere.”*

– Anonymous

people a number from one to four (or however many groups you want to have). Make the students get up and move to another part of the room (“group 1 in the front corner, group 2 in the back...”) to get into their groups. This also helps break up the monotony of sitting in one spot for too long.

Get the students to (re-)introduce themselves to their group-mates so they can call each other by name, and have them do this even months into the course. If you’re discussing an issue with two clear sides, you might consider staging a debate between the smaller groups. Alternatively, you can provide them with a controversial quotation and have them take opposing sides. In this case, either divide the class into two groups or (if it is a large class) into four

groups so that half the class will prepare a case for one side or the other. You can even have students role-play during the subsequent debate. Debates can be a lot of fun for students, especially if the issue is a bit contentious. Group work is also very good for close reading of secondary and especially of primary materials. When doing group work, try to reserve a significant portion of the tutorial time for bringing the groups back together for a class discussion.

### c) Student Presentations

While it’s difficult to squeeze student presentations into an hour-long tutorial, especially when you’ve got 25 students and only about 24 weeks of teaching, student presentations are well suited to two-hour tutorials. And having students lead the class for part of the time also takes some of the pressure off you to be “on” for two straight hours.

### d) Creative Teaching Strategies (some examples)

Think of teaching as your *art* (and a respite from the trials of thesis writing, coursework, or studying for comps). With a little careful thought and planning, not to mention loads of practice, you can hone your teaching to a *fine art*. Some will take naturally to teaching while others will take time to develop their skills. All of us will get better (we hope!) with practice. There’s no one way to run a seminar and some people will feel more comfortable with certain teaching methods than with others. However, don’t let some initial discomfort keep you from pushing the boundaries of your teaching skills and trying out new ideas. If you try something once and it doesn’t work, don’t necessarily discount it forever. After trying something new, do a self-assessment. Or ask your students how they felt about the exercise. What worked and what didn’t? And why? What could you do differently the next time to make the experience more successful? Play around with your teaching. Experiment. Have fun.

Here are some tried and true teaching techniques that can add a little spice to your weekly menu of tutorial tricks.

- *Role Playing*

This can be a great way to create enthusiasm for the material. Have some or all of your students take on the role of historical actors. Try to use this technique for a subject over which there is (or was) debate or conflict and to which students can personally relate. Be sure to make clear to students what your objectives are in using this technique.

You can ask all of your students to take on roles. For example, half of the class might be asked to portray opponents of an issue while the rest play the roles of supporters. Volunteers can play specific roles, such as one or more historical figures that are key to the debate. Volunteers work better than conscripts for playing specific roles. Students typically volunteer more willingly if they get to portray negative emotions.

*“A game of historical Jeopardy (related to the week’s subject, of course) always worked wonders. The times I’ve tried it, it has indeed been a rousing success. It requires...a bit of adjustment to turn the TV game show format into something a class of 30 can participate in...but it invariably creates a enthusiasm camaraderie, and a sense of friendly competition among the students, which livens up even the dullest of February days.”*

– Sarah Glassford

In your role as instructor, gently direct the discussion toward the general questions and away from a focus on specific role-players or what they’ve said. Role-playing also works well if you take on the central character in the role-play. For example, be Montcalm in 1759, set a council of war (your students), and ask advice on how to defend Québec. Be Trudeau in 1970, in the face of the Cross kidnapping, and ask your cabinet what to do. Be Montezuma and ask your court how to handle Cortez. The possibilities are nearly endless.

- *Illustrate the Point*

This is similar to the ice-breaker exercise we called “Art for Learning’s Sake.” Bring some materials (large sheets of paper, markers, or crayons), and ask small groups of students to collectively illustrate what they have learned from the readings or what the readings were about. Again, this one sounds a bit wacky. Moreover, some of your students might grumble about your “kindergarten” teaching methods. However, this one has been used to good effect by many TAs in York’s History Department. It works especially well with material that either has or easily evokes some visual imagery. An article on working class family strategies entitled “Pigs, Cows, and Boarders,” for example, works very well with this exercise.

- *Games*

You can also turn the occasional class into a game, perhaps modeled on a game show, such as Jeopardy! which most students are likely to know and which has a premise and rules simple enough for someone to understand who has never heard of the game. Keep in mind, however, that something like Jeopardy – which seeks one-word or factual answers – won’t work for teaching complex concepts.

#### **e) A Quick Checklist of Discussion Group Problems and Solutions**

- 1) Group is unresponsive or silent?
  - Try using small groups to get people talking
  - Ask students what they think is going on
  
- 2) Students come unprepared
  - Go over the preparation requirements for the class
  - Make a contract with your students: if they come prepared you will run a seminar, otherwise you will not
  
- 3) Students complain about the way you run the seminar
  - Ask for constructive suggestions. Encourage negative students to make more positive suggestions
  - Consider an informal written tutorial evaluation, sometime near the end of the first term, which students can complete and hand in anonymously. Tell students that you will share the results with them and suggest ways to improve the course
  
- 4) A couple of students dominate the discussion
  - Use body language, gestures, and eye contact to bring others into the discussion
  - Give the dominant students a role to play that will occupy them (such as note-taking)
  - Set ground rules early, such as making students wait until at least three to four others have spoken before they can speak again

- 5) Discussions keep wandering off the topic
  - Keep the tutorial outline visible throughout (e.g. on the blackboard or overhead)
  - Point out what is happening
  - Ask students how their comments relate back to the questions you are asking
- 6) Students demand that you give them the answers and lecture to them rather than hold discussions
  - Remind students of the purpose of the tutorials (active learning, critical thinking, etc.)
  - Discuss why they are demanding the answers (their anxieties, etc.)
- 7) Class becomes cliquish or begins to pick on one student
  - Point out what is happening
  - Establish clear behavioural ground rules
- 8) Only one section of the room participates in discussions
  - Use group work and make people move around and sit in different spots
  - Check your own body language and the layout of the room
  - Point out what is going on

(Adapted from "Discussion Group Problems," TA Training Program)

## VII. Grading

Taking that very first pile of thirty essays on the origins of WWII might seem interesting and exciting at first, but it can also be an anxiety-producing experience if you haven't thought about how you're going to approach them. You'll likely have many questions (aside from 'what have I gotten myself into?'). How many, and what type of comments should I write? What is the difference between an A and a B, or a D and an F? How do I make sure that I am grading the essays according to the same standard? These are all important and relevant questions that every TA has confronted in their teaching career. We hope to provide you with some quick and easy answers.

### York's Grading Structure

Before you mark anything, you should know that the grading system at York University goes like this:

**A+ (90-100%) = 9** (point system value)

Exceptional: Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques and exceptional skill or great originality in the use of those concepts/techniques in satisfying the requirements of an assignment (or course).

**A (80-89.99%) = 8**

Excellent: Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with a high degree of skill and/or some elements of originality in satisfying the requirements of an assignment (or course).

**B+ (75-79.99%) = 7**

Very Good: Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with a fairly high degree of skill in the use of those concepts/techniques in satisfying the requirements of an assignment (or course).

**B (70-74.99%) = 6**

Good: Good level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using them to satisfy the requirements of an assignment (or course).

**C+ (65-69.99%) = 5**

Competent: Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using them to satisfy requirements of an assignment (or course).

**C (60-64.99%) = 4**

Fairly Competent: Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with some skill in using them to satisfy the requirements of an assignment (or course).

**D+ (55-59.99%) = 3**

Passing: Slightly better than minimal knowledge of required concepts and/or techniques together with some ability to use them in satisfying the requirements of an assignment (or course).

**D (50-54.99%) = 2**

Barely Passing: Minimum knowledge of concepts and/or techniques needed to satisfy the requirements of an assignment (or course).

**E (40-49.99%) = 1**

Marginally Failing

**F (0-39.99%) = 0**

Failing

### **Effective Grading for the Time-Pressed Student**

Grading can take up an enormous amount of time if you don't have a system. The first round of essays and exams that you mark might take a bit longer if you are inexperienced, but once you get the hang of it, it becomes a bit easier.

#### **a) Set the groundwork early – be clear about your expectations**

Make sure that you have thought about, and been very clear about your expectations and grading before the first assignment. Be clear about the format. How will you grade the assignments? First, talk to the course director about her expectations when it comes to grading. Will she be looking for a grade or a percentage? Both? Discussing the assignment or exam with other TAs may also give you some helpful insight.

Explain your expectations to the students before they start on the assignment. This helps lay the groundwork and saves you headaches later. Neither you, nor your students, will benefit from an “anything goes” approach to assigning essays and answering student questions about your expectations. Students with questions should be encouraged to visit you during your office hour for guidance. Some things, such as the policy on late assignments, will be explained in the syllabus. However, students also benefit from a clear explanation of those things that you consider important in the areas of content and style such as:

- grammar and spelling
- sentence structure
- a clear thesis statement
- a good introduction and conclusion
- intellectual coherence of the whole argument
- bibliography
- spacing, margins, page numbers
- cover page

Students become anxious before the first – and, actually, every subsequent – assignment that they have to turn in to you. Knowing what your expectations are before they start on the assignment will relieve some pressure on them and will hopefully make your job easier when it comes to grading, as the students attempt to meet your expectations.

While you will want to spend some time in each class working on writing skills and essay mechanics in some form or another, don't spend too much time trying to teach basic skills. You do have to cover the course material after all, and the Centre for Academic Writing is available to the students, free of charge, for those

who are concerned about their writing assignments. Encourage students to hand in all assignments directly to you, and immediately record receipt of all essays in your grade book. Although the Department has an Essay Drop Box outside of the main office (VH 2140), the office staff does not date/time stamp them and is not responsible for misplaced essays. Two more things: don't forget to be persistent in your reminders to students about what constitutes plagiarism and how suspected cases of plagiarism are treated at York University, and be firm and consistent about how you will treat late assignments in accordance with the course syllabus.

#### **b) Get Organized**

Effective marking involves being organized. Obvious? Perhaps. Nevertheless, many of us have our own stories of colossal time-wastage from skipping these preparatory steps. Clear a block of time for yourself with few distractions (although you may be tempted to just turn the TV on quietly while you mark...don't!). Make sure that you have the original essay/exam questions, some extra paper, any sources you need, and some writing utensils at your side. A dictionary might not hurt either. Don't try to mark all the assignments in one sitting. Breaking the marking into smaller chunks (a few papers at a time) will make the task more manageable, and you will be more efficient as a result. Clearly, your attention span will flag after a couple of hours of reading the same material (not to mention the fact that you may become irritable, reading fifty papers on the same topic in one go). To be fair, you should take short breaks and come back to the grading. Many graders find it useful to take an initial read-through of the assignments in order to get a feel for the content and style of the papers. If students are writing on a variety of topics, mark those with similar topics together.

#### **Maintaining Objectivity**

In grading assignments, TAs should ensure that they remain as unbiased as possible. You must try to grade based on students' mastery of knowledge and skills and not other considerations that will affect your grading of the assignment. Students' personalities, their interest in the readings, the amount that they speak in tutorials, and how they treat other students are some things that will cross your mind as you grade their work. This is why some prefer to not know the name on the cover of the assignment – it helps to clear their minds of other extraneous details that might cloud their judgement in marking. Try marking "blind" by flipping back the cover page of all the assignments before you begin.

#### **How to Grade Quickly but Still Do a Thorough Job**

Keep a copy of your marking criteria handy so that you have a concrete model to work from. This will ensure that you remain as consistent as possible.

Don't comment on every single mistake in a student's paper. Instead, you should make thorough comments and corrections of sentence structure, verb-agreement, and other grammatical errors on two or three pages. Students don't need five to ten pages of reminders of their mistakes. Your thorough grading of a few pages should be enough to flag some of their most common errors.

After this, you can focus your attention on the content. Is there an introduction? Is there a conclusion? Do the paragraphs flow one to the next? Did the student prove her thesis? Are there gross misstatements of fact or sweeping unsupported generalizations?

For the rest of the essay, make shorter notes such as "sp" for spelling, and "run-on" for a sentence that goes on way too long. You will want to make longer comments, however, on misstatements of fact and other substantive errors.

Finally, record the grades in your book or spreadsheet (which should be well-organized and laid out by this point). Getting into the habit of doing this immediately will serve you well in that you will not waste time trying to pull the grades together later, or worse, forget to record them at all.

*Believe it or not, even the choice of marking instrument can be a big decision. Red pen might seem too punitive and pencil is easy to erase. A paper full of red marking can demoralize students. It is perhaps best to stick to a neutral colour like blue or black.*

## Comments and Feedback

Both grades and comments probably will be taken personally so you must take care to avoid discouraging your students. Comments should be encouraging, constructive, and as specific as possible, especially if you are suggesting improvements. Write about the things that you appreciated about the paper, and start with a positive comment. Comment on areas where the student could improve and make concrete suggestions about how to do so. Be specific! If you are commenting on a student's tendency to generalize, for example, cite an example and be sure to tell her what makes the statement a generalization. Comment on the good as well as the bad! As graduate students, we're taught more to tear down than to build up other authors' works. However, students need the building up much more than the tearing down.

It's always far easier to criticize than to praise, but you must do both. You should praise particularly well done portions of the essay. You want this to be a constructive experience for your students. You should particularly avoid writing brief and general positive comments only to invariably follow them with "but" or "however" and a litany of very specific negative remarks. Instead of writing, "Your ideas were excellent, but your writing needs a lot of work," write, "You could highlight your strong grasp of the material and your excellent interpretations by improving your sentence structure and paragraph organization, and thus making the point clearer to your reader."

Do not use the comment section to editorialize or repeat the same suggestions. Make sure that you write enough comments to encourage the student in her efforts, tell her what you liked about her essay, tell her what areas needed work, and offer concrete suggestions for improvement.

## Different Grading Schemes

Each TA will have their own way of marking essays, but they generally fit into one of the two groups below. See the appendices for examples of each.

### a) Structured Marking Scheme

A structured marking scheme sets out a number of criteria, each assigned a portion of the grade, according to which assignments will be judged. This marking scheme is probably best suited to first and second year papers, where you will be assisting with the students' writing skills as they learn to produce and structure research papers.

A structured approach breaks down the student's grade and allows her to see what areas she should improve. A structured approach also cuts down on appeals by allowing you to justify more clearly your grade assignments. If possible, keep a copy of the grading sheet from each assignment, so that over the course of the year you can see if students have worked on improving the problematic aspects of their essay writing.

### b) The Holistic Method

The holistic method involves reading the paper over completely, then assigning a grade according to how well the student has addressed certain points. It is good to determine what points you are looking for in the paper before you start to mark it; a discussion with the course director will clarify what points she feels are most important. The paper is graded mostly on style and content, including the degree to which the student is familiar with the material, the expression of an argument with statements and examples to support it, and identification and analysis of the issues.

## What to do with essays when students are unhappy with the grade

Even after you have been clear in your expectations, marked with a structured marking scheme and commented on how and where the student can improve, there may be some tears. Remember that many of

these students, especially first-years, are used to being the top performers in their classes, and are in an entirely different league at York.

When a student is unhappy with a grade, set up a meeting to discuss the essay. If it is the start of the year or the student has horribly misunderstood the assignment, you may offer a rewrite, but remember that you should then also extend that possibility to other students. Keep in mind that rewrites mean more marking. Some teachers offer rewrites of papers as regular practice, but their students will quickly learn to write only a rough draft and then hand in a more polished copy once the TA has done the editing for them.

At the meeting, go over the paper with your student. Explain why you assigned the marks that you did and review your expectations for the assignment. If the student still insists that you did not grade fairly, then offer to let another TA mark a clean copy of the paper or encourage the student to contact the course director. It is up to you whether you want to accept the other TA's opinion or not. After this second look by another TA, return the paper to the student. If the student is still dissatisfied (and this has happened), then the paper can be passed along to your course director for her opinion. She has the power to change the grade, although sometimes the grade might end up being lower! At this point, it's out of your hands. If the students strongly disagree with the course director's decision, they can appeal formally in accordance with York's policy on appeals. At this stage, refer students to the Undergraduate Programme Director.

### **Undergraduate Essay Prizes**

Toward the end of the year, an e-mail will be circulated asking TAs to submit their best student essays to course directors for nominations for the Desmond Hart Memorial Awards and other essay awards in all course levels. Keep this in mind as you start to receive student assignments! If you read a particularly excellent paper, make a note to yourself so that you can later ask the student to submit her essay for consideration.

### **Grading Exams**

Much of what we've said about marking papers applies to grading exams. However, consider these tips as well. Start with a model answer with which you can compare the students' answers. It makes sense to establish what it is you are looking for in the answers before you start to mark them. Sometimes all the TAs in a course will either meet or use e-mail exchanges to come up with model answers collectively. Rather than marking each student's paper individually, some TAs find it useful to mark exams by the question. For example, mark question one in all the exam booklets before moving on to the next question, so that the answer (and the relative merits of students' responses) is still fresh in your mind. It is often useful, at the start, to read an exam by one of your best students from end to end, to establish a model of what your students could have aspired to.

You are not required to mark exams for spelling, grammar, or sentence structure, although students are generally expected to write answers in essay format.

### **Evaluating Tutorial Participation**

Most undergraduate courses, especially those with a tutorial component, have a participation mark built in to the grade breakdown. Whether participation is worth ten or twenty per cent of the final grade, it's often difficult to decide how to break this grade down. Before the year begins, you should decide what approach you will take and how you will document student participation. Some students might not be convinced of the value of the tutorials. Neither will they fully appreciate the effect that failing to attend will have on their final grades. Remind them that a good mark in the participation component of the course might mean the difference between a C and a B, especially for those who are better talkers than writers.

When the course begins, tell students how you will be monitoring them in order to assign a participation grade. It is one thing to talk a lot in tutorial, but are the students engaging the material? Are the students' contributions meaningful? How will you determine this? Don't forget that some students do not perform well in front of a group of people. You can also base participation marks on a student's level of preparedness for the class and her contributions during group work sessions. You will be ever so pleased with



*"I find for first year students it is a good idea to give interim grades once or twice during the course of the year. This has worked particularly well in my tutorials because students often believe that showing up is sufficient to get a decent grade. It also saves (me) from the panicked students who don't realize until it is too late that their grades aren't good enough for teachers college."*  
- Jenny Ellison

yourself at the end of the year when you have taken attendance all year and have written comments about students' participation throughout. It will make your life easier when tallying the students' final grades and then organizing your marks for submission to the front office. In the case of an appeal on a grade, you will have a firm leg to stand on; it is hard to justify a mark when you have no concrete evidence of how you arrived at the student's final participation grade. In other words, no matter what approach you choose for grading, take attendance and comment on student participation weekly. When the end of the course rolls around, you will be happy you did.

### **Two suggested approaches**

#### **a) Weekly grades**

You can make weekly assessments and assign a grade for each week, averaging them out at the end of the year. Some TAs offer fifty percent just for the students showing up, while others won't even give them that if they don't participate. Some grade out of ten every week, giving 3 to 5 points for attending, and grading upward from there based on the student's level of participation.

#### **b) Holistic approach**

The holistic method is based on assigning a grade for the overall performance over the course of the year. If you choose to use a holistic method,

make sure that you keep good records, preferably making comments about each student's performances after each tutorial. You will need them when it comes time to assign a grade. Even your memory is not good enough to remember whether Joey was a brilliant contributor to the discussion five months ago.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Honesty**

With the advent of the World Wide Web, plagiarism has become an increasing problem in undergraduate courses. Sadly, at some point in your teaching career, you'll likely find evidence of it in your students' work. Students often get very concerned that they will unwittingly commit plagiarism or in some other way breach academic honesty. You might refer students (especially first- and second-years) to York's new online Academic Integrity Tutorial which clearly explains what plagiarism is and how to avoid it [http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic\\_integrity/index.html](http://www.yorku.ca/tutorial/academic_integrity/index.html). You can even assign this online tutorial as homework and have them print out and hand in the results of the quiz that comes at the end of it (the tutorial takes about 35-40 minutes to complete).

The University demands that its members maintain the highest standards of academic honesty which requires that people do not falsely claim credit for the ideas, writing or other intellectual property of others, either by presenting such work as their own or through impersonation. It further requires that people do not cheat (attempt to gain an improper advantage in an academic evaluation), nor attempt or actually alter, suppress, falsify or fabricate any research data or results, official academic record, application or document. The Senate has identified ten different breaches of Academic Honesty:

- 1) Cheating – which includes copying, submitting work done for one class to a second class, submitting work done in collaboration without prior authorization, selling essays or assignments among others
- 2) Impersonation
- 3) Plagiarism – the misappropriation of the work of another as one's own (in whole or in part)
- 4) Improper research practices – including dishonest reporting of results
- 5) Dishonesty in publication – knowingly publishing information that will mislead or deceive readers
- 6) Dissemination of information without permission
- 7) Abuse of confidentiality
- 8) Falsification of unauthorized modification of an academic document or record
- 9) Obstruction of the academic activities of another

10) Aiding or abetting, encouraging, enabling or causing others to do or attempt any of the above

There are a variety of penalties for the above offences. Suspected breaches of academic honesty are investigated and charges are laid if reasonable and probable grounds exist. A student charged with a breach of academic honesty is presumed innocent until, based upon clear and compelling evidence, a committee determines the student has violated the academic honesty standards of the university. There are a range of penalties that may be imposed either singularly or in combination for any offence. These are the penalties listed in ascending order or severity:

- 1) Written disciplinary warning or reprimand
- 2) Required completion of an academic honesty assignment
- 3) Make-up assignment, examination or rewriting a work, subject to a lowered grade
- 4) Lower grade on the assignment, examination or work
- 5) Lower grade in the course
- 6) Failure in the course
- 7) Permanent grade of record – the grade assigned shall remain as the one grade of record for the course even if the course is repeated, this is always attached to the penalty of the failure of the course
- 8) Notation on transcript – can be attached to any other penalty but will always be included in cases of suspension, withholding or rescinding a York degree, diploma or certificate and expulsion from the University. Transcript notation can be for a limited period, when no period is specified a student can petition to have it removed after five years with the exception of notation of expulsion from the University
- 9) Suspension from the University for a definite period, not to exceed five years, with transcript notation
- 10) Expulsion from the University with transcript notation
- 11) Withholding or rescinding a York degree, diploma or certificate with a transcript notation

If you suspect a breach of academic honesty on an assignment, term paper, essay or similar work report it to your course director. You should retain possession of the suspect material and provide a written report, together with the confiscated material, to the course director. It is the responsibility of the course director to notify the Faculty and initiate an investigation. They are responsible for collecting or assisting in the collection of the necessary information and should be prepared to act as a witness at any committee hearing on the matter. You can find information about the procedure on the webpage at:

<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=69>

When should you suspect plagiarism?

- When a passage in an assignment looks familiar to you
- When the style or structure of a sentence or portion of the essay differs significantly from the rest of the paper
- If a student's assignment seems to represent a sudden, noticeable change in writing style or quality (over the year, you will become familiar with students' styles and writing abilities)
- When the undocumented information in an assignment is far too specific to be common knowledge, and it is clear the student must have taken it from somewhere but does not cite a source

## VIII. Your Rights and Responsibilities as a TA

As a Teaching Assistant at York, you have both responsibilities and rights. There are, of course, limits to each. Fortunately, at York (especially compared to many other universities) the rights and responsibilities of TAs are fairly well spelled out and are negotiated and protected by a legally binding contract that covers all

TAs. Aside from your direct contractual rights and responsibilities, however, you can derive many benefits from your TA position.

## **Rights And Benefits**

### **“There is Power in a Union!”: Collective Agreement Rights**

Congratulations! You are now a card-carrying Union member. All part-time employees registered at the University as full-time graduate students and employed in teaching, demonstrating, tutoring, or marking belong to Local 3903 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Canada’s largest union. A Collective Agreement (CA) covers the terms of your employment. These terms are negotiated between your Union, and the University Administration. The CA sets out and describes the essential aspects of your employment including: rates of pay and hours of work; protection against discrimination and harassment; eligibility for leaves (including maternity leave); grievance and disciplinary procedures; and more. You should receive a copy of the CA soon after beginning your first contract. You can also find copies online through the Union’s website or from a link off the Human Resources web page.

The History Department generally has three Union stewards, one or more of whom are TAs like yourself who are elected (two in the spring and one in the fall) by Union members in the Department. They can answer most employment and contract related questions or put you in touch with the person who can.

For more information or to find documents and forms, speak to your union steward or contact the union office: in person, via the East Office Building, Suite 104; on the web at [www.cupe3903.tao.ca](http://www.cupe3903.tao.ca); by phone at 416-736-5154; or by e-mail [cupe3903@tao.ca](mailto:cupe3903@tao.ca). You will (usually) be added automatically to the 3903news and/or the 3903talk listservs and if not you can email CUPE to be added. You can also check the York University Human Resources and Employee Relations website at [www.yorku.ca/hr/](http://www.yorku.ca/hr/).

#### **a) Workload**

Teaching can be a lot of work, especially if it’s your first time teaching a new course and the material is unfamiliar. If you’re not careful, you can spend so much time on your TA job that you won’t get your thesis done. Worse still, you might encounter a course director who expects the moon from you. But don’t worry: our Collective Agreement limits the amount of time you can be asked to spend on your TA.

One of the basic protections that you have under the CA is a limit on the number of hours you can be expected to work over the course of the year.

***A full TA requires you to work no more than 270 hours (for a half or quarter TA, the total time is pro-rated, e.g. 135 for a half TA).***

At the beginning of the year, your course director will call a meeting to discuss the distribution of work for the year and you will sign a workload form. This form contains a breakdown of the hours you should spend on each task, including preparation, teaching, grading, attending lectures, and holding office hours. The total should add up to no more than 270 hours and it should be a realistic estimate. If the course director forgets to call this meeting within a week or two of the start of classes, just remind him or her.

Keep track of your hours! It is the course director’s responsibility to make sure that you are not being worked more than 270 hours in the year. However, it is *your* responsibility to track accurately your hours and make your supervisor aware of potential overwork as soon as you realize it is becoming a problem.

If you find that overwork is becoming a problem, alert your course director and request a meeting. Together you must come up with a plan to try to avoid overwork. In the past at such meetings course directors and TAs have agreed to reduce the TAs’ duties for the remainder of the year by such methods as not requiring TAs to attend all lectures (usually lecture notes or summaries will be provided) or holding office hours only by request. If overwork cannot be avoided, it is your *right* to file a grievance for overwork and to be paid for the hours you work above 270.

In the last round of bargaining the TA workload form was modified to take into account overwork caused by email. It was also stipulated that TAs have the right not to use email, to refuse to give their email address out to their students.

#### **b) Benefits Plan**

The CUPE 3903 Benefits Plan, which provides full prescription drug coverage, partial vision care coverage, and a decent dental plan, covers all TAs and their spouses, common-law partners, same-sex partners, and dependent children. There is no cost to you for the medical coverage because it is part of your contract. All TAs are automatically enrolled and the previous wait periods were eliminated in the last round of bargaining. TAs are also able to enrol their spouse, and dependants in the plan. You should receive an enrolment package a few weeks before you are eligible for enrolment and must return it to the address indicated. Your coverage remains effective for four months after the end of your contract. This means you are covered throughout the summers until you no longer hold a TA position. If for some reason your membership in the Union lapses (e.g. you take a year off), when you return to teaching, there's no waiting period and your coverage resumes at the beginning of your contract.

When your enrolment goes through you will receive a benefits card which will allow you to get prescriptions for free (except the \$3 dispensing fee). For other costs (including things like glasses, chiropractic visits, etc.) you will have to pay up front and get reimbursed. You will find the forms required to do this posted on the CUPE board outside the TA lounge (or you can ask the Union stewards).

In the last round of bargaining (effective 2005-2008) the Union was able to win some increases in vision and dental coverage. For updated information check the Union website or talk to your steward.

#### **Funding for research and travel**

Being a TA (a Unit 1 member of CUPE 3903) also gives you access to several funds, beyond those available to all graduate students, which can help defray travel expenses for travel to conferences. For a full description of all funds available to you (and application deadlines) through CUPE, including the Graduate Development Fund, Thesis Completion Fund and others, check out this link: [www.cupe3903.tao.ca/docs/funds.html](http://www.cupe3903.tao.ca/docs/funds.html).

CUPE also has a pool of money for bursaries that are available on the basis of need. Single parents and visa students are prioritized for these funds. You can find out more about this fund and the application process from the Union website.

Other funds are available to you through the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) <http://www.yorku.ca/grads/> and the Graduate Students Association (GSA) <http://www.yugsa.ca/>.

Finally, don't forget that as a graduate student you are also eligible for awards within the department such as the Ramsay Cook Fellowship and the Albert Tucker Award. Announcements about these awards and other internal funding are usually made over departmental e-mail before the application deadline but you can find out more information about them by visiting the department's website at: <http://www.yorku.ca/ghistory/information/financial.html>

#### **Summer Minimum Guarantee and Tuition Indexation**

While you are a member of the "priority pool" (essentially your first five years as a TA), the CA requires York to provide you with work during the twelve-month period beginning in September. This work is not to exceed 135 hours per term. In the last round of bargaining the summer minimum guarantee was a crucial issue. The amount of the summer funding was also increased to \$4490 for 2005-2006, \$4625 for 2006-2007, and \$4764 for 2007-2008. Often this work will involve doing research for a professor, but you may be asked to do something else at York, such as academic advising for incoming undergraduate students. Increasingly this may also include extra teaching, either a summer course or a research contract during the summer.

To be eligible, you must put in a blanket application (by January 31) to Jean Levy. FGS will send you a form by March 15<sup>th</sup> on which you can indicate which term you prefer to do your additional work. There are three criteria by which you can opt not to take your summer guarantee in a given term:

- a) you are on research leave (as set out by FGS – consult their website for details; taking the summer to go away and do research usually doesn't count)
- b) you have medical, childcare or other compassionate reasons
- c) your Graduate Programme Director, supervisor/advisor and the Dean of FGS support a petition stating that taking the summer guarantee in a given term would hinder your academic progress

You will be informed of your eligibility midway through the winter term. If you hold substantial external or internal funding (such as SSHRC or OGS), they count as your minimum summer guarantee.

Tuition indexation was another hard fought issue in the last round of bargaining. Since it is not in the core of the CA but in a letter that the university has signed, this means that it is more fragile and could be cancelled entirely every time the contract comes up. The objective of tuition indexation is to address the rising cost of tuition. In the first of our hard won contracts (in 1998) it was agreed that Graduate students would be reimbursed the amount that tuition had gone up as of that date. What this means is that you will receive \$590 a term if you are a TA paying domestic fees. This will first be credited to your York account (and applied to any outstanding tuition) and any left over you will get a cheque for.

### **Right of First Refusal**

In effect, this is the Unit 1 seniority protection. Once you are teaching in a course, you have the “right of first refusal” for that course the following year. That means that, if you are still in the priority pool and if the course is offered, you will be offered the course again unless you refuse the offer. Once you leave a course, you have no seniority rights to the course in future years, although you get the right of first refusal in your new course assignment.

### **Professional Development**

A teaching assistantship provides you with many formal and informal opportunities for professional development. The time that you spend every week with your students can be considered professional development; you are gaining skills through actual practical application. For those who are interested in formal professional development opportunities, the Centre for the Support of Teaching (CST) offers regular seminars and presentations on effective teaching. These are advertised regularly through the departmental email. In addition, the CST has a webliography on teaching, accessible through their website, [www.yorku.ca/cst/](http://www.yorku.ca/cst/).

Your record as a TA, on your CV, reflects well on you when you apply for jobs in the academic market. The skills that you gain will assist you in public speaking and in interviews when the hiring committee asks about your skills and plans. Finally, reference letters that applaud your teaching skills will put you in a good position when applying for work.

This brings us to another point. Although you will find it comfortable to teach the same course year after year, it is a good idea to switch courses once or twice. You will gain valuable experience teaching for different people and teaching different subjects and levels. The benefit to you is that it will broaden your experience and you will have more models to work from when you are being interviewed for a position. Finally, reference letters from more than one professor are a bonus! For more information on professional development, see Section XI.

### **Personal Satisfaction**

There is a great deal of personal satisfaction to be gained from TAing. You might discover that you are a ‘natural’ at teaching and really enjoy the challenge that each week brings. You have the opportunity to watch students gradually improve their skills over the year. You have some degree of control over how the information is taught and engaged by the students. Be creative in your approach and have some fun with the material.

In addition to gaining valuable teaching and public speaking experience, you are playing an important part in the academic life of the students. You offer advice, direction, and encouragement, and most students appreciate this. At the end of the term or the year, when all is said and done, students may come up to you and thank you for all of your hard work (some may even come up to you at the end of the final exam and make you very uncomfortable by hugging you *right in front of everybody...* at least that's what we've heard).

Moments like these can be very gratifying. But it is often the more prosaic moments of teaching – when a student has made an effort, when a tutorial seems to go off without a hitch, or when everyone in the class seems to get it – that give you the most satisfaction.

## TA Responsibilities

Teaching Assistants in the history department are generally required to perform the following tasks. There may be other course related tasks that you will be asked to do (don't worry, fetching coffee for the boss *will not* be one of them):

- **Preparation for classes** – Once you're into the swing of things, preparation will become much easier and be less time consuming. You will have to do all the course readings in order to prepare for each tutorial. Typically, TAs spend about two hours preparing for each week, including reading and preparing a lesson plan.
- **Leading discussion groups** – This is really your main job and ideally the most rewarding thing about being a TA. See Section VI.
- **Attending lectures** – Departmental policy requires that you attend every lecture, especially if you haven't taught the course before. Most courses with tutorials have two hours of lectures per week. You are generally required to attend lectures unless you and the course director have come to an agreement that you do not have to attend. This might be the case when you have taught a course for two or three years running and you are familiar with the material. Again, it is between you and the course director to come to an agreement—otherwise it is compulsory to attend.
- **Grading students' work** – This job's so important we've given it its own section in the manual. See Section VII on Grading.
- **Holding office hours** – Actually that's a bit misleading. Typically, you're actually expected to hold only *one* office *hour* per week. Try to choose an hour that will be convenient for both you and your students, preferably on the same day as the course lectures or (better yet) your tutorials. Since you will also be sharing an office with several other TAs, try to arrange a time that does not conflict with your office mates' office hours. If you're a new TA, don't be surprised if students don't come to see you very often, at least not until they have assignments due. Nowadays, students (and some TAs) seem to prefer e-mail correspondence, although you should try to keep e-mail correspondence to a minimum. Encourage your students to come and see you instead!

*“My most embarrassing experience: I made a joke in tutorial about how office hours were very lonely times, and that the students should come more often to keep me company. Then one of them took me up on it. He came every week for the full hour just to talk, and I couldn't think of any way to say that I'd actually rather do work than hang out with him.”*

– Beverly Eadie

- **Invigilating tests and exams** – You will be required to attend and help supervise all tests and exams, including during the December and April exam periods (if your course has a mid-term and final exam).
- **Blanket Applications** – Even though the contract guarantees you five years of teaching beyond your first TA, you must put in an application (called a “blanket” application) for the following school year by January 31. You should apply to every department or hiring unit in which you have an interest in teaching (History TAs often teach in Social Science, Humanities, and other Arts courses, Glendon

History Department and the Atkinson School of Arts and Letters; some work as tutors in the Centre for Academic Writing).

## **What Your Collective Agreement Won't Tell You**

### **Departmental Expectations**

As an employee of the university and of the department, you will be expected to do your job to the best of your ability. If you are good at your job, you may also help the department to recruit and retain students. In a sense, the TA is an ambassador of the Department of History. This is important work as well. Keep your office hours and notify students, the CD and the office staff if you are not able to be there by calling 416-736-5123. Students may not often come during your office hours, but when they do, it is important that you are there for them.

It is expected that you will also recognize the hard work put in by others around you, including the office staff. We couldn't operate without them! In other words, treat your course director, fellow employees, and the office staff respectfully. Be friendly and professional to all! Start and end tutorials on time.

### **Record Keeping**

The better organized your grade and attendance sheets are from the start, the less work you will have later on. In the last couple of years Maxine Hayle (the Secretary to the Chair) has created spreadsheets for each tutorial. This has been an enormous help. Basically she emails you a sheet which has all of your students names and student numbers entered already as well as a list of all the assignments, their overall value and a space to keep track of attendance each week. The sheet is even set up to do all the math for you! It is a good idea to get comfortable with this sheet at the beginning of the year (and Maxine is more than willing to help you figure it out if need be) as it will save you an enormous amount of time throughout the year. Having these spreadsheets also makes life easier for the office staff and the CD if there are any petitions or appeals after the course has ended. Just make sure you back it up!

## **IX. What You Can Expect as a TA at York**

In this section, we have tried to predict what you can expect as a TA at York, based upon our experiences and the experiences of other TAs. Although we aren't clairvoyant, we can give you the lay of the land so you can come in feeling prepared. We have tried to give you an idea of where you fit in as a Teaching Assistant, as well as some resources that you will find useful. While we are not saying that you will need to use all the resources that we have listed, you can consult them if you do!

### **Your Relationship with the Course Director**

Course directors are responsible for preparing the course and all of its components, including a course outline, readings, assignments, lectures, and exams. They should provide you with free copies of the all the course materials.

Your CD should outline the purpose of the tutorials vis-à-vis the course. Sometimes the CD will leave it up to you to determine how you want to deal with the readings in tutorials and what questions you ask, but it should be made clear what you should generally be using the tutorial time for. Does the CD want you to spend part of the time reviewing lectures? Or does she want you to focus exclusively on the readings as more in-depth case studies into the course themes?

It is the CD's responsibility, not yours, to deal with petitions, plagiarism cases, deferrals, make-up exams, or special accommodations. Students may first come to you about such issues, but you should refer to them to the course director.

Your course director may wish to visit your tutorials during the year. She will need to inform you in advance of any such visit and let you know the purpose of the visit. If the visit is to be used for informal evaluation purposes, the CD must discuss with you the time and criteria for such evaluations and must discuss the results with you. A formal evaluation of your teaching (one that goes on your record) can only be carried out under conditions set out in the Collective Agreement. Your course director should be familiar with the Unit 1 Collective Agreement since, like it or not, she is your job supervisor. Your CD has a duty to respect the provisions of the Collective Agreement, particularly the rules concerning workload (maximum 270 hours) and class sizes. It is the joint responsibility of the course director and the TA to avoid overwork.

### **Teaching within the Framework of Someone Else's Course Design**

The great thing about being a TA is that someone else has already done most of the preparatory work for you. The readings will already be assigned. The occasionally frustrating thing about being a TA is that someone has already done most the preparatory work for you, and that the readings have already been assigned. You may be head honcho in your tutorials, but you don't really have much control over what students are being taught. This can be especially frustrating when you don't agree with the course director's approach to the subject or the way she has framed the course.

Because you're often responsible for grading all of your students' work, there's room for you to put your own spin on the course materials. Where the CD has given you specific directions about how to address the materials, however, you should follow her directions. Since most undergraduate courses have a final exam, over which you may (depending on the course director) have little control, you should be fair to your students by sticking to the script, so to speak, enough that they will be able to handle their exams.

### **Teaching at York**

York's student population is diverse; it is more multicultural than at many other Ontario universities. More than most universities, moreover, York is a commuter campus. Most of our students probably live at home in Toronto's suburbs with their parents (which often brings its own challenges). Many of our students come from immigrant families; they're often the first Canadian-born generation and the first generation to attend university. Keep these things in mind when dealing with your students.

A diversity of cultures enriches the teaching and learning experience, but can also create challenges. Be sensitive to cultural diversity and the fact that some students will feel an emotional attachment to some subjects that should not be discounted. The Collective Agreement mandates maximum tutorial sizes. The maximum class size for a one-hour tutorial is 25 students, 30 students for a two-hour tutorial. If the hiring unit wants you to take more it must get your permission and you will be paid extra (see Unit 1 CA, Article 16).

### **Services and Facilities available to TAs at York**

#### **Centre for Academic Writing**

Part of your job is helping students to write better essays, but you only have so much time. If students are having real trouble with their writing – let's say, for example, that they can't successfully string together a dozen words to make a sentence – then you might consider suggesting (as nicely as possible) that they visit the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW).

The CAW offers practical assistance to all students in the Faculty of Arts (yes, that includes graduate students), covering all aspects of the writing process. The primary work of the CAW is done in one-on-one tutoring sessions of either 25 or 50 minutes. When a student registers at the Centre, she will be assigned a tutor who will work with her until both the tutor and student are satisfied that the student is capable of handling written assignments without assistance. The CAW, however, is *not* an editing or proofreading service. It also offers drop-in writing assistance, workshops, and credit courses (refer students to the CAW website for information). You can't devote your entire weekly office hour to one student, but students can get weekly appointments at the CAW.



If students are reluctant to use the CAW, remind them that their tuition helps pay for the service, so they might as well use it! Remember, too, the CAW offers more than remedial help. Any student can profit from its services. The CAW is located in the Ross Building in S329 and can be reached at (416) 736-5134 or on the web, <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/caw/index.html>. The CAW's website also contains links to online writing resources.

You may also have students in your class who speak English as a second language. Talk to your CD about how you should handle students who have difficulty communicating and writing in English. You, or the CD, could direct the student to the English as a Second Language (ESL) Open Learning Centre (OLC) on campus, which is located in Vanier College, Room 037. Services offered by the centre are free of charge and include weekly workshops on topics related to the language needs of ESL students, individual tutoring on specific language needs, and language-learning through the computer. For more information on workshops and services at the ESL-OLC, check the website at: <http://www.yorku.ca/eslclc/keele/default.asp>. Students can also be directed to the Faculty of Arts Advising Centre for advice and guidance on academic planning, including their ESL needs. The Centre is located in 103 Central Square, and can be reached by phone at (416) 736-5022, or via the internet at [http://www.arts.yorku.ca/student\\_academic\\_centre/fasac.php](http://www.arts.yorku.ca/student_academic_centre/fasac.php).

### **Facilities and Equipment**

Under our Collective Agreement, the hiring unit (the History Department if you're teaching a history course) is obligated to provide you with office space. But don't get too excited – you have to share, usually with a lot of other TAs. There are usually more TAs assigned to each office than there are desks, so be prepared to share the space. You can't really hog a desk all to yourself, unless you have very generous office-mates.

The Department in which you are teaching should also provide you with access to a photocopier and a pass code so that you can make photocopies for your tutorials. Within reason, you can make whatever copies you need for teaching.

As a TA, you can order audio-visual equipment from the Instructional Technology Centre (ITC) and use film and video from the library's extensive collection. Email Maxine Hayle ([mhayle@yorku.ca](mailto:mhayle@yorku.ca)) to order equipment and she will book it under the name of the course and your CD.

Like all graduate students in History, you have access to the department and the computer lab any time Vari Hall is open (which is almost always). You can get the door codes for the main door, the computer lab, and the graduate student common room from the office staff (or from a knowledgeable professor or grad student). Remember that these codes should not be shared with anyone who is not a member of the department faculty or graduate student body. To print from the computers in the computer lab, you will need a password, which you can get by contacting the Computing Graduate Assistant.

You can also get yourself some reserved space in the form of a study carrel at Scott Library for a small rental and key fee. For more information, see [www.library.yorku.ca/FacultyAndGrad/GradCarrel.htm](http://www.library.yorku.ca/FacultyAndGrad/GradCarrel.htm).

On the fourth floor of Scott Library (Room 409), there is a Graduate Student Reading Room. This room was created by the Libraries, with generous assistance from the Office of the Vice-President Academic and the Faculty of Graduate Studies, as a quiet study space for graduate students. There are 122 seats at tables, carrels, and as lounge seating. The room is fully covered by the AirYork wireless network and all tables have YorkNet connections and electrical outlets. There are six computers and a printer (with payment by standard York University Libraries print/copy cards). The tables are equipped with reading lamps. An electronic noise reduction system has also been installed in the room. The room is fully accessible to graduate students with disabilities. Graduate students can enter the Graduate Student Reading Room by punching in the current door access code, which will be changed periodically. The Libraries will attempt to notify graduate students by way of their Graduate Program Directors of such a change, but it is possible for a graduate student to learn the current code by completing the Graduate Student Reading Room Door Access Code Form.

The lockers in the history graduate student common room (VH 2187) are usually reserved for doctoral students who don't have TA-ships and for MA students, none of whom have their own office space. Sometimes,

however, there are extra lockers. If you want to use a locker, see the Graduate Programme Assistant to sign up for one.

### **Accommodations for TAs with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities will be accommodated and, if necessary, will have access to York University's Department of Health and Safety funds designated for the purchase of special equipment and resources to assist employees in carrying out their teaching duties. If you have special needs, you should speak to the hiring unit in which you are teaching, and accommodations will be made wherever possible. See York's Procedures on Accommodation in Employment for Persons with Disabilities (which are also ensured by our Collective Agreement) [http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/u\\_pro/disabili.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/u_pro/disabili.htm).

## **X. Challenges for TAs**

In previous sections of this Guide, we've discussed some of the challenges you might face in areas of teaching such as grading and leading discussions. How many more challenges do you need, right? In this section, we highlight some other challenges that not everyone will face, but that you should be aware of since you might encounter them at York.

### **Addressing Different Learning Styles**

No two students are alike. Okay, this might be a truism, but this means that you have to teach in order to create an active learning environment where students with different learning styles are engaged. We could write an entire booklet on theories of different learning styles, but for fear of treading too far into the fields of psychology and education, we have summarized a few basic points here.

#### *Learning Styles*

A learning style is an approach to learning. In short, there are three different learning styles:

- **Visual**

*Visual Learners* learn best through seeing and observing. These students learn best from visual displays such as overheads, pictures, videos, reading off the board, and handouts. Visual learners will often take detailed notes and sit at the front of the class (although not always), and are more sensitive to your body language and facial expressions.

- **Auditory**

*Auditory Learners* learn best through lectures, discussions, and debates. These students might bring a tape recorder to class and benefit from being able to hear information spoken aloud along with reading it. Auditory learners are sensitive to the pitch and tone of your voice.

- **Tactile/Kinaesthetic**

*Tactile/Kinaesthetic* learners can be the most challenging for the university setting. These students learn best through hands-on activity and moving around. Tactile/kinaesthetic learners benefit from changes in activity such as small group work and role-playing activities.

While a student can primarily be one of the three styles of learners, she will often be a combination of the three.

## Multiple Intelligence Theories

According to theorists, there are eight different ways to demonstrate intellectual ability. In other words, students are often more proficient when it comes to one of the eight types of intelligence listed here:

- 1) The Linguistic Learner – ‘The Word Player’
  - Loves to read books, write and tell stories
  - Is good at memorising names, places, dates and trivia
  - Learns best by saying, hearing and seeing words
- 2) The Logical-Mathematical Learner – ‘The Questioner’
  - Likes to do experiments, figure things out, work with numbers, ask questions, and explore patterns and relationships
  - Is good at math, reasoning, logic and problem solving
  - Learns best by categorising, classifying and working with abstract patterns/relationships
- 3) The Spatial Learner – ‘The Visualiser’
  - Likes to draw, build, design and creation things, look at pictures/slides, watch movies, play with machines
  - Is good at imagining things, sensing changes, doing mazes/puzzles and reading maps and charts
  - Learns best by visualising, dreaming, using the mind’s eye, working with colours/pictures
- 4) The Musical Learner – ‘The Music Lover’
  - Likes to sing, hum tunes, listen to music, play and instrument, respond to music
  - Is good at picking up sounds, remembering melodies, noticing pitches/rhythms, keeping time
  - Learns best by rhythm and melody
- 5) The Bodily/Kinaesthetic Learner – ‘The Mover’
  - Likes to move around, touch and use body language
  - Is good at physical activities (sports, dance, acting, and crafts)
  - Learns best by touching, moving, interacting with space and processing knowledge through body sensations
- 6) The Interpersonal Learner – ‘The Socialiser’
  - Likes to have lots of friends, talk to people and join groups
  - Is good at understanding people, leading others, organising, communicating, manipulating and mediating conflicts
  - Learns best by sharing, comparing, relating, cooperating, and interviewing
- 7) The Intrapersonal Learner – ‘The Individual’
  - Likes to work alone and pursue own interests
  - Is good at understanding self, focusing inward on feelings/dreams, following instincts, pursuing interests/goals and being original
  - Learns best by working alone, doing individualised projects, self-pacing instruction and having own space
- 8) The Naturalist Learner – ‘The Nature Lover’
  - Likes to be outdoors and shows an interest in nature (plants and animals)
  - Is good at scientific exploration in the outdoors
  - Learns best by being outdoors, exploring and experimenting

While everyone is more proficient in one of these than the others no one is only intelligent in one way.

Adapted from Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.*)

## **Managing Students at Different Levels**

Not only do you have to be aware of different learning styles, but also you will soon realize that some students in your class excel, while others seem to fall behind. Teachers at all levels struggle with trying to maintain a balance in order to avoid teaching either to the “top” or the “bottom” half of the class.

Changing your teaching style from time to time will help to address this challenge. Perhaps some students are more suited to the style of learning that is fostered in the university setting, and are therefore your “best” students. Instead of trying to make the students adapt to a single style or method, why don’t you propose a variety of activities and methods of learning that will engage your students differently? For example, students who are silent in classroom discussions may shine in a small group setting; there is less attention focused on them and when they have to turn to the larger class to present their answers they will feel supported by the strength of their group.

Giving students your questions a week beforehand will also help them to feel more prepared when they arrive in your class. This will reduce some of the anxiety, and those students with weaker reading skills will have extra time to read through and think about the material. Depending on whether you have asked them to come prepared for a debate, small-group work, drawing the story on the board in cartoon form, or reiterating parts of the readings in groups of two, they will know what to expect and should (hopefully) be ready.

## **Older Students**

In some ways, it’s a bit odd to put a section on older students in the “challenges” section. Many TAs find that, far from being a challenge, “mature students” are often the most enthusiastic and best prepared members of a tutorial. Yet, many older students may initially feel a lack of confidence in an environment filled with much younger adults. As a TA, you can make older students feel more at ease by offering frequent positive feedback (hopefully, you are doing this with all your students anyway). Try not to single out older students based on their age, especially by turning to them for the perspective of an older generation. Just as you wouldn’t (or shouldn’t) turn to an African-Canadian for a black perspective, it would be inappropriate to ask mature students for a perspective based on their age. If they voluntarily take on this role, that’s fine. Older students are more likely to draw on their own personal experience for examples and inspiration and, occasionally, as the basis for the analysis in their papers. Remember, too, that older students will in many cases have made relatively greater sacrifices to be here than younger students and will often have different family issues, such as children, to deal with in addition to their academic responsibilities.

## **Students with Disabilities**

York makes a real effort to accommodate students with disabilities, including those who are visually impaired or who have learning disabilities. For people with physical disabilities, York offers a variety of services including paid and volunteer note-takers, research assistants, and sign language translators. Except in rare circumstances, students with disabilities will already have self-identified when they enrolled at York and will already have dealt with the Office for Persons with Disabilities in order to make accommodations for their special needs. It is the course director’s responsibility to sign any forms regarding accommodations for students. You can help create a positive learning environment for disabled students by accommodating their special needs without drawing undue attention to their disabilities. Like students with different learning styles, students with physical challenges will often benefit from having course materials presented in different ways. Some students will require the presence of another person, such as a sign language interpreter, to facilitate their learning. While this at first might seem distracting to other students, they will soon become accustomed to the third-party presence and return to focusing on the discussion and the material.

Students with learning disabilities will usually identify themselves to you. You should keep this information strictly confidential. Nevertheless, it helps you to be aware of a student’s learning disability. If a

student with a learning disability has not yet been to see an advisor at the Counselling and Development Centre, you should direct her there.

Tips for Teachers of Students with Learning Disabilities:

- be flexible and responsive to alternative learning styles
- identify learning strengths of students and put them to good use
- get detailed information on students' learning disabilities
- be creative in exploring ways to help students learn or demonstrate knowledge
- allow accommodations
- look for ways to reduce accommodations which become outdated as students develop new skills
- find opportunities for students to demonstrate their strengths and build self-esteem
- let students try, even if it means they sometimes fail
- help students learn from their failures

(from *Secrets for Success: Profiles of University Graduates with Learning Disabilities*)

Students with both learning and physical disabilities may require extra time writing exams or in-class tests (keep this in mind if you plan to spring the occasional pop-quiz on your students). Since January 2006 the scheduling of alternate exam times has been handled by the Registrar's Office for all students on the Keele campus. Students can now submit requests for alternate exam accommodations online through a link from this web page: <http://www.yorku.ca/altexams/policies/info> which also gives them step by step information. Hard copies of the forms are also available at the Student Client Services main reception area on the first floor of the Student Services Centre. Students can contact the Registrar's office by E-mail: [altexams@yorku.ca](mailto:altexams@yorku.ca), Telephone: 416.736.5500, TTY: 416.736.5660, Fax: 416.650.8124 at the Web site: [www.yorku.ca/altexams](http://www.yorku.ca/altexams) or visit them at W223 Student Services Centre.

For a list of the Disability Resources at York, including the *Faculty Resources and Awareness Guide: Teaching Students with Disabilities*, visit the website at <http://www.studentaffairs.yorku.ca/able/index.htm>.

### **How to Deal with Power Dynamics between Students**

Whether you realize it or not, there are always power dynamics in the classroom. Not only is there an instructor-learner dynamic (discussed above), but there is a power dynamic among peers in the classroom as well. As the instructor, you have the power to direct the classroom work and plan how the material will be communicated to the students, but also to address problematic relations in the seminar.

Many TAs go into their first tutorial hoping to create a safe, positive, and egalitarian learning environment that will be devoid of power dynamics, especially those that normally exist between teachers and students. Many of us would love nothing more than to tell our students that our classroom space is one in which no one, including the TA, is more important, has more authority, or is more of an expert than anyone else. However, no matter how much you'd like to eliminate power dynamics in the classroom, they are going to exist. Moreover, attempts to eliminate them often work against creating the safe, positive space that you were trying to create in the first place. You are, after all, the TA because you possess a certain amount of knowledge about the subject matter and the skills needed to analyze it. The trick is to find the right balance in your classroom between being an authority figure and acting as a facilitator for student learning.

Power dynamics can present themselves in different ways and are based on age, ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference, among other factors.

### **Gender/Race/Sexuality**

Your classroom will be a cross-section of individuals of different genders with different backgrounds, belief systems, and sexual preferences – just to name a few. While this can make your classroom a dynamic environment, it can also lead to discomfort, uncertainty, and conflict. As educators, we have a duty of care to provide a classroom that is safe and accepting and free from harassment, exclusion, and intimidation. How can you prepare for this?

First, it is helpful to do some self-evaluation. What are your own biases and stereotypes? What is your own background? Are you sensitive to issues regarding different cultures, sexual preferences, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds? While you shouldn't be expected to leave your own identity at the door, it is important to have a level of awareness about all the issues that you will certainly confront at a campus as diverse as this one.

Using the following *Checklist for Engaged Pedagogy in Racially Diverse Classrooms* will help you as a teacher of a culturally diverse classroom:

#### Discourage

- qualifiers which reinforce racial stereotypes
- assumptions that all members of racial groups are the same, or even similar
- ethnic clichés
- racist/ethno-centrist jokes
- patronizing behaviour or tokenism by race, including expecting students of non-European ancestry to respond for their entire ethno-racial group
- avoidance of eye contact with students of non-European ancestry
- relating a students' academic difficulties with her/his ethno-racial background
- using a "colour-code" to describe or interpret the actions of students

#### Encourage

- an acknowledgment of the presence of racial diversity in your classroom
- taking responsibility for managing/monitoring ethnic and racial interactions
- ground rules for mutual respect in the classroom
- choosing language that does not reinforce bias
- giving equal respect to all races and presenting a balanced representation in visual aids and other media
- choosing texts and print media that avoid racial discrimination and stereotyping
- expanding your horizon by including contributions from non-traditional scholars
- acknowledging and respecting all of your students' accents
- being patient with students whose first language is not English
- encouraging students to relate their learning to their personal experience

(From *Voices from the Classroom: Reflections on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (Toronto: Garamond, 2001))

Having some "cultural competence" about other cultures will help you to avoid (out of ignorance) offending your students. We know that you are pressed for time but try to become more informed about the groups of students that make up your class.

Be aware of your language and do not make any assumptions about students' backgrounds. You don't know, for example, your students' socio-economic backgrounds, whether or not they came from 'traditional' family structures, whether their parents went to university/college, or if they recently immigrated to Canada. An off-the-cuff comment about the students' social lives that assumes that they are heterosexual can be disrespectful. In other words, check your language, actions, and assumptions in order to create an environment of respect in your class.

Finally, in laying the ground rules at the start of the year, you must be absolutely and unquestionably firm about not allowing any disrespectful, openly hostile, or intimidating behaviour. No, you don't have to threaten your students. But be clear that you want your class to be one where people respect each other, and this respect should extend to you as well. In laying these ground rules and agreeing on them together, it is clear that sexist, heterosexist, and racist behaviour is not allowed. With any luck, this proactive approach on your part will set a tone of respect from the beginning of the year.

Unfortunately, just because you have laid these ground rules doesn't mean that all students will abide by them. Discuss any problematic behaviour on the part of a student with your course director so that it can be addressed. Remember, your safety and well-being are important.

### **How to Turn Terrible Moments into Teachable Moments**

What do you do if you inadvertently make a comment that offends one of your students? What happens if a heated debate erupts in your classroom over a contentious issue? If you have made a comment that was misunderstood or inappropriate, apologize (if you feel you should). You can then use that moment to get the class involved in a discussion on the issue. Don't obsess about the fact that you made a mistake, but be aware and make the appropriate remedy.

If a heated discussion erupts in the class, you can physically signal a time out and tell the class that you are stopping the debate. This will help you regain control. The next step is to try to defuse the anger, frustration, and hostility by telling the students to take out a piece of paper and write about how they feel about what just happened – they don't have to hand in the paper to you, but they can get their feelings and thoughts out on paper. In this way, the students can constructively express themselves. While the students are writing, you can take the five or ten minutes to regroup and think of your next strategy. Depending on the debate, you can interrupt the discussion if you sense it is not balanced. If more information is needed, then you can tell the class that the discussion can continue when everyone has come back with more information.

Remind the students again about the ground rules of the classroom and the importance of constructive dialogue. When the debate seems to be between two students, deflect attention away from them by having the whole class address the issue. Avoid personalizing the issue, but introduce it to the other students as "A comment has been made that suggests X. What do you think about this issue?" If there is a difficult situation in your class, make sure that you address all actions, issues, and concerns of those involved. You can have people come and talk to you after the class to discuss the issue further.

*Never run after an angry student who has left the room. Assure the class that you will follow up with that student later.*

It is a good idea to be aware of the surroundings of your classroom. Where is the closest phone? How can you contact York Security? For more information about security at York, see the York Security Services website at [www.yorku.ca/security/](http://www.yorku.ca/security/).

### **International Graduate Students Teaching at York**

Cultural differences may be particularly relevant to International Graduate Student TAs, especially those who have recently arrived at York. Virtually all cultures recognize the teacher as an authority figure, but the standards of behaviour expected from teachers and students and the level of deference accorded to teachers varies widely. In general, Canadian university teachers expect a high level of participation from their students and encourage their students to challenge the ideas of their teachers and their peers. While, in Canadian universities, such behaviour is seen as a sign of intellectual curiosity, in other cultural settings the same behaviour might be judged as simply rude.

International graduate students may also face the prospect of teaching in a language other than their first, which can add to the stress of teaching. It's best to be up front with your students on the first day about an issue such as teaching in a second language, but don't dwell on it; you don't want to undermine the students' respect for you. Remember, you've been hired because of your knowledge and skill in the discipline.

Fortunately, the History department normally has a large complement of international graduate students, many of whom have faced similar challenges and who can be relied upon to share the wisdom of their experiences. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your course director, other professors, and other TAs about how the system works here, including expectations for grading papers. If the Canadian educational system is

unfamiliar to you, you might consider asking another TA if you can sit in on one of her tutorials to get a feel for how things work.

For more information, check the following resources:

*Teaching Tips for International Graduate Student Teaching Assistants*, (Dalhousie University), <http://www.dal.ca/~oidt/12itas.html>

*International Graduate Student Committee* <http://www.geocities.com/internationalgradstud/>

The International Graduate Student Committee (IGSC) in CUPE 3903 is a union body with a mandate to advocate on behalf of International Graduate Students, focusing on both economic and academic issues.

*York International—International Student Services Program* <http://international.yorku.ca/>

York International is responsible for service and support to international students, and it provides information sessions throughout the year for all international students. These include sessions on academic life at York, graduation, financial aid and planning, on-campus employment, Canada Immigration regulations and Canadian taxes. An extensive reception and orientation service is offered for new students at the start of each term. York International also administers the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), which is mandatory for international students. Individual advising is available to international students on issues such as academic and cultural adjustment, financial planning, and immigration regulations.

## **XI. How to Get the Most Out of Your York TA Experience**

While you're at York, you might consider ways to turn your TA experience into an opportunity for personal and professional development. If you're headed for a career that involves teaching, it's particularly important to take advantage of at least some of these opportunities. This section of the booklet will outline some of the resources available at York and some of the ways that you can work on and document your professional development.

### **Centre for Support of Teaching (CST)**

The Centre for the Support of Teaching was established in June 1989 to provide advocacy for excellence and innovation in teaching and to assist individuals, hiring units, and faculties in improving student learning. The CST coordinates a broad range of programs and strategies to promote reflective practice and scholarly dialogue on teaching and learning among faculty and graduate students at York University. Visit the website at [www.yorku.ca/cst/](http://www.yorku.ca/cst/) to find more information about the following topics.

*Teaching and Learning:* Resources available electronically on course development, delivery and evaluation, teaching critical thinking, problem based and cooperative learning, teaching with technology, TA Teaching tools, and association journals and listservs.

*Programs for Graduate Students:* TA Day, University Teaching Practicum (UTP), FAQs about the UTP, Ongoing Lecture Series, University Teaching and Learning (UTAL), Teaching Assistants Resource Group (TARG).

*Publications.* Core: York's Newsletter on University Teaching, SCOTL Bulletins, Teaching Documentation Guide (SCOTL), Teaching Evaluation Guide (SCOTL), TDGA Manual, The University Teaching Practicum, UTP Checklist.



## The University Teaching Practicum

The University Teaching Practicum (UTP) is a useful and painless way to begin the process of documenting your professional development as a teacher (and its inclusion on your CV won't do you any harm either!). The UTP is a self-directed programme of professional development, undertaken by teaching assistants at York. It is designed to encourage TAs to reflect upon their teaching philosophy and practice and to draw upon their own experiences and the experiences of others to develop their teaching skills. Once you register for the Practicum with the CST, you can complete its three components at your own pace:

- 1) *General Principles of Pedagogy*. To fulfil the requirements for this component, you must complete twenty hours of study exploring teaching topics and five hours of discipline specific study. Usually you would complete the general programme of study (20 hours) by attending TA Days, TARG workshops, or other conference sessions related to teaching. You can also fulfil your general requirement by taking the summer half course UTAL 5000.03. The discipline-specific hours can be filled by attending TDGA workshops or through authorized independent study. You can find the schedule of TA Workshops and Seminars help by CST at [www.yorku.ca/cst/grads/ta\\_workshops.html](http://www.yorku.ca/cst/grads/ta_workshops.html).
- 2) *Teaching Practice and Analysis*. You must complete at least one full TA-ship or equivalent as well as an analysis of your teaching, which will include colleague and student evaluations, plus a self-evaluated videotaping of you in action.
- 3) *Teaching Dossier*. You will develop a dossier that includes 1) a statement of your teaching philosophy, 2) your teaching strategies, 3) description of your experience and professional development, and 4) an analysis of your teaching.

Once all three components have been completed, the CST and the Dean of Graduate Studies will review your dossier and will give successful candidates a UTP certificate.

## TA Days

TA Day, organized by the CST during the first week of September, is a free one-day teaching development conference for teaching assistants. It offers a full range of workshops—run by professors, CST experts, and experienced TAs – for both first time and experienced TAs. Registration is onsite. You can attend the whole day or simply drop in for a session or two that interests you.

Introductory topics typically include running your first tutorial, survival strategies for TAs, facilitating learning among ESL students, marking and grading written assignments, teaching library research skills to undergrads, and generating discussion. Advanced workshops might include such topics as making the transition from teaching assistant to course director, teaching writing skills, TA-CD-student relations, handling conflict and emotion in the classroom, active learning in larger classrooms, an introduction to lecturing, creative pedagogy, international TAs teaching at York, and power in the classroom.

## TDGA Workshops

History TDGA seminars are specifically geared toward History TAs and are an excellent opportunity to hone your teaching skills (and for those of you working on the Teaching Practicum, they count toward your discipline-specific requirements).

The History TDGA (Teaching Development Graduate Assistant) is a senior TA, recommended by the Graduate History Program and appointed by CST, who works in consultation with the CST to organize several discipline-specific teaching workshops within the department during the fall and winter terms. These seminars are geared specifically for History TAs, but are open to all TAs. You are also welcome to attend TDGA workshops in other departments.

TDGA workshops are usually facilitated by a mixture of faculty, TAs, and outside experts, depending on the nature of the topic. They are generally interactive workshops; most of the time is set aside for creative discussions among presenters and participants.

## Teaching Assessment and Evaluation

Experts on teaching assessment define two different types of evaluation and assessment:

- *Formative assessments* are designed to promote reflective teaching practices, to encourage growth, to improve performance, and to improve student learning. They can be conducted at any point during the year, and their purpose is to identify the need for changes in teaching or grading methods in order to improve student learning. They are generally not used in any formal evaluation process without your permission. It is up to you to initiate formative assessments.
- *Summative evaluations* provide an overview of your teaching and retrospective assessment of your teaching practice. They are usually conducted at the end of a course or when you're ready to start applying for jobs.

Both types of assessment and evaluation are important to your development as a teacher. Summative evaluations (such as formalized student evaluations) are enlightening and will be necessary evidence of your teaching accomplishments when you are applying for teaching jobs. Yet, formative assessments are even more important, since they will lead you to ongoing reflection on your teaching and greater professional development.

### Self-evaluation

There's no one method of self-evaluation that will work for everyone in every circumstance. We'll give you an idea of techniques you can use, but you might have many ideas of your own. Many forms of self-evaluation are very informal and require little preparation. Others require some thought and preparation. All of them should have a clearly identified purpose, and it helps to have a plan for acting on the results of the evaluation.

*Teaching logs or journals* are kept throughout the entire year. You can start them any time, especially if you don't intend to share them with anyone, but they are most useful if begun at the beginning of the year or kept over multiple years, especially if you teach the same course more than once. In your journal, you will keep a brief record of what you did to prepare for each class, what your expectations were, what themes and questions you focused the discussion on, how students responded to the material, and what worked and didn't work. If you're full of nothing but praise for yourself (much of it probably deserved), you'll probably get little out of the exercise. Conversely, if you do nothing but put down your own teaching, you'll have little chance for growth. Be fair to yourself by recording both positive and negative aspects of your teaching experience. After a while, you'll be able to identify things that work for you and your students and things that don't, and you'll be able to identify areas of teaching practice where you can make some changes.

### Student Evaluations

Of the two types of student evaluations, formal and informal, you'll have more control over informal evaluations, since most of them are self-initiated.

#### *Formal Evaluations*

Toward the end of the academic year in the Faculty of Arts, usually in March, undergraduate students get a chance to fill out standardized evaluations of all their courses. As a tutorial leader, you will have to distribute these evaluations to your students and set aside twenty minutes at the end of one of your tutorials for them to complete the forms. In the spring of 2006 a pilot programme was started using online course evaluations which students could fill out at any point over a three week period. It is currently up to the CD and course as a whole to decide whether to use paper or electronic means of evaluation.

York's evaluation forms have sections in which students can both evaluate aspects of your teaching numerically and provide you with written detailed comments about the course and your teaching practices. According to our Collective Agreement, these evaluations will only become part of your Professional

Performance and Service File with your written permission. CD should send the numerical results and make the written comments available to TAs. Please do not hesitate to ask.

### *Informal Evaluations*

In addition to these official evaluations, you might also think about conducting your own informal evaluations from time to time throughout the course of the year. Informal evaluations can be as simple as taking ten or fifteen minutes out of one tutorial to ask students to reflect on and discuss their experiences so far, and make suggestions about how to improve the tutorial. Giving your students some advance notice that you're going to do this will probably yield better results than just springing it on them. Assure them (as long as you actually mean it) that you are prepared to hear constructive criticism of your performance.

Perhaps at least once, mid-way through the course, give students an opportunity to make a written informal evaluation of the tutorial. The last tutorial session before the December exam period is often a good time to do this, especially if there's no exam in your course, since students' attention and preparedness have generally begun to flag at this point. You'll also have a chance to thoroughly review students' comments over the break. Make sure you give students the opportunity to do their evaluations anonymously which includes ensuring that they do evaluations in a way that doesn't allow you to recognise their handwriting.

Designing the right questions for these evaluations is crucial to getting helpful responses that you can then use to reflect upon your teaching practices. Try questions such as, What did you find most/least helpful about the course? What would you like to do more of/less of in the tutorial? or Have the tutorials provided you with opportunities to participate? And how could tutorials be improved to facilitate your participation? Let students know that you will take their comments seriously and try, where feasible, to incorporate their suggestions for improving the course into your teaching practice. When you have reviewed the comments, share them with your students, and discuss how you can act upon their suggestions.

Here are a few tried and true methods of classroom assessment, suggested by SCOTL's *Guide to Teaching Assessment and Evaluation*:

- The *One-Minute Paper* is a technique used to get students to briefly reflect and comment on what they have been learning in a particular class. In a One-Minute Paper, you ask students at the end of the class to respond anonymously to these questions: 1) "What is the most important thing you learned today?" and 2) "What question remains uppermost in your mind?"
- The *Muddiest Point* is a variation of the One-Minute Paper that asks students "What was the 'muddiest point' for you today?" It gives you an idea of what students have learned (or not learned) about the day's topic and indicates issues that you might want to explore further.
- *Critical Incident Questionnaires* ask students a series of five questions (you should definitely prepare this one as a single-sheet hand-out) that focus on critical moments of learning in the course. They require more time—about 10 minutes is a good bet—than the previous two techniques, so you'd have to use them sparingly in one-hour tutorials. As well as providing substantive feedback concerning students' engagement with the course, Critical Incident Questionnaires can reveal power dynamics that might not be apparent to you as the instructor.

#### Critical Incident Questionnaire:

- 1) At what moment this week were you most engaged as a learner?
- 2) At what moment were you most distanced as a learner?
- 3) What action taken or contribution made this week by anyone in the course did you find most helpful or affirming?
- 4) What action or contribution this week by anyone in the course did you find most confusing or puzzling?
- 5) What surprised you most about the course this week?

## **Faculty Evaluations**

Generally, your course director will want to visit at least one of your tutorials, once per year. As outlined in Section IX of this manual, you must be notified in advance of the timing and purpose of such a visit. The general aim of informal and formal evaluations is to improve your teaching. You may also want to use such a visit as a means to document your teaching, and perhaps have your course director write you a letter that you can add to your teaching portfolio. If your CD happens to be your dissertation supervisor, then it's a particularly good idea to have her visit your classroom; when she eventually writes you letters for academic jobs (if that's where you're headed), she'll be able to say more about your teaching.

The employer only has the right to use formal evaluations (as defined in the Collective Agreement Article 13.02.01) in hiring decisions, but you can use informal evaluations to document your teaching.

## **Peer Pairing**

Colleagues in your field are probably best suited to evaluate the teaching methods used in your tutorials. At the faculty level, peer observation forms a key part of summative evaluations for tenure and promotion. At the TA level, peer observation would be an entirely self-initiated process.

Peer pairing, a valuable form of peer observation, involves two colleagues (in this case you and another TA) observing each other's teaching through classroom visits and providing constructive feedback. Although many of us have been tutorial students ourselves, this is not always the case. At any rate, the experience of teaching a tutorial is quite different from being a student in one. Witnessing another's teaching methods may be of as much value to you as having someone else observe and comment on your teaching. Peer pairing works best if the pair meets beforehand to establish clear criteria for evaluation. It also works best if conducted over a number of sessions, so that you and your colleague will have a chance to implement and observe changes in teaching practices based on the peer review.

Peer pairing, of course, has its risks and its disadvantages. Having someone else sit in on your teaching session, even if she is a friend and colleague, can be very intimidating and can subvert your performance. Friends and colleagues are often very generous evaluators (great for the ego, but perhaps not as useful for your professional development). The Centre for Support of Teaching, however, has developed guidelines for the use of peer pairing and can provide assistance to teaching assistants interested in establishing peer-pairing relationships.

## **Documenting Your Teaching**

When you get to the end of your career as a graduate student and you start thinking about applying for jobs, you're going to need to document your teaching. As anyone who's had to do this at the end of grad school will tell you, this task will be made much easier if you've been engaged in it all the way along. It's never too late to start. The sooner you begin documenting your teaching, the more benefit you will get out of the process. Keep records and samples of everything that you produce for your tutorials. It's better to have too much than to find out later that you've destroyed something useful. Perhaps the more important reason to document your teaching is for your own benefit; documenting your teaching will lead you to reflect, in very concrete ways, upon your teaching and to develop and improve your professional skills, many of which are transferable to other careers besides teaching.

### *Teaching Dossiers*

One of the best ways that you can document your teaching is to develop a Teaching Dossier or portfolio – a collection of documents that together provides a description of your teaching accomplishments. Much like an artist's portfolio, it selectively samples your work. However, unlike an artist, you have to display your accomplishments indirectly, through description, summary, and example, since you obviously cannot literally demonstrate your teaching practice through a collection of documents. Your dossier will not contain every single piece of information produced by you and about you in the course of your teaching. Rather, it is a selective compilation, organized in such a way as to summarize and highlight your teaching activities and their

effectiveness. Your portfolio will contain a statement of your teaching philosophy, a description of your teaching goals, and an assessment of your classroom practices, which should include identification of your teaching strengths as well as aspects that could be improved. In addition, your dossier will highlight any contributions you have made to teaching and learning generally, including publications on teaching. Your Curriculum Vitae, your academic résumé, will be a part of your teaching dossier. While your CV provides a concise summary of your teaching and professional experience, your dossier highlights important aspects of your experiences and teaching accomplishments.

A new trend witnessed in hiring committees is for candidates to submit a compact portfolio where they highlight their goals and methods. A good thing to do, especially if you have been creative or inventive in the classroom. Bromides like “I strive to empower the students” are less useful than the story of a trick that went well. When on the job market, TAs should consult very very very closely with their professors about the whole packet they send out as, sometimes, the smallest thing can make all the difference.

### *Course Portfolios*

A Course Portfolio is usually a part of a teaching portfolio. It documents your teaching in a specific course, perhaps over a number of years. It might include a teaching log, any handouts or materials that you developed or used in your teaching, copies of student feedback (informal and formal evaluations), and other evidence of teaching practice and philosophy. As a TA, your Teaching Portfolio will generally include most, if not all, of these elements:

- Your CV
- A statement of your teaching philosophy that reveals your understanding of the connection between your teaching practices and your educational goals
- A summary of your teaching experience
- One or more course portfolios, including samples of teaching materials you developed for the course and samples of students’ work that show evidence of your work with students
- Peer evaluations
- Student evaluations
- Faculty evaluations
- Evidence of self-evaluation
- Publications on teaching or evidence of other teaching development activities, such as leading or even attending workshops.

A savvy excerpt from the portfolio works better than sending a copy of the whole to a hiring committee, as members are reading a lot of stuff very fast.

For more information on teaching and course portfolios, visit the CST (in person or on the web) or check out this very comprehensive guide from the University of Texas at El Paso, <http://www.utep.edu/cetal/portfoli/>.

## **XII. Other Teaching Development Opportunities**

### **Lecturing**

Most course directors would be more than happy to let you do an occasional guest lecture in the course in which you are a TA, although some will jealously guard those lectures that are on their particular specialty. Getting some experience lecturing will be valuable to you when you’re entering the academic job market (if indeed that’s where you plan to end up).

Typically (and in ideal circumstances), a lecturer will spend about three to five hours preparing for every lecture hour. Your first lecture or two however, will probably take you much longer. It's very important to practice and time the lecture beforehand, especially if you plan to use audio-visuals or PowerPoint. Be sure you keep in mind the level of your audience and the time constraints. Most first-time lecturers have a tendency to try to pack in far, far too much information.

### **Ticketed Courses**

Most years, the Department will have an opportunity to offer a senior graduate student a chance to teach their own course as a course director. The Department has tended to get two Unit 1 "tickets," which allow it to appoint a Unit 1 to a course directorship to fill in for faculty on leave if those leaves create curricular need. The Department receives ticketed courses based on a competitive application to the Faculty of Arts from a limited pool of funding for tickets assigned to the Faculty of Arts. (The number of tickets allocated for Unit 1 CDs across the university is determined by the parties to the CUPE Collective Agreement.) Accordingly, the department's success in receiving those tickets is dependent upon the needs of the undergraduate programme and the budgetary decisions of the Faculty of Arts. In other words, the needs of the undergraduate programme alone determine which courses need to be taught and thus which tickets are requested. Over the past few years, the Department has received one or two tickets a year, but tickets are not guaranteed. In the History Department, the tickets available are usually for fourth year seminars and colloquia, and occasionally for third-year lecture courses. There is no formal application process for ticketed course directorships, and the Chair of the Department chooses suitable candidates in consultation with the Graduate Programme Director.

The downside to doing a ticketed course is that you aren't paid any more than you are as a tutorial leader. Moreover, it's usually *a lot more* work since you have to design the course and do all the things that course directors normally do, including writing and giving lectures, in some cases. Taking on a ticketed course can substantially slow down your dissertation progress. If it's your first ticket, however, you have a right (as per CA 10.01.3) to request marker/grader assistance equivalent to one hour per student enrolled in your course.

The advantage of taking a ticket (if one is offered to you) is obvious. It's an excellent opportunity to gain some early experience teaching your own course. This looks great on your C.V. If you get a ticket, you can either use the previous year's syllabus or, if you prefer, redesign the syllabus according to your own teaching philosophy and style. It also helps a lot on the job market, especially in interviews, as you can talk with confidence about how you design courses.

### **University-Wide Teaching Awards**

York University has four annual university-wide awards for excellence in teaching, one of which is designated for Teaching Assistants. The York University Parents' Association sponsors the Awards and the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCOTL) selects the recipients. Recipients of the awards receive \$3,000, have their names engraved on the University-Wide Teaching Award plaques in Vari Hall, and are recognized at convocation ceremonies. Faculty, students, and/or alumni may make nominations, individually or collectively. The TA award is open to all teaching assistants currently enrolled in a graduate degree program at York who have held the equivalent of at least one full teaching assistantship in the year before their nomination. It usually takes a hard-working backer to assemble a successful dossier – probably a prof but perhaps a fellow TA, and a few months of lead time are very handy. It has been suggested you start the campaign in the spring, for a fall target date. Any TA interested in applying or helping apply should touch base in the department, as several professors have either won, or helped others win, and there is local wisdom about what things work well.

In evaluating nominations, SCOTL will look for evidence of:

- 1) Positive learning experiences for students
- 2) Successful teaching strategies.
- 3) Commitment to professional development

- 4) Continuing excellence in all areas of the nominee's teaching over a period of years.

Note that past applications are available for your perusal. Contact Terry Carter at the SCOTL or the website: [http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate\\_cte\\_main\\_pages/scotl.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate_cte_main_pages/scotl.htm)

### **XIII. Bibliography and Other Resources**

Many of the sources listed below were used in coming up with ideas for this manual.

#### **At York**

York provides teaching assistants with many resources, if you know where to look for them. Don't underestimate the value of talking about teaching practice with other TAs in the department. The TDGA, for example, is someone with a few years of teaching experience and someone who has spent some time reflecting on teaching. Experienced TAs are also usually willing to share the benefit of their experience, including telling you all about their most embarrassing moments or stupid TA tricks. Even after you have a few years' experience, don't become so jaded and cynical that you're unwilling to learn something from less experienced and perhaps younger TAs (who, let's face it, will probably be more 'down with the kids' than you are)...

#### *History TDGA Resource Library*

Within the department, the TDGA maintains a locker in the graduate students' common room (VH2187) that contains binders with teaching resources organized by topic.

#### *The Centre for Support of Teaching (CST)*

The CST maintains an excellent website at <http://www.yorku.ca/cst/>. There, you'll find resources available electronically on course development, delivery, and evaluation, teaching critical thinking, problem-based and cooperative learning, teaching with technology, TA Teaching tools, and association journals and listservs. You can contact the CST at [cst@yorku.ca](mailto:cst@yorku.ca) or drop by the Centre, located on the main floor of the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Building.

#### *The Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning*

SCOTL works with the CST to articulate and implement objectives in York's Academic Plan. It has published two short, informative guides on evaluating your teaching. <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate/committees/scotl/>

#### *The Learning Skills Program of the Counselling and Career Development Centre*

The Centre's website contains a number of useful handouts that you can print out and give to your students, including ones on reading skills, studying for exams, how to take notes, stress management, and general tips for university success. See <http://www.yorku.cdc/lsp/index.htm>

#### **On the Web**

We all know there's a lot of junk on the web, but there are also many valuable teaching resources. If you're into web surfing, try other universities' sites. Most Canadian and US universities, especially those that use teaching assistants, will have a centre such as York's CST.

If you're not into surfing yourself, try some of these sites:  
American Historical Association, *The AHA and Teaching* <http://www.theaha.org/teaching/>

The AHA website contains links to articles on teaching history and some good examples of course portfolios.

Dalhousie University, *University Teaching and Learning: An Instructional Resource Guide for Teaching Assistants at Dalhousie University*. <http://www.dal.ca/~oidt/taguide/TofC.htm>

University of Hawaii, *Faculty Development Teaching Tips Index*

This is a comprehensive website that provides a wealth of online teaching materials, much of it reprinted from other sources. Go to <http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/> and search for “Faculty Development Teaching.”

University of Prince Edward Island, *Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*.  
<http://www.upei.ca/stlhe/>.

Queen’s University, *A Handbook for Teaching Assistants*, by Allyson Hadwin and Susan Wilcox, Instructional Development Centre. <http://www.queensu.ca/idc/idcresources/handbook/index.html>

Temple University, *Teaching at Temple: An Introductory Handbook for Teaching Assistants*  
<http://www.temple.edu/attic/tahandbk.html>

The University of Western Ontario, Teaching Support Centre. <http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/index.html>. They publish a monthly journal *Reflections* which is available online. See September 17, 1986 issue for ‘Using Discussion in your class’.

## Print Sources

Several years ago, the Graduate Students’ Committee of the Canadian Historical Association published a useful handbook, John S. Lutz et al., *Resource Guide for Teaching and Marking Assistants in History* (Ottawa: Graduate Students’ Committee of the Canadian Historical Association, 2002). This is an excellent little resource guide. Scott Library has a copy, or you can find one in the TA Resources locker in VH 2187 in the General Topics binder.

Once a year, the CST publication *Core: York’s Newsletter on University Teaching* publishes a TA issue, sponsored by the CST and CUPE 3903, which includes articles on teaching written by York TAs. These are also available online at <http://www.yorku.ca/cst/res/core.htm>.

York’s Libraries hold copies of these recent publications that may be of some assistance:

Allen, R. R., and Theodore Rueter. *Teaching Assistant Strategies: An Introduction to College Teaching*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1990. LB 2335.4 A43 1990.

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Herman, Deborah M., and Julie M. Schmid. *Cogs in the Classroom Factory: The Changing Identity of Academic Labor*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003. LB 2335.865 U6 C65 2003.



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- Nyquist, Jody D. *Preparing the Professoriate of Tomorrow to Teach: Selected Readings in TA Training*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co., 1991. LB 2335.4 P74 1991.
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- Powell, Stuart ed. *Special teaching in higher education: successful strategies for access and inclusion*. London: Kogan Page, 2003. LC 4814 G72 S369 2003.
- Shoemaker, Betty and Larry Lewin. *Innovative instruction: a menu of teaching tools for effective student learning*. Norwood, Mass.: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 2004. LB 1025.3 S46 2004.
- Smith, Jan, Colleen M. Meyers, and Amy J. Burkharter. *Communicate: Strategies for International Teaching Assistants*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall, 1992. LB 2335.4 S65 1992.

## XIV. Appendices

### History Department Who's Who

As a graduate student and a teaching assistant, whom can you turn to for advice? The following will generally be your points of contact in the department (If you've already enrolled in the Graduate Programme in History at York by the time you're reading this, then you've no doubt already met the Graduate Programme Director and the Graduate Programme Assistant—but we've included them here anyway).

#### *Veteran TAs*

One of your best, most accessible, and least intimidating points of contact will be your fellow TAs. During the weekdays, you can usually find a few hanging out in the graduate student common room (VH 2187). Most people will be more than willing to share with you their successes and failures in teaching. Also, in the fall of each year, the Graduate History Students' Association distributes a phone list of all graduate students.

#### *Course Directors and other faculty*

While you may find some course directors more approachable than others, the majority are quite willing to dispense advice (some of them in copious quantities) to the confused or just plain curious TA. Don't be afraid to talk about teaching with various faculty members.

### *Graduate Programme Director (GPD)*

The GPD is responsible for the academic administration of the Graduate Programme in History, including the negotiation of Teaching Assistantships with new graduate students. The GPD usually serves for a three year term.

### *Graduate Programme Assistant (GPA)*

Essentially, the GPA is the manager of the Graduate Programme in History. The GPA manages records, regulations, student support, applications for external scholarships, and about a million other things too numerous to mention here. You can reach the GPA at 416-736-5127. The current GPA is Lisa Hoffmann [lhoffman@yorku.ca](mailto:lhoffman@yorku.ca).

### *Director of Undergraduate Studies*

The Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) is responsible for the administration of the undergraduate history programme.

### *Department Chair*

The Chair of the Department administers Department's affairs and is generally the head honcho. She also works with the GPD to assign TA-ships.

### *Office Staff*

The office staff keeps the department functioning smoothly. They are the first point of contact with undergraduate students in the front office, and they maintain the external as well as internal business in the department. Jean Levy ([jrlevy@yorku.ca](mailto:jrlevy@yorku.ca)) is the Assistant to the Chair of the Department. Among other things, she's the keeper of the office door keys, as well as the person to whom you'll submit your Blanket Applications every January. Her office is directly across from the photocopy room (VH 2140 D). In the main office you'll find Maxine Hayle ([mhayle@yorku.ca](mailto:mhayle@yorku.ca)) Secretary to the Chair. For computer related matters, or to get an access code to use the department's photocopier, contact Attefa Salihi ([attefa@yorku.ca](mailto:attefa@yorku.ca)) the Web Administrator.

### *CUPE 3903 Union Stewards*

The Department usually has two or three union stewards, representatives elected by the members of the Department from all units. They act as liaisons between the Union and you and are an excellent resource regarding contract matters.

### *TA Liaison Committee*

The committee normally consists of two faculty and two graduate students: one of the TA union stewards and the current Teaching Development Graduate Assistant.

### *Teaching Development Graduate Assistant*

The TDGA sits on the TA Liaison Committee, but her most important job is to plan teaching training sessions. There are usually two or three per semester and give TAs a chance to get together to hear about and discuss particular teaching related issues. They also help fulfill the requirements of the Teaching Practicum.

## Essay Marking Sheet

**Course:**

**Tutorial Assistant:**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**/ 15 Introduction & Thesis:** The essay presents its topic clearly, and states a clear thesis.

**/ 10 Organization and Structure:** The essay supports the thesis coherently and logically.

**/ 10 Relevance & Coverage:** Each point furthers the argument. The essay covers all the relevant points needed to support thesis. It excludes irrelevant material.

**/ 25 Content:** The essay backs up its argument with sufficient and relevant data.

**/ 10 Conclusion:** The conclusion summarizes main arguments, reviews the points made in the paper in a general way, and perhaps discusses their implications. It does not simply restate the thesis and may also open outwards to new questions for further exploration.

**/ 15 Style:** The essay is grammatical, clear, and eloquent.

**/ 10 Research & Preparation:** Has used required number of good, appropriate, reliable sources, sources are adequately used in writing the paper.

**/ 5 Mechanics:** The essay has been properly proofread to avoid typos, spelling errors and punctuation problems. It follows requirements for title pages, page numbers, footnotes, bibliography, fonts and margins.

**Paper Grade: / 100**

**Comments:**

## **The Holistic Marking Scheme**

### **A Paper**

A paper of this level displays a mastery of the information and the theoretical context in which it is presented. It contains original thought expressed fluently and written with a style distinguished by its freshness and clarity. The argument is sound, substantive, organized, introduces other points of view, and uses proper sources effectively. One is impressed by the author's contribution to the understanding of the topic and where the subject is going.

### **B Paper**

The author demonstrates a substantial knowledge of the information and theoretical concepts associated with the subject. The paper is well written and well presented with no serious flaws, a good use of sources, and a clear thesis. The argument is above average in organization and analysis and brings in points to support the thesis. There is an awareness of different points of view. The conclusion is sound but not original. Generally, the paper is competent but not extraordinary.

### **C Paper**

The author demonstrates an acceptable grasp of the material and awareness of the sources and general theory. The organization is logical and the style follows proper form, although there may be some lapses in each aspect. The paper would be best described as descriptive because it lacks any substantial analysis, and demonstrates a modest ability to work with the material critically. One senses the author does not fully understand the issues of the subject because the ideas are shallow, undeveloped, and tend to stray from the subject.

### **D Paper**

The author shows a familiarity with the subject, but not an understanding of it. She lacks the writing or communication skill to relate intelligibly what knowledge has been comprehended. The paper is disorganized, lacks structure, and the ideas are undeveloped. There is no evidence of substantial thought.

### **F Paper**

The author is without any writing skill. Grammar and spelling errors dominate and disguise the lack of organization. The ideas are unrelated to the subject and reveal a complete misunderstanding of the task.

## Marking Tutorial participation (example 1)

Tell students that during tutorial you will keep track of the quantity and quality of their participation. Note that speaking a lot is not necessarily good participation. After each class record one of the following comments in your mark book:

- **Excellent (80-100%)** – The student demonstrated a thorough understanding of the readings and contributed significantly to the discussion. She posed stimulating questions, frequently drew connections between the readings, and repeatedly made insightful comments.
- **Good (70-79.99%)** – The student demonstrated a sound understanding of the readings and generally contributed to the discussion. She posed questions, some of which stimulated further discussion, and attempted to draw connections between the readings.
- **Satisfactory (60-69.99%)** – The student demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of the readings and contributed somewhat to the discussion. The student posed a few questions (usually clarification questions), but saw few links between readings.
- **Poor (50-59.99%)** – The student attended class but did not participate. Instructor was unable to assess their level of comprehension, their ability to express ideas verbally, or their ability to draw connections.
- **Did not attend (0)** – The student was absent from class and consequently could not be assessed. This counts as a zero.

## Marking Tutorial Participation (example 2)

Tell students that they will receive up to one mark per tutorial with this breakdown:

1/3 of a mark for coming to class

1/3 of a mark for saying something

1/3 of a mark for providing insightful/well proven/well supported/significant contribution to the discussion

You'll need to decide for yourself if you think students who simply attend tutorial but do not participate should be given a passing grade as the first example does and the second example does not.

**TIME SHEET**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Work Description</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Hours Remaining</b>