

# TA TRAINING PROGRAM

Department of Philosophy  
University of Arizona  
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## TA TRAINING I: GETTING STARTED

### Introduction:

- Departmental TA Teaching Handbook
- Developing a teaching style

### I. General Responsibilities

**Attendance.** TAs are expected to attend all course lectures and to be punctual. If you become ill, you will need to notify the course instructor ASAP and make arrangements to get missed notes and information. If special circumstances arise, e.g. a conference or talk that conflicts with the lecture period, you must get permission from the course instructor to miss lecture.

**Discussion sections.** TAs are expected to conduct all regular discussion sections. Sometimes more advanced graduate students have speaking engagements or conference opportunities which conflict with their discussion sections in a particular week. You *must* notify the course instructor of the conflict well in advance, and, in consultation with the instructor, make arrangements to schedule makeup classes or some suitable alternative. (On large courses with multiple TAs, it might be possible, with the instructor's permission, to arrange for another TA to cover missed sections.)

**Office hours.** TAs are expected to hold 3 hours of office hours per week. In consultation with the instructor, TAs might schedule, say, 2 regular hours, scheduling the additional hours during weeks in which students are preparing for papers or exams.

**Exams.** TAs are expected to proctor all course exams. That includes arriving early, helping with the distribution of exams, observing students for the entire exam period, and helping with the collection of completed exams.

## II. Meeting your class for the first time

### Basics:

- Make sure you have chalk and working dry-erase pens with you; don't assume the room will have these
- ***use the full period***
  - set the tone for the class; make expectations clear; communicate your seriousness about section and the importance of philosophical discussion
  - begin establishing a good rapport
  - begin learning your students' names
  - introduce your students to philosophy

### Things to do the first day:

**Handout** (one page)—posted on D2L with the following information:

- your name, email address, office phone number and room number, and office hours (ordinarily, 3 hours per week)
- course policy regarding attendance and participation ***in section***
- rules of the road—begin with clear policies and rules, include a caveat (e.g. “except under extraordinary circumstances”), as this gives students the necessary guidance, while leaving room to handle special cases.
 

*Tip:* it is a good idea to ban the use of laptops and cell phones during class; make clear that everyone is there to do philosophy.
- your policy regarding email
- your expectations for what the section will be like.
- Be sure to ***go over*** the handout, do not count on it being read.

NOTE: The professor for the course will ordinarily have announced the grading system, etc. in the course syllabus and in lecture; what you may need to add is information about attendance and participation ***in section*** and how those affect grading. Any information you provide must be consistent with the professor’s policies and requirements, so please confer with him or her before producing the handout.

### Substance:

- Once you have taken care of the nuts and bolts, ***do something substantive*** with the remaining time; do not simply end class early.
- You might very briefly explain the purpose or point of studying philosophy—especially the areas of philosophy to be covered in the course. But it would be especially good to explain what they stand to gain from preparing for, attending, and participating in your section.
- Ordinarily, there will have been one or two lectures before your section meets. ***Begin to discuss the material presented in lecture.***
  - Remember, though, your role is ***not*** to lecture, but to clear up material that might be confusing and to lead a well-organized discussion of the

philosophical issues that have been presented—one that gets students engaged in *doing philosophy*.

- You should also aim to serve as a good *model* of philosophical skills.

### **III. The Role of a TA**

- A. How to organize and lead sections
- B. Encouraging and motivating discussion
- C. Reflections on the first year TA experience

### **IV. Working with UA undergraduates**

- A. Managing student emails
- B. Handling problem students and students with problems
- C. Sexual harassment

### **V. Resources for further improving one's teaching**

- A. TA Advisory Committee visits
- B. University Resources
- C. The TA Mentoring Program

### **VI. Remaining questions and concerns?**

### **VII. D2L Training—Level I (Basics of D2L)**