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The Essential Guide for Teaching Assistants in the School of Human Kinetics & Recreation

The Essential Guide for Teaching Assistants in the School of Human Kinetics & Recreation was developed by Dr. Anne-Marie Sullivan, Acting Associate Dean of Graduate Studies & Research.

Many other teaching assistant manuals and guides were reviewed in developing this document for use in the School of Human Kinetics & Recreation at Memorial University. Thank you to Kate Walsh and Alicia Baker, two current graduate students in SHKR, for their contributions to this document. And a special thanks to Dr. Jeannette Byrne for her willingness to review the final document paying particular attention to the lab expectations for TAs in SHKR.
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Introduction

Welcome all new and experienced Teaching Assistants (TA) in the School of Human Kinetics & Recreation (SHKR) at Memorial University! As a TA and graduate student, you are consistently practicing the art of leadership by balancing your own academic success, and at the same time, by inspiring students to effectively engage in the learning process.

As a teaching assistant in SHKR you fill a number of important roles. These include leading class discussions, teaching labs, marking assignments, corresponding and meeting with students, or facilitating practical sessions and marking exams. Your work is very important to the success of the students and instructors you work within SHKR. This manual is designed to help you prepare for your teaching role at Memorial University and to help you have a successful experience as a TA. It outlines typical roles and responsibilities of TAs, directs you to university policies relevant to TAs and discusses the essentials of university teaching.

This is an introductory guide and is not intended to be comprehensive. While it does provide suggestions and ideas for you to test in responding to the demands of the position, you are also encouraged to take advantage of the resources available through the Instructional Development Office. Take the time to check out the support available at their website http://www.delts.mun.ca/faculty/teachingsupport/

TA‘ing in SHKR – essential information:

1) In order to get paid for your TA you must do the following:
   a. Complete a direct deposit form that must be submitted to financial services. These forms only need to be completed once during your time at MUN. If you were at MUN as an undergraduate and received payment of any type you do not need to fill it out again. Similarly if you have already TA’ed in SHKR then you will not need to resubmit the form.
   b. Complete the TA agreement
2) Talk to the course instructor who you will be TA‘ing for. This is how you will find out what your TA responsibilities will be and what teaching/marketing your schedule will be.
3) As a TA you are part of the Teaching Assistants Union of Memorial University (TAUMUN). As such the collective agreement of this union determines most of the regulations that govern your employment as a TA. This agreement can be found at http://www.mun.ca/taumun/
4) A standard TA consists of 56 hours of work over 14 weeks. As a TA you are expected to be available to mark final exams which means you should plan to be around until the end of the official exam period. If you need to plan travel home at the end of the term you should speak to the course instructor prior to booking any flights etc. so you can ensure you will be available for all end of term marking you are needed for.
5) TA hourly wages are as follows (4% vacation pay included): $21.57/hour you will be paid in biweekly installments for the term of the position. Initial payment will be
made within thirty (30) days of the Graduate Assistant’s appointment provided you have submitted your direct deposit form to financial services and completed all the necessary paperwork (as described above).

6) As a TA you are an integral part of teaching in our unit. It is important that you come to labs, seminars, and classes ready to engage students in learning. Arrive 15 minutes early for labs or seminars that you teach.

7) Many TAs are involved in grading student work. Be sure you work closely with the course instructor so you understand the grading criteria as well as the value of the coursework. If you are working with multiple TAs it is critical that you are all consistent in your approach to grading. Work with one another and the course instructor so you are confident in the grades you are assigning. See Appendix A for further information on grading.

Starting Off on the Right Foot

Questions to Ask Your TA Supervisor/Course Instructor

Whether you are a new TA or an experienced TA for a course that is new to you, you need to know exactly what your responsibilities may be. All instructors will have different approaches to teaching so it is important that you communicate with each instructor to help you clarify your role and develop a working relationship with the course instructor.

Course management
• What can you tell me about the course? (syllabus, learning objectives, demographics, learning activities)
• Will I be doing guest lectures, running tutorials, conducting labs, and/or grading?
• Are there other TAs involved with this course? How will we ensure consistency for the students?
• Will I be required to attend lectures?
• What should I do if I am unable to attend a class/tutorial?

Communication during the term
• How do you prefer we communicate about the course?
• Will I be communicating with students during the term?
• How often will we meet to discuss the course?

Office hours
• How many office hours should I hold and when?
• If I am to give individual assistance, how much help is too much?
• What kind of assistance should I not give?
• Should I organize group help/review sessions?

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1 Adapted from A Handbook for Teaching Assistants, University of Waterloo, 2013
Assessment

• If I am to evaluate/grade papers, projects, reports, quizzes, and/or exam, will you be providing me with clear grading criteria?
• Will I have any input on exam/assignment construction?
• Is the process/formula for determining a final grade clear?
• How quickly should evaluation be returned to the students?
• Should we meet before I begin grading papers/exams?
• Who reviews disputed grades?
• Should I make two copies of all grades?

Policies and protocols

• What is the protocol for cases involving breaches of academic integrity?
• What are the course policies with regard to late assignments, missed classes, plagiarism, cheating and appeals?

Getting answers to these questions may take time, but knowing the answers will help you approach your new task with confidence.

Preparing to Teach

Being adequately prepared does take additional time but is worthwhile because:

• You will be better able to explain difficult concepts.
• You will be more organized - you will have a game plan.
• You will be better able to focus on your students and their understanding of the material.
• You will be better able to respond quickly and confidently to both questions and the unexpected.
• You will increase your self-confidence and the confidence that your students have in you.

Prior to teaching something new:

• Do you understand what you are teaching? You may want to read some resources or attend some lectures in the course.
• Learn as much as you can about the class you are assisting with. Where does it fit into the program sequence? What requirements does it satisfy? Are most students majors or taking the course out of interest? Find out what the professor’s goals for the course are. What knowledge should the students have by the time they complete the course?
• Be inquiring and critical. Do not assume that everything in the lab manual or seminar package is necessarily correct or explained in the best possible way. Take the opportunity to perform the experiment or do the exercises prior to the session. This will help to identify any areas where there is the potential for difficulty with procedures or concepts, and increase your ability to successfully troubleshoot.

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2 Adapted from Graduate Students’ Day Package, University of Guelph, 1995; Benoit, First Day Issues GTA Workshop Handout, Virginia Tech University, 1997
• Practice your first session ahead of time. Try out the opening few minutes on a TA colleague or friend. Have someone check whether you are audible from the back of the room. Have abundant material prepared. Don’t rely on the students to fill the time with questions.

For those of you involved in lab teaching a few additional things to consider are:
• Visit the lab and inspect the equipment and arrangement, electrical outlets, chalkboards, and lights. In most cases these should all be set-up by the lab instructor and/or research coordinator however never assume the lab will be ready for you when you arrive – always check in advance to ensure you have everything you need.
• Meet with the professor/lab instructor to clarify ALL lab policies. Tour the lab to find out where the supplies are, how to get equipment, and any particular dangers that exist. Do you know how to work all the equipment? Have you thought about how to explain it to students?
• Find out what the instructor wants the students to learn from the lab/seminar, as it may not be the same as the purpose stated in the lab manual/seminar package. This will help you to answer student questions, such as “Why are we doing this?”
• Be inquiring and critical. Do not assume that everything in the lab manual is necessarily correct or explained in the best possible way. Take the opportunity to perform the experiment or do the exercises prior to the session. This will help to identify any areas where there is the potential for difficulty with procedures or concepts, and increase your ability to successfully troubleshoot.
• Practice your first session ahead of time. Try out the opening few minutes on a TA colleague or friend. Have someone check whether you are audible from the back of the room.

Introductions

Often the course instructor or lab demonstrator will have already determined the content of the lab you are teaching or seminar you are leading. As such you may not have a lot of opportunity to add your own activities etc. If you do have input on what your first meeting with students will look like some things to consider including are:
• Tell the students something about yourself to help break the ice: where you are from; your professional background; the degree you are working on; your research and interests; why you are excited about the course.
• If the class is small, let students introduce themselves to the group by saying: where they are from; their program; experience with the subject matter; and their motivation for taking the course.
• To break the ice in larger classes, ask students to introduce themselves to the student on their right/left.
• Use a game or feedback sheet to discover more about your students (e.g., background in content area, what they hope to get out of the course, academic or career goals).
Course structure, policies and syllabus
The degree to which you will have to do any of the following will depend largely on who the course instructor is. Many course instructors will cover this material in their lectures; however some will want you to address certain aspects in your labs. Be sure you are clear about the course instructors’ expectations prior to your first interaction with students.

- Explain the overall course structure.
- Discuss how the topics relate to course objectives, how the course fits into the overall program curriculum.
- Discuss what you expect of your students and what they can expect of you (e.g., preparation, accessibility). “What are your expectations for this course, of me as a TA, of yourself as a learner?”
- Discuss policies affecting student grades: attendance; examinations; assignment content, weight, and deadlines.
- Discuss texts, required readings, and library reserve readings.
- Define and discuss policies on late assignments, plagiarism, and cheating.
- Develop ground rules (classroom learning norms) for class participation, discussions, projects, and general classroom environment.
- Have a short discussion or demonstration if time permits, to give students a sense of what your sections will be like. Consider reviewing the highlights of the first week’s lectures.
- Let students know you are receptive to suggestions and constructive criticism.
- Try to stay a few minutes after class/lab to address questions or concerns that students have. This is a useful way to gauge how effectively you are communicating right from the outset of the semester.

Managing your nervousness
As a new TA you may be concerned about nervousness. Consider using some of the following ideas if you find your level of nervousness uncomfortably high:

- Accept that it is okay and normal to feel nervous. Your students may also be nervous.
- Arrive early for class/lab and chat with the students as they come in.
- Breathe deeply, using your diaphragm, and speak slowly.
- Rehearse your first session by visualizing how it will go, or try out your opening introduction on a friend or TA colleague. Identify those parts of your body where you feel tense (neck, jaw, etc.) and try to relax them.
- Make a strong start by preparing thoroughly. Be confident of your competence! Outline the points you need to get through and focus on these main points. Be sure to prepare more questions than you think you will need.
- You can’t know everything! Don’t feel that you have to know all the answers. If you don’t know, don’t hedge your response; it’s usually obvious that you don’t know what you’re talking about. Admit you are unsure. Promise to find out the answer,
suggest a reference, refer the question back to the class, or ask a student to find out and report back the next week.

- Be confident! Concentrate your attention on the information that you want and need to cover, not on your own nervousness.

**Advice for when there is a group of Teaching Assistants**

Some courses may have more than one TA involved. In these situations it is important that teaching responsibilities are clearly defined. Make sure that the professor and all the TAs come to a consensus with respect to TA responsibilities. This will help reduce the possibility of any administrative problems during the semester. Also consistency in teaching is important when multiple individuals are involved in instructing as would be the case if there are multiple lab sections of a course. If you are teaching with others it is essential that you meet prior to each week of teaching. This meeting should outline what is being taught that week, instructors that will be given to students and issues related to grading of assignments that may be given. If you are unsure of any of the material you are required to deliver it is your responsibility to speak to either the lab instructor or the course instructor to clarify the material. You are an integral part of the teaching being done in any course you are involved in – the quality of your teaching matters to students. It is your responsibility to ensure you are comfortable with the material and how it will be delivered.

**MUN Students: Helping your Students Become Successful Learners**

Successful students exhibit a combination of successful attitudes and behaviors as well as intellectual capacity. Consider ways you can encourage your students to integrate the following characteristics into their performance in your class. First year students often need more guidance and support in their efforts to become “successful students.”

Successful students . . .

- are responsible and active. Successful students get involved in their studies, accept responsibility for their own education, and are active participants in it!
- have educational goals. Successful students have legitimate goals and are motivated by what these goals represent in terms of career aspirations and life’s desires.
- ask questions. Successful students ask questions to provide the quickest route between ignorance and knowledge.
- learn that a student and a professor make a team. Most instructors want exactly what their students want; they would like them to learn the material and earn a good grade.
- don’t sit in the back. Successful students minimize classroom distractions that interfere with learning.
- take good notes. Successful students take notes that are understandable and organized, and review them often.
understand that actions affect learning. Successful students know their personal behaviour affects their feelings and emotions that in turn can affect learning. When students act like they're disinterested, they become disinterested.

• talk about what they're learning. Successful students get to know something well enough that they can put it into words.

• don't cram for exams. Successful students know that divided periods of study are more effective than cram sessions, and they put this principle into practise.

• are good time managers. Successful students minimize procrastination. They have learned that time control is life control and have consciously chosen to be in control of their life.

When a Student is in a Personal Difficulty

As a TA you have a great deal of direct contact with students. As a result, students may come to you when they are experiencing difficulties or are in emotional crisis. At times your students may require immediate attention.

How can you be of assistance?

• Talk to the course instructor and encourage the student to do the same
• Take time to listen.
• Take the problem seriously.
• Let the student know that you are concerned.
• Exercise caution about giving advice.
• Let the student know your personal limits and the limits of your time.
• Refer the student to the appropriate resources (see below).
• Consult with Counselling Services if you have any concerns about the confidentiality of the student's information, before discussing the problem with others that may provide assistance.

Maintaining Professional Relationships

Some TAs may find it difficult to set appropriate personal boundaries with their students (especially when TAs and students can be so close in age!).

The following tips created in part by Queen's University Human Rights Office and adapted for use at Memorial University may be useful to you in setting appropriate boundaries. Maintain a professional relationship with your students. Don’t attempt to be one of them -- your position precludes intimate relationships. Remember to be friendly but not a friend!

• When meeting with students in your office, leave the door open or arrange to be interrupted after a short time.
• If you feel a student is “making advances” make it clear by your reactions and/or verbal response that you are not interested. If the behaviour persists, seek advice
from someone you trust, who will take the problem seriously and can help you deal with the problem.

• Mutual attractions do occur between students and teaching assistants. If you wish to have a personal relationship with a student you must wait until the student has completed all course work and is no longer under your direct assessment or control. Remember, it is difficult, if not impossible, to be an impartial evaluator when involved in a romantic relationship with a student.

• If a friend is taking your course, you are obligated to inform the course instructor to arrange appropriate evaluation means and to avoid any potential conflict of interest. Again, it is difficult to evaluate objectively and the atmosphere in the classroom may be negatively impacted if you do not disclose the relationship.

• If a student approaches you with personal problems that may undermine a professional relationship, direct them to the appropriate area on campus that can help them.

• When carrying on conversations with students, both in and outside of class, avoid commenting on a student’s clothing or appearance.

• Discriminatory jokes and racial slurs are inappropriate in the classroom. Many students will be offended by such remarks. Put a stop to them immediately.

• Make every effort to use gender neutral language in your classroom to avoid students feeling excluded and alienated. By doing so you will also be setting an example for the kind of language that you expect the students to make use of in class.

• If a student comes to you because they are being harassed, take the issue seriously. Offer them support and provide them with helpful information. It is your responsibility to handle this problem quickly and appropriately.

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself on the receiving end of persistent unwanted attention. Or, you may experience derogatory remarks on the basis of your gender, feminist stance, sexual orientation, or racial or ethnic origin. Memorial University of Newfoundland is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free of harassment. If this happens to you, please seek support.

Email Management

Emailing students can be very time consuming. Set clear email policies and have the course instructor share this with the class. Your email policy may include the following:3

• **When you will respond to emails.** Be sure to outline how often you will be checking email and how you plan to respond to emails.

• **When you will not respond to emails.** For example you set very specific guidelines around due dates – will you be checking email more frequently to provide last minute guidance or will you not be responding during the 24 hours before a

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3 This is adapted from A Guide for TAs at Simon Fraser University, 2012
deadline to avoid the last minute panic? Are you away at all over the semester or are there any other times where you may have limited internet access? Students should know these things so they can know what to expect in terms of responses. When necessary remind students of the times when you will not be responding to emails.

- **What kinds of questions you will respond to via email.** Are there certain types of questions that should be addressed in a face-to-face meeting rather than an email? You might decide to only respond to “yes/no” questions via email and save more complex concerns for a meeting. You may also direct specific types of questions to the course instructor. Knowing who students should address specific types of questions to will help reduce the amount of email you receive.

**Teaching in an Inclusive Classroom**

**What is an inclusive community?**

An inclusive community is “one in which there is real, visible and meaningful representation of the diversity evident in the wide community at all levels and in all constituencies on campus (faculty, staff, students, administration), one in which all members feel safe and empowered, valued and respected for their contributions to the shared purposes of the University: research and educational excellence. It is a community where the rights of all individuals and groups are protected. Inclusion occurs when an organization provides equitable access to its services, benefits and opportunities, when systems and structures facilitate full participation by all members and when members are treated equitable and recognized for their contributions. The key ingredients are equitable access, participation (especially in the decision-making processes) and equal attention to the needs and aspirations of all” (Human Rights and Equity Services, McMaster University).

**What is an inclusive classroom?**

An inclusive classroom is a classroom in which all members of the class (students and instructors) feel safe – physically and emotionally. Students feel that their contributions and perspectives are equally valued and respected. To ensure inclusivity, content is selected from a broad range of sources and is presented through a variety of teaching methods. In an inclusive learning environment, everyone is responsible for contributing by asking questions, challenging assumptions and allowing for mistakes to be made. It is not enough that everyone shares the classroom space, it is vital that everyone is made to feel like a valued member of the classroom community.

**Creating an inclusive classroom**

Obviously it is the instructor’s responsibility to create an inclusive learning environment but the following suggestions will help you, the TA, in understanding how you may be able to contributing to creating and supporting an inclusive classroom.
Suggestions for creating an inclusive classroom

- Get to know yourself and consider how you have been raised from a cultural perspective. What are your own beliefs about diversity? How does your background impact your classroom? What are your assumptions about teaching and learning? How do these assumptions influence your approach in the classroom? To be inclusive, it is vital that you are reflective and consider how your own language or behaviour may exclude others.

- Get to know your students – the better you know your students, the more likely you are to notice when a student may be experiencing some difficulties participating in your class. Do your best to get to know students on an individual level – this is particularly important for students who may feel they are among a minority. Students who feel connected to their class instructors and TAs are more likely to seek support and guidance when needed. Encourage students to get to know one another as this can also help create a more cohesive and supportive community in your classroom.

- Be intentional about creating a safe space for your students. Establish ground rules for classroom behaviour and make sure that all members of the class understand and follow the rules. Take time to assess the classroom climate – around mid-semester hand out index cards and ask for anonymous feedback about how comfortable students are in the class and ask them to identify two things that might make them feel more comfortable.

- Recognize any barriers that might keep a student from participating in your class. Once you have identified these barriers, work to remove them. Barriers can be found in your own attitude or the attitudes of other students; the physical environment; or in the teaching strategies employed in the classroom. Be ready to address these barriers in a meaningful way and work with others where necessary. You should familiarize yourself with the resources available through the Blundon Centre on campus (http://www.mun.ca/blundon/about/index.php)

- Promote collaboration between students. This can happen by encouraging students to discuss course concepts in small groups during labs. Recognize that there can be conflict in group projects and work with individuals and groups to minimize this conflict.

What to do when...

We will have a discussion about TAing and some of the situations you may encounter in a graduate seminar in the fall term...below are some things to think about and chat with other TAs to see how you might address these situations. (Also see Appendix B for further information on the civil classroom)

As a TA you may encounter difficult situations and you may not be entirely comfortable dealing with some of these situations. Whenever you are faced with a situation that does bother you, make sure you talk to the course instructor, your faculty supervisor, and other
graduate students to get the support you need and to learn how others might handle a similar situation. While it is not possible to consider all possible scenarios, read through the examples below and consider how you might react.

Here are some examples of the types of common situations you may encounter:

1. A student answers a question incorrectly in the classroom or lab
2. During a discussion, a student makes a comment you perceive to be inappropriate
3. A student comes to your office to discuss a grade he or she feels is unfair or unjustified
4. You suspect a student has plagiarized an assignment
5. Your course instructor has asked you to grade 25 extra assignments, but if you do so you will exceed your allotted hours for the term
6. One student in your classroom/lab consistently makes inappropriate jokes/comments before and after class time
7. A student asks you out on a date

It will help to talk through these examples with your faculty supervisor, the course instructors, and other TAs to see if they have encountered these situations and how they have addressed any concerns. When in doubt seek help.

In addition to the common concerns noted above, there are also situations that require more specific responses:

• A student comes to you in emotional distress, or you suspect he or she is in emotional distress.
  o Pay attention to warning signs that a student is in emotional trouble (ex. depression, anxiety, change in classroom/lab behaviours, etc.). If you feel that a student is having any emotional difficulties and you feel comfortable with that student, talk to him/her privately. If you are not comfortable approaching the student, discuss your concerns with the course instructor and contact the Counseling Centre for suggestions. Make sure you have the contact information for the Counseling Centre and provide this to the student (http://www.mun.ca/counselling/home/).
• You feel harassed or intimidated by a student
  o If you ever find yourself in an unsafe situation, immediately contact Campus Security at 4100 from a campus phone (864.4100 from a cell phone). If you cannot make this call for any reason have another student call for you. Check out the university’s emergency management plans at http://www.mun.ca/facman/security/ for other information.

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4 These examples are taken from A Guide for TAs at Simon Fraser University, 2012
5 These examples are taken from A Guide for TAs at Simon Fraser University, 2012
o Remember to keep copies of all email communications from your students if they are threatening as these will be needed as part of any investigation that may occur.

Again anytime you are uncertain or uncomfortable make sure you discuss all your concerns with the course instructor and/or your faculty supervisor. This experience should be a positive one. While there will be some challenges along the way there are resources in place that will support you along the way. You may also approach the AD Grad Studies to discuss any concerns you have related to your TA experience.

**Being a TA for Online Courses**

**Suggestions from DELTS**


There is often on “online chat” option available if you run into an issue and require immediate assistance.

Be sure to check out the “How to use D2L” and other online technologies (lecture capture, clickers, online rooms, stor, ePortfolio, Respondus Quiz Maker, Creative Commons) used in your (Instructors and TAs) course.

**Student Learning Resources**

Many of the same principles of effective teaching in a traditional university classroom that were introduced in earlier sections of the manual also apply to online teaching. One of the obvious differences between online and traditional teaching is the lack of a physical classroom. Students may work with the course content, communicate with each other and the instructor, submit assignments and take quizzes all through this online space. Being a teaching assistant for a fully online course may be challenging at first because you may never meet students face to face. Communication is often asynchronous and text-based so you do not have an opportunity to read facial expression or body language. Are the students working through the material? Are they having problems? You may feel that the lack of a physical connection with the students at a pre-determined time and place each week may prevent you from answering these questions. Rest assured that these challenges can be addressed. Many instructors and teaching assistants find that teaching online is a highly rewarding experience and they can even feel more connected to their students than in a physical environment.

**Online Students**

It is important to note that online students are not necessarily students that are studying from a distance. Many students enrolled in online courses at Memorial are full time or part
time on-campus students working towards their undergraduate degree. Many teaching assistants find it helpful to enroll in an online course themselves in order to experience firsthand online learning from the student perspective.

**Role of the Online TA**

As a teaching assistant you may be asked to mark, grade, discuss or add content to an online course. This can be challenging if you are not familiar with D2L. On campus training courses and help documentation is available to assist you. Distance Education, Learning and Teaching Support (DELS) provide support and training to help you become familiar with D2L.

The instructor may ask you to do any of the following as a teaching assistant for a fully online course:

- Moderate online discussions
- Post news items
- Manage student submissions in dropboxes
- Mark student dropbox submissions, grade them and post grades to the course’s online gradebook in D2L
- Email announcements or reminders to students
- Create online student learning groups
- Host TA office hours online
- Edit or create content in D2L
- Assist students with minor technical difficulties in D2L

Meet with your online instructor early on to ensure you have TA access to the course in D2L, that you know what is expected of you and that you are comfortable with the corresponding D2L tools.

**Teaching Tips for Online TAs**

Set aside time every day or every other day to log into the course site to check student activity. Familiarize yourself with the course schedule so you know what students should be doing each week. Advise students to set aside at least 10 hours per week to work on their online course. Students who schedule regular times each week to work on their online course are less likely to get behind.

Post a friendly welcome and introductory biography of yourself using this discussion board within the first day or two of term. Let students know how they can contact you and when they can expect a response from you.
Appendix A: Grading and Feedback

There is no one correct system for grading papers. These criteria are meant to set guidelines for the marker, and will not produce infallible results. You should revise the method so that it works for you.

Assignment Explanation

- Give students very clear instructions for the assignment and make sure that everyone is clear regarding your expectations.
- Give them the assignment well in advance of the due date.
- Invite students to book appointments with you to review questions or assignment drafts

Giving Feedback

- Choose the appropriate level of feedback for the task. As comments should be future oriented, it may not be necessary to provide extensive feedback on a final assignment.
- Use short comments throughout the paper. Elaborate the reason for your grade in remarks at the end of the paper. Don’t forget to highlight the positive aspects of the assignment.

Grading Basics

- Don’t rewrite your students’ papers. Focus on particularly effective or problematic passages. Note consistent problems with sentence structure, grammar, diction and spelling, but avoid marking or correcting all errors. If there are significant grammatical or content issues encourage your students to visit you during office hours for assistance or clarification.
- Read through quickly for overall focus and organization, then read more carefully to consider paragraph structure, coherence (and transitions), introduction and conclusion. Think carefully about what specific and general comments will be the most valuable before you make them, then be selective. If you overwhelm the student with abundant comments on the first page, he/she may not even want to look at the rest of the paper.
- You will probably find that you make fewer comments on an excellent or extremely poor paper than on a mediocre one. However, always remember to include some comments. Sometimes it can be as frustrating to a student to be awarded an ‘A’ as it is to be awarded a ‘D’ if there are no comments included. Students need feedback to help them understand what criteria you used in awarding their grades.
- After you have made both your general and specific comments, try to distance yourself and think about the paper in terms of overall effect and how it compares both to other papers and to assignment expectations.
• Assign the specific grade. (You will probably need to translate your letter grade into a specific numerical grade. Or do you want to assign a range of grades between 60 and 69%? Can you distinguish and justify a grade of 61% versus 63%?) If you need to give numerical grades on a question or part of a question out of fewer than 100 points, decide on the letter grade and then calculate that grade out of the value assigned (i.e., for a C answer, 60% translates into 9/15).

**Keeping Your Sanity**

• Remember to take breaks! You will be more efficient if you give your mind a rest and reward your-self at regular intervals.
• The time required to mark essays will decrease as your experience increases.
Appendix B: The civil classroom

While setting the stage in the classroom normally falls to the course instructor, you may find yourself more likely to be addressing the environment in a laboratory setting. It is important regardless to consider what is meant by a civil classroom and to discuss with the course instructor how he/she sets the tone in the class. This will help you in understanding how to deal with students on an individual basis. You may want to chat to the course instructor about some of the issues below to see how these are addressed in the classroom.

What is a civil classroom?

A civil classroom is conducive to the civil exchange of all types of ideas by all members of the class – students and instructors. It is “a classroom in which students and instructors aim to minimize disruptive behavior and to respond appropriately to disruptive behavior when it does occur” (Simon Fraser University, 2012, p. 17). It is important to manage issues quickly and prevent as much as possible by setting the stage in advance.

Preventing conflict

Set the tone at the very beginning of the course. In the first class distribute a handout that covers expectations for the course:

- **Attendance & participation** – what is expected? Is any portion of the course grade based on attendance or participation? Can students arrive late or leave early? Should they notify the instructor or TA if they will be absent? Do they have to provide documentation for missed classes? Can they make up evaluation missed due to absenteeism? Are students required to participate verbally? Is there an alternate to verbal participation?
- **Assignments & examinations** – how should papers be submitted? What will happen if a paper is submitted late? What happens if a student misses an exam? Can a student submit a rough draft of written work for feedback?
- **Technology** – are students permitted to use laptops in the classroom? What should students do if they are expecting an important phone call? What are the guidelines for use of D2L in relation to the course? How should email messages be directed? When can students expect a response to email messages?
- **Group work** – how are students expected to manage group projects? Is there a peer evaluation element as part of the group project? Are students expected to attend group meetings outside of classtime?
- **Expectations of professionalism** – in SHKR many of our students will immediately enter professional roles upon graduation and they need to be thinking about how to behave as a professional now. How should students address class instructors? Can students eat during class? Can students wear hats in the classroom? Do students

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6 Adapted from A Guide for TAs at Simon Fraser University, 2012
have to put up their hands to contribute to class discussion? What kind of behaviour is expected during any field placements they may encounter?

- **Feedback** – when will students receive feedback? How can they provide feedback? What will you do with feedback? What kind of feedback can students expect? What can students do if they wish to discuss any feedback?
- **Large classes** – it is important to note that larger classes can be problematic because of the larger numbers and the feeling that individual students aren't noticed the same way. What kind of behaviour is required for everyone to be able to learn? Get students involved so they understand they are accountable for their behaviour.