



A GUIDEBOOK FOR INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS

AUGUST 2014



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PANELS 1 & 2: What to Expect as an ITA

Panel 1: Panel Discussion with TA Advisors

Panel 2: Panel Discussion with Undergraduates & Experienced ITAs

These panels will give you an opportunity to hear about teaching and studying at USC "straight from the horse's mouth." In Panel 1, USC Professors and TA advisors will share some of their experiences with international teaching assistants, and discuss some of the university's expectations of ITAs.

In Panel 2, undergraduate students and experienced international teaching assistants will share their experiences and expectations of classroom life at the university. You will also learn about some ways that you can find out about the expectations your students may have for you as their teaching assistant and the individual level of understanding about the course material as it is presented throughout the semester.

Panel 1:

On the index cards handed out to you, write one or two questions you would like to ask a **Professor or TA Advisor**. For example:

What can I do if I feel my TA duties are taking up much more time than I'd expected or had been told?

Who can I talk to if a student in class is complaining to me about course-related issues (too much homework, difficulty understanding the professor's lectures, etc.)?

Panel 2:

On one side of the index card, write "**ITA**", on the other side write "**Undergrad**". Write down one or two questions on each side. For example:

ITA	Undergrad
How do you remember the students' names?	How do you evaluate a TA's performance?
Do you find it difficult to proceed with your studies while you're performing your TA tasks? If so, what is your recommendation to overcome the problem?	Do you have different expectations from an ITA than that of a native speaker TA?

NOTES:



FIRST MEETING

Introductions: Instructor & Classmates; Review of ITA Exam Criteria; Overview of Objectives, Lessons & Homework

TASK 1: ICEBREAKER

Your instructor will ask you to participate in an activity to get to know your classmates.

NOTES:

TASK 2: Introduce your partner to the class, sharing a few interesting things you learned about him/her.

TASK 3: REVIEW OF ITA EXAM CRITERIA

Your instructor will provide a review of the ITA Exam criteria and can answer some related questions you may have.

TASK 4: OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVES & MODULES

Your instructor will provide a brief overview of the week's objectives and the Modules you'll be covering in this Guidebook.

HOMEWORK

1. **Read Module 1 in the Guidebook: Presentation 1: First Day of Class**, and prepare for tomorrow's presentation.
2. Go to <blackboard.usc.edu>, to section:
20142_ali_001_ns00005: ITA Language Institute and click on the **CONTENT** folder to access the following three links:
 - a. ***ITA Exam Terms***
Click on the "ITA Exam Terms" link which will direct you to the ITA Exam Terms page; scroll down to find the list from your department. Print the list and bring it to class tomorrow, and keep it with your Guidebook so you have it in class every day this week.

Prepare the following for Wednesday's class:

- b. ***Teaching, Language, and Culture***
You will find a variety of links related to your personal language needs in the Teaching, Language, and Culture folders. Explore some of the websites/resources, and on Wednesday, be prepared to present and share **TWO** of the sites you found most useful, explaining how these websites can benefit you (and your classmates).
- c. ***Academic Integrity Tutorial***
Click on the "Academic Integrity Tutorial" link. Complete the Tutorial (approx. 20 min.), print out the completion certificate, and bring it to class by Wednesday.

MODULE 1

Presentation 1: First Day of Class- Setting the Tone with Effective Verbal/Non-Verbal Communication

The First Class Meeting

During the first week of classes, many students will be “shopping around,” that is, while they have registered for their courses already, they will still be deciding which courses they will keep, which they will add, and which they will drop. The impression you make in your first class meeting will help them decide whether or not to add, drop, or remain in your section of a course. The students’ decisions to stay will be affected by **1)** how you set the tone and **2)** your ability to communicate, verbally and nonverbally.

Setting the Tone for the Class

While many of the students in your section may not have purchased the required textbook yet, you can still set a positive tone for the rest of the semester by showing your enthusiasm for the class material and getting to know the students. Do not waste the first class session by dismissing the students as soon as you have gone over the syllabus and the course requirements. There are many things you can do on that first day to excite your students about the course. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Tell your students about yourself.** Tell the students your name, what you would like to be called in class, something about your background (personal and academic), and how you are specially prepared to teach this course. Students will feel more comfortable participating in class if you set the standard for communication.
- **Get to know your students.** Ask their names and find out some background information about them.
- **Try to find out what the students might already know** about the subject by asking them about their prior educational experience.
- **Ask the students about their expectations for the class.** What do they think they will learn in the course? List their ideas on the board and then tell them which are accurate.

- **Point out to the students in advance** what they should pay attention to for the next class meeting, e.g. the first reading or homework assignment.

These actions will communicate to your students that you are interested in them and in teaching the course. Research has shown that if you have a positive attitude toward your students, they will be more forgiving of foreign accents and grammatical inaccuracies.

Effective Communication Requires Conscious Effort

All teachers – ITAs, TAs, and even tenured professors – find effective classroom communication challenging. You, as an ITA, may face unique challenges due to pronunciation, accent, and/or culturally-based differences. Even so, you will need to be effective verbal communicators speaking in a way that is easy for your students to comprehend. Nonverbally, you want to communicate genuine respect and friendliness toward the students.

- **For verbal communication**, it is easier to control the **volume and rate** of your speech than it is to control aspects of your pronunciation, such as particular sounds and intonation, so you should be aware of two general qualities of your voice:

Speak with enough volume:

A loud voice (not too loud, it will make students anxious) shows confidence and implies authority. Be aware that if you speak too softly, students may not hear important points and they may doubt your ability to manage the class or lab.

Speak slowly in the classroom:

While American undergraduates can obviously understand fast speech, they may not be used to your accent, so make an effort to slow down your rate of speech in class. In addition, it is important in any learning environment to emphasize and repeat key concepts, which naturally involves slowing down the rate of speech.

- **Our *nonverbal behavior* conveys a lot about our *attitude* about the class and our students.**

1. Make eye contact with your students! This will keep them engaged in the subject and attentive to what you have to say. You will also be able to monitor their ability to understand you by observing their facial expressions.
2. Face the students when you talk to them; don't keep your back to your audience for long, even when writing on the blackboard.

3. It's okay to walk around the front of the room as you talk. Using gestures and facial expressions also helps to clarify language and emphasize key ideas. Be aware that crossing your arms puts an invisible barrier between you and your audience.

4. Maintain a relaxed posture and a relaxed facial expression. If you are too serious or schoolmaster like, the students will feel distanced from you and positive interaction will not occur.

TASK: Present a confident image of yourself and the class

Introduce yourself and give a brief description of the class you'll be a TA for. Set the tone using the suggestions above. Students will tell you whether they want to stay or not depending on the tone and communication:

Consider:

1. What can you do to help the students accept you as their teacher? How can you show them that you are approachable, friendly, and concerned about their learning?
2. Students may be concerned about their ability to understand you and whether you will be able to understand them. It may be wise to approach this subject right from the beginning. Therefore, you should keep in mind the advantage of acknowledging your English differences (accented speech) and/or problems (grammatical errors, lack of knowledge of slang expressions) rather than apologizing for them. What could you say on the first day to put the students at ease and set a positive tone for the semester? How will you work together with your students to overcome language difficulties?
3. How will you know if the students have understood you? Will you monitor their faces, ask frequently if they understand, encourage them to ask specific questions?

Tone:

Volume & Rate:

Non-verbal Cues:



NOTES:

MODULE 2

Effective Communication & Interaction; Presenting Information: Useful Classroom Expressions

Preview Questions

How should I speak in the classroom?

What can I say to...

- introduce a class or lab?
- give examples/emphasize important points?
- invite questions and support participation?
- conclude a class session?
- work through a problem?

Effective Communication & Interaction- Discuss the following with your classmates:

1. How do teachers/TAs in your country start a class? Do they engage in any small talk with students?
2. As a TA, would you engage in small talk with your students at the beginning (or end) of class? Please explain. What are some safe /common small talk topics?
3. What are some things a TA could say (or do) upon entering a classroom (with students already there)?
4. What strategies can help a TA demonstrate confidence while speaking in front of a class or interacting with students?
5. Discuss some phrases TAs can use to introduce a lesson.
6. How can a TA determine what information students are familiar with, before providing answers or reviewing material from a professor's lecture?
7. What can a TA do or say to encourage participation & questions?
8. What steps can a TA take to ensure that information is presented as effectively as possible?

Classroom interaction is unlikely to be successful if a TA does not present the course material in an interactive manner. You should think about how to speak in the classroom, using common words and phrases that not only assist effective communication, but also provide not only strategies to help students learn but also ways for you to continue developing your own English language skills.

Useful Classroom Expressions

Many different phrases are used to organize presentations and to identify for the student what type of information is being presented. Such phrases are used to introduce a topic, give examples and emphasize main points, invite questions and support participation, and to conclude a teaching session.

Introduce a discussion section or lab by giving an overview of what you will cover:

"What we are going to cover today is . . ."

"Today, we are going to talk about . . ."

"Last time we talked about . . ., today we will go on to . . ."

"Today's topic is . . ."

"The purpose of our lab experiment today is . . ."

Give examples and emphasize main points with clear language clues, so that students know what requires specific attention:

"Let me give you an example . . ."

"For instance/For example . . ."

"Now, there are two things that are really important. First, . . ."

"What this means is that . . ."

"Now pay attention to this next part . . ."

Invite questions and support participation by giving students the opportunity to express their ideas and comments, and encouraging their attempts to participate in the class even if their responses are not correct. Part of learning is making mistakes too.

"What do you think?"

"Could you explain that a little more?"

"Can you think of an example?"

"Who can tell me what our next step is?"

"Exactly."

"Almost. Consider... . Now, what do you think?"

Conclude a class or lecture topic with a brief summary of the main points.

"To summarize . . ."

"What we have been talking about is . . ."

"The important points to remember are . . ."

"So far (up until now), we have been discussing . . ., in the next class we will . . ."

"Who can summarize what we have done so far?"

Language for the Lab or Office Hours

The lab and the TA's office are usually more personal settings for TAs and students to interact. Working one-on-one with students provides another opportunity for your students to see you as interested, helpful, and friendly.

Encourage their questions by being open and aware of potentially difficult subject matter.

"How's it going, (use first name)?/ What's up?"

"Any problems with the class so far?"

"How are you doing with (possibly difficult point/problem)?"

"Where should we start?" (To begin working through a problem)

"What should we do next?"

"What do you remember about this step/part?"

"And so what's our answer?"

Here are some steps that you can take to present information successfully:

1. Consider the purpose of your lesson. Is it to teach a new concept? Review key ideas from a lecture? Explain how to conduct an experiment?
2. Consider your students' preparation. How much do they already know about this subject? How can I find out what they don't know yet? How will this information affect my presentation?
3. Make connections for the students. While you might be quite familiar with the material, it may be new to your students. Try to connect the new material to something the students already know or have already learned in class. Take a minute or two at the beginning of class to review what was covered last time. You should also make these connections any time you introduce new concepts.
4. Preview for the students what will be covered in a particular class period. You might want to write on the blackboard the things you wish to accomplish that day. This provides the students with a framework for the class session.
5. Use transitions, technically known as discourse cues or markers, to signal a move from one topic to the next, or to show how one idea is related to another. Here are some examples:
 - *"This is the first step."*
 - *"Now pay close attention to this part because this is the part you have to know."*
 - *"What I'd like to do next is focus on"*

6. Repeat key words or concepts. Students need to hear new concepts repeated in order to understand them. Paraphrase your ideas – repeat your message in different words.

For example:

“The first law of thermodynamics relates to conservation of energy, and states that energy can be neither built up nor destroyed. In any system, no energy can be created without an exactly equivalent lessening of the total energy in the system.” Paraphrase: “Energy won’t run uphill.”

7. Reinforce an important principle by showing the principle in practice, such as in a lab setting. Visual aids, the blackboard, and handouts can also be used to demonstrate a principle.

* * * * *

This afternoon, you will be presenting information in the form of a term in your field. Remember to consider the seven points above and the expressions you’ve just reviewed to incorporate into your presentation.

MODULE 3

Components of Defining a Term; Term Practice

When defining a term or concept, it is important to make the information relevant (applicable) to the students' lives. They will learn the material better if they know why the information is important and how it relates to other concepts they may already know.

In this module, we will focus on making the term relevant to the students so that the meaning is clear and presented in a way that students can easily understand.

You will also receive feedback from your peers and instructor following your term presentation, to help you improve in these areas, before you take the ITA exam.

Before Giving the Definition

Before you define a term or concept, it is important to provide motivation and make connections to what the students already know. The questions below will help you. The examples given are adapted from "The New Science of Skin and Scuba Diving":

1. Why do the students need to know this term?

"Temperature and pressure are probably the most important factors with which sports divers are concerned..."

2. How much do they already know about this term and about the related subject?

"Though the beginner may feel that some of the detail is excessive, it is certain that a reasonable understanding of these phenomena will help to increase the pleasures and reduce the hazards to be encountered in diving."

3. What related ideas and concepts do the students already know that will help them understand this new term?

“Just as pressure builds in the middle ear as we ascend or descend in a plane, it also builds as we ascend or descend into the water”

Defining the Term

It is important to remember to give a clear and concise definition of the term or concept.

4. What is the formal definition of this term?

“Matter is anything that occupies space and has weight”

5. Could this term be defined differently in other contexts?

“Since the word ‘diving’ is applied to just about any method of getting underwater, we shall have to narrow the definition a bit for the purposes of this [course].”

Making it Relevant

When defining the term, there are several ways to make it relevant and clear to your students. To do this, think about the following questions:

6. What practical examples will make the term clear to your students?

“For example, in ice, the water molecules are held in a crystalline structure because the forces of attraction between water molecules are greater than the energy required for free movement”

7. What personal examples or stories will help explain the term?

“The accident which gave rise to the term ‘squeeze’ was what happened when a diver’s air hose broke near the surface and vented the helmet to a lower pressure. He was thus ‘squeezed’ into the helmet as he descended”

8. What analogies can be made to concepts the students already understand? Is there a pattern, relationship, or function similar to the term you are defining?

“As you descend into the water, you may have to yawn or swallow so that the air will pass through the tubes in your ears easily. It may even be necessary to grab your nose and blow. But if you blow too hard, the ‘trap door’ (the area between the throat and ear) may just shut tighter.”

9. What terms compare or contrast with this term?

“If one lifts a 2-ounce fish line sinker he refers to it as ‘heavy,’ but a large block of balsa wood... is called ‘light,’ even though it weighs twice as much. The term density explains this discrepancy”

10. What is the origin of this word (prefix, root, suffix meanings)? What language is it from? Is it made from an acronym?

“Seaward refers to moving in the direction (ward) of the open sea.”
“Scuba comes from the acronym self-contained underwater breathing apparatus”

11. Will a drawing or diagram of the term help your students understand it more clearly?

“The relationship between these three scales is shown by the following conversion equations”

Task 1: Presentation Analysis

As you read the following example from a linguistics course, decide which of the questions were answered. Which questions were not answered? Is this definition clear or would it be better with more information?

Before we continue our discussion of second language acquisition, I would like to explain an important concept, affective domain. This term is basic to any discussion of personality. It has been useful in discussing the personality variables that we observe in second language learners. Affective domain refers to the feelings and emotions that everyone experiences, the emotional side of human behavior. It can be contrasted to the cognitive side, which refers to our rational and analytical abilities, our ability to learn, analyze and remember. An example of a personality factor which falls within the affective domain is the idea of self-esteem or self-confidence. Self-esteem relates to how you view yourself. In second language acquisition, we often assume that students who are very self-confident will be successful in language acquisition. Another example is motivation. Lack of motivation or lack of a desire to learn another language often results in slow progress.

Task 2: Practice Making it Relevant

Work alone or with others from a similar field to think of a term or concept that is important for a basic understanding of your field. Take a few minutes to answer as many of the questions below that you can about the term. When you have finished, explain your term to a partner or small group of students who are unfamiliar with your field.

1. Why do the students need to know this term?
2. How much do they already know about this term and about the related subject?
3. What related ideas and concepts do the students already know that will help them understand this new term?
4. What is the formal definition of this term?
5. Could this term be defined differently in other contexts?
6. What practical examples will make the term clear to your students?
7. What personal examples or stories will help explain the term?
8. What analogies can be made to concepts the students already understand? Is there a pattern, relationship, or function similar to the term you are defining?
9. What terms compare or contrast with this term?
10. What is the origin of this word (prefix, root, suffix meanings)? What language is it from? Is it made from an acronym?
11. Will a drawing or diagram of the term help your students understand it more clearly?

Term Presentation Practice: Introducing a Term

Refer to the Terms List from your department, and choose a term you would like to present to your classmates today. Keep in mind the information learned in previous sections regarding transition words and language used for presenting

information. Your presentation will be recorded and assessed by your instructor to see how well you performed, and you will complete a Self-Evaluation form after watching your presentation video on Blackboard.

Step 1: Consider how you would present your term to undergraduate students, assuming that they are NOT familiar with the term. Make an effort to provide a framework for the new information: use transitions and appropriate expressions to connect the information, and if necessary, repeat or paraphrase key ideas or concepts.

Step 2: Plan a short presentation of four to five minutes to explain the term. After your presentation, your classmates will ask you questions related to the term.

Presenting the information:

1. Overview: Welcome the students to and tell them what you will cover during this period. Introduce your topic with an attention getter.

2. Visual Information: Write down the term (and brief outline) on the blackboard. Go over the key points related to the topic.

3. Topics: What can you say about the content to stimulate interest in the students? What parts might you want to emphasize? Do you know any additional information?

Closing: What could you say in your closing to make the students feel that your topic is interesting and helpful? What impression will you give them concerning your role as the instructor?

5. Questions: How will you know whether the students have understood you? Will you monitor their faces, ask frequently if they understand, encourage them to ask specific questions? Be prepared to answer questions about your topic.

MODULE 4

Presentation 2: Term Presentation #1 (Videotaped)

You will present your term to the class and the video of your presentation will be uploaded to Blackboard for you to review after class.

Students should listen attentively while the speaker is presenting and be prepared to ask some questions after each presentation.

Homework:

Watch your video on Blackboard (Term Presentation 1 Folder>your instructor's name) and complete the Self Evaluation form below.

Term Presentation- Self Evaluation

PART 1:

PRONUNCIATION

LANGUAGE

DISCOURSE (FLUENCY /TEACHING/INTERACTION, ETC.)

PART 2: Term Presentation Evaluation Form

Provide a (✓+) for very good, (✓) for satisfactory, & (–) if needs improvement

1. Term written clearly on the board and good use of board – wrote down outline and key words	
2. Term presented clearly and examples/ practical uses were provided	
3. Showed relevance/ importance of term	
4. Explanation not too technical; no jargon	
5. Responded well to questions, rephrasing, and asking for confirmation	
6. Good eye contact, relaxed posture and facial expressions	
7. Good volume/rate of speech	

Strengths

Areas needing further improvement

MODULE 5

Sharing Blackboard Resources; Term Presentation Feedback

Blackboard Resources

On Monday, you were asked to explore some online resources on Blackboard. Share with your classmates, two of the most helpful TLC resources you found, and explain how and why these resources are particularly useful.

Term Presentation Feedback

Language Review

When you receive presentation feedback from your instructor, compare it to your Self Evaluation to see which areas of language, pronunciation, content, and non-verbal communication are evaluated similarly or differently.

After reading the feedback, correct your language errors while determining which types of errors you most commonly make.

Pair Work: Discuss your language corrections with a partner. Next, try to correct your pronunciation errors (vowels/ consonants/ word stress, etc.) by reading each word aloud and practicing the proper pronunciation with your partner.

Mark the words and/or sounds you find challenging (or which you're unsure of) so you can practice those after reviewing some pronunciation components in **Module 6**.

Our uSC will also be moving around the class to help students with error correction and pronunciation.

Practicing Outside of Class:

Once you have determined your areas of weakness (in language/pronunciation), you can refer to the Blackboard Resources (outside of class time) and bookmark some helpful websites so you can practice individually and improve upon the areas posing the greatest challenges to you.

Continue to refer to the online Blackboard resources to practice any areas of weakness, and remember to be *patient* as you practice.

MODULE 6

Targeted Areas of Pronunciation: Vowels, Consonants, and Word Stress; Terms List from Department

Each language has a unique inventory of vowel and consonant sounds that occur in combinations to make the syllables and words of the language. Attention to the exact features of the pronunciation of the individual sounds in American English and how these differ from your native language sounds will put you in a better position to understand and pronounce American English well.

Vowels

Understanding with the vowel chart makes it possible to learn new sounds physically, as opposed to relying on the ear, which may not be able to hear unfamiliar sounds. Your ability to hear the new sounds will improve as you learn to form them physically.

The vowel chart (Figure A below) fits into the middle of the mouth as shown in the simple cross-section of the head (Figure B).

Figure A

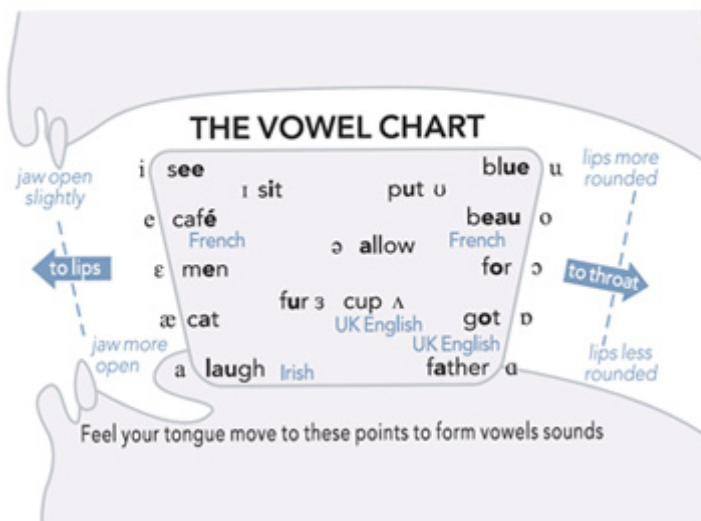
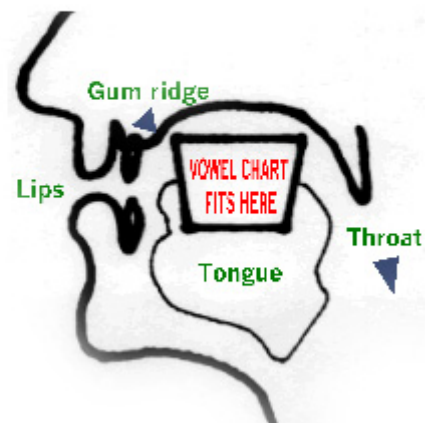


Figure B



The role of the tongue: Note that the left side of the chart points toward the lips, and the right side points toward the throat. The upside down, backward "e" symbol (schwa) in the middle of the chart would be located in the middle of your mouth.

Each point on the chart is a position in the mouth where the tongue moves to make a different vowel sound.

Now try some vowel sounds: Look in a mirror and say the sound "eeeeee" as in the word "see." Next say "aaaah" as in "father." Alternate saying these two sounds a few times: "eeeeee, aaaah, eeeeh, aaaah." "Do you see your tongue moving in the mirror? Notice that the front of your tongue moves up and forward to just behind the gum ridge for "eeeeeh," then down and back for "aaaah."

In the same way, each symbol and key word on the chart represent a position in the mouth to which the tongue moves to form a vowel. If you don't move it anywhere, and just leave your tongue **relaxed in the middle of the mouth** and let out some voiced air, you get the sound "uh," shown in the middle of the vowel chart with the "**schwa**" **symbol: /ə/**. **This is a very important sound for the American accent, as it's the most common vowel sound heard in American English.**

TASK 1- With a partner, take turns reading the following words, and underline the schwa sound(s) in each:

allow, petition, support, campus, vitamin, possible, compose, upon

The lips and jaw position help, too. It's important to notice how the lips and jaw shape vowel sounds. When you properly pronounce the vowels along the front of the vowel chart (moving down from "**see**" to "**cat**"), you'll note that your **jaw is high and just slightly open** for vowels like /i/, as in "see", and it **opens more and drops lower** as you move down the chart to the vowel sound /æ/, as in "cat."

TASK 2- With your palm facing down, place your hand directly under your chin as you pronounce various "high" jaw vowels, (e.g., "see") and "low" jaw vowels, (e.g., "cat"), paying attention to how your jaw pushes your hand down when pronouncing the latter.

With a partner, take turns reading the following words, paying attention to jaw position for each vowel sound (keeping your hand under your chin):

Seem, room, frame, built, roll, done, grand, frown, caught

TIP: Check your mouth, tongue and jaw positions by looking in a mirror when you practice pronunciation.

Consonants

	Stop Sounds		Continuant Sounds		Nasal
	<i>Voiced</i>	<i>Voiceless</i>	<i>Voiced</i>	<i>Voiceless</i>	<i>Voiced</i>
Two lips	be	poor	We	White	man
Teeth & Lip			Van	Fill	
Teeth & Tongue			/ð/ Then this the	/θ/ Thin <i>Thick</i> strength	
Tongue Tip	do	to	zip, lip, run	So	no
Tongue Front			/ʒ/ vision pleasure /dʒ/ Joe judge soldier /y/ yes use	/ʃ/ show, she sugar, /tʃ/ China chip, <i>chin, nature</i>	
Tongue Back	get, go, guard	kiss			/ŋ/ sing, ring, finger
Throat				Hot	

TASK: Practice reading the words with specific vowels and consonants that your Instructor noted on the feedback form for Presentation 1.

References

Byrd, P., Constantinides, J.C., & Pennington, M.C. (1989). *Foreign Teaching Assistants Manual*. New York: Collier Macmillan.
<http://www.thedialectcoach.com/content.asp?ContentId=542>

Pronunciation: Word Stress; Terms List

Word Stress

As a general rule, every English word spoken in isolation contains one major syllable, which is stressed. A stressed syllable is usually louder, and its vowel is longer and higher pitched than the vowel of an unstressed syllable. Often, the vowel of an unstressed syllable is shortened or weakened to the neutral schwa /ə/ vowel.

The words below are commonly occurring words in an academic context that non-native speakers may stress incorrectly. They are grouped according to the syllable that receives the strongest stress. These are all important words, which you should practice pronouncing until you are confident that a native speaker would not misunderstand you.

Stress on 1 st Syllable	Stress on 2 nd Syllable	Stress on 3 rd Syllable
Inference Exercises Necessary Concentrate Management Library Reference controversy	Assignment Discussion Activity Conclusion Impossible Experience Prediction Material	Information Education Introduction University Satisfactory Academic Hypothetical Controversial

TASK 1: Refer to the **Terms List** from your field, and add terms in your field to this list. Practice reading words from your list with similar suffixes as some of those above (sion, tion, ity, ic, ical, etc.) paying attention to syllable stress patterns.

TASK 2: With a partner, read and correct any word stress errors your instructor may have noted on the Presentation Feedback form.

References

Byrd, P., Constantinides, J.C., & Pennington, M.C. (1989). *Foreign Teaching Assistants Manual*. New York: Collier Macmillan.
<http://www.thedialectcoach.com/content.asp?ContentId=542>

MODULE 7

Intonation, Rhythm, & Stress in Message Units; Language of the University: Asking, Requesting & Suggesting

Intonation, Rhythm, & Stress in Message Units

Every language has its own **rhythm**, the pattern of how words are stressed or unstressed. The rhythm of English depends upon the **contrast** (or **alternation**) between strong and weak syllables (or beats). If you say every syllable of every word equally, your rhythm will sound “choppy” to a native speaker. If you don’t put any special stress on any of the words or syllables you say, your speech will sound run together and slurred to a native speaker. In either case, it will be very hard for someone to understand you, and your listener will probably start to “tune you out.”

Good rhythm in English involves stressing **content** words and reducing **function** words.

Content words carry meaning (i.e. nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc.).
Function words (i.e. prepositions, articles, conjunctions, etc.) primarily serve a grammatical purpose.

In general, the vowels in function words are reduced to schwa / ə /.

Example: *I went to the park and read a book.*

The underlined words in the example above are functions words, and would receive less emphasis (or stress) than the content words (I, went, park, read, book).

Message Units

Speakers help listeners process their message by breaking their utterances into message units. A message unit is a string of words that belong together as one unit in the mind of the speaker.

Message units are often separated from each other by a *brief pause* (/). Each message unit has its own intonation, and most message units have ONE primary stress.

Example: *In today's lesson, / we will look at message units / and have some practice / marking them in sentences / and using them in speech.*

Which words in the above example would receive primary stress?

TASK 1

Read the following sentences aloud, focusing on the message units.

1. A gene/ is an element of the germ-plasm/ that controls transmission of a hereditary characteristic.
2. The gross national product/ is the total value/ of all the goods and services/ that are produced by a nation / during a specified period of time.
3. The term geostrophic/ refers to a deflective force/ caused by the rotation of the earth.
4. A phoneme/ is the smallest unit of speech/ that distinguishes one meaning from another/ in a given language or dialect.
5. In a meritocracy/ you are chosen or moved ahead/ based on your talents or personal achievements.
6. A syllogism/ is a kind of deductive reasoning/ in formal argumentation/ that consists of a major and minor premise/ and a conclusion.
7. A. Is there anyone here who can tell us/ how to calculate the mean?
B: You add up all the scores, / then divide by the total number of scores.

TASK 2: Intonation, Rhythm, & Stress in Message Units

1. Consider a term from your field, and write at least five sentences which could be included in the term definition. Share your sentences with your partner, and help your partner address any language errors you may notice.
2. Divide your sentences into message units, distinguishing content words from function words by underlining the content words.
3. Circle the primary stress in each message unit.
4. Draw intonation patterns over the sentences, and mark linking within words and across words, for proper rhythm.
5. Take turns reading your sentences to your partner, focusing as much as possible on the above components.

Language of the University: Intonation for Asking, Requesting, and Suggesting

When speaking any language, a person makes the voice rise and fall in pitch. Except in cases of special emphasis or contrast, an English clause or sentence has the major pitch change on the **last major content word**. This is entirely appropriate, considering that it is also a pattern in English for the most important or new information to be placed at or near the end of a sentence. The final position is called the “focal” or highlighted position. In this position, the major pitch change in the sentence draws attention to this highlighted position.

In statements or information questions (*who, what, where, when, why*), the pitch typically rises and then falls on the last major content word or phrase.

- *I want you to take out your study sheets now.*
- *Where is your study sheet?*

In yes/no questions, the pitch of the voice tends to be high and/or to rise on the last major content word.

- *Do you know the answer to this question?*

In the “continuation” intonational pattern, the voice is high or rises on all the items other than the last one to show more information is coming. Falling intonation generally indicates finality, whereas rising or high intonation generally indicates non-finality.

- *The reason could be the obvious one, or it could be a not-so-obvious one.*

TASK 1: Mark the intonation patterns, then with a classmate, practice reading the sentences and questions below.

1. The first chapter is a very important one.
2. Who can tell me the answer to this question?
3. Have you done yesterday's homework assignment yet?
4. Do you agree with all the opinions expressed here?
5. Will you be able to finish your research paper on time?
6. You will have to take a make-up exam or else retake the course.
7. Either he is late, or he just completely forgot about the appointment.
8. We can talk about that during my office hours next week.
9. The undergraduate students in my afternoon class often arrive late.
10. There are four things you need to do by the end of the course: turn in your lab reports, turn in your class notes, schedule a meeting with me, and then turn in your final papers.

More on Asking, Requesting, and Suggesting

When you need to have your students follow directions, do you a favor, or pay attention to a warning, your choice of words to communicate your intention is very important. Consider the differences in the following statements and questions:

- A. Lower the flame!
 - B. I think you might consider lowering the flame on that burner.
 - C. It would be a really good idea, if you don't mind, to lower the flame on that burner.
 - D. Would you please lower the flame on that burner?
-
- A. Close the door; it's noisy out there.
 - B. Would you please close the door? It's noisy out there.
 - C. Could you get the door?
-
- A. Pass your homework papers forward now.
 - B. Pass your homework papers forward please.
 - C. Would you all kindly pass your homework papers forward please?

When should you use imperative forms?

When should you use polite, but informal directives?

TASK 2: Using the Most Appropriate Request Forms

Using the language forms and intonation patterns we have discussed, make suggestions, requests and give warnings.

1. Request that students read and summarize Chapter 3 for the next class.

2. Suggest that students form study groups to prepare for the midterm.
3. Request that students put away all lab equipment before leaving.
4. Warn a pair of students that unless they dry their beaker completely before putting dry ice into it, the experiment won't work.
5. Ask permission to erase what you have written on the blackboard.
6. Suggest that a student explain her point.
7. Request that a student repeat his question.
8. Warn a student that he has been boiling his solution for too long.
9. Request that the class look closely at the diagram on page 130.
10. Encourage a student to identify the specific part of the problem that she does not understand.
11. Request that the class make a list of unfamiliar terms from the reading.
12. Warn students that the time allowed for the completing the test is quickly approaching.
13. Ask students to stop talking as it is causing a great distraction.
14. Request everyone's attention while you explain a key point.
15. Warn students that those not wearing safety goggles cannot perform the chemistry experiment or stay in the classroom.
16. Request that students change lab partners each week.

References

Byrd, P., Constantinides, J.C., & Pennington, M.C. (1989). *Foreign Teaching Assistants Manual*. New York: Collier Macmillan.

Homework: Review Module 3 (Task 2) in preparation for your term presentation tomorrow. You will be given TWO terms and will select ONE to present during the ITA Exam on Friday.

MODULE 8

Language of the University: Key Expressions

Preview Questions

- How can I find out what part of the teaching material the student does not understand?
- How should I respond to students' incorrect answers in class?
- How can I give clear directions and organize tasks effectively?

Asking Questions: Finding out What Students Know

All teaching includes helping students to learn from themselves. In the classroom this often translates into being skilled at eliciting information from students. In many teaching situations, students can learn more from your questions than from your answers. Here are some sample questions that a TA might ask when:

- The student has just provided an incorrect answer to a homework problem.

TA: ***"How did you start?"***

- The student stops in the middle of solving a problem.

TA: ***"So what do you do with this information? Do you know?"***

- The student has completed an incorrect step in a homework assignment.

TA: ***"Could you explain what you did in this step?"***

These are not rhetorical questions. In each case the TA expects the students to explain their thinking process so that he or she can step in once they have identified where the student made a wrong move.

When you find the point of error, you might:

- Remind students of what was said in class
- Show how they took the same step in another similar situation
- Ask the class for feedback and intervention
- Point out a helpful passage in the textbook

Responding to Student Answers

Students can respond to a question in three ways: by answering it correctly, by getting part of the answer right, or by giving an incorrect answer. In every case the student expects some kind of feedback from the teacher. Here are some ways American teachers respond to student questions:

- **If a student gives the correct answer**, the teacher might say one of the following to give positive feedback and encourage all of the students: ***Okay, Yes, That's right!, Excellent!, Perfect!, Nice job!***. To make the feedback more personal, the teacher can add the student's name. For example, a teacher could respond by saying, ***"Good work, Lee."***
- **If a student gives an answer that is partially correct**, teachers also like to start out by saying, ***"Okay,"*** but then add, ***"That's part of it; now can anyone else help us out from this point?"*** This way the teacher has acknowledged the effort of the first student and opened up the problem to the rest of the class, thus inviting more interaction and participation.
- Lastly, **if a student's answer is incorrect**, teachers in the United States try to begin their response with a positive or neutral word before getting back to the question. This is true even if the teacher suspects that the student was ill-prepared or not paying attention. Teachers do not openly criticize students or their answer. For example, a teacher would not say, "You are wrong," or "That is wrong." If you say such things in the classroom you will appear too mechanical and unfeeling. A more expected approach would be:

"Let's go back. You were doing fine until you got right here. Then you missed a step right around this point."

"Close. Can you try again?"

"I understand what you're saying, but that's not exactly what's needed here. Think about the example I gave you a few minutes ago."

The teacher might also need to restate or rephrase the question if most of the students cannot get the correct answer. When most of the class is having trouble understanding a point, the teacher might need to review the material again in a different way. If you think you may have been partly to blame for the confusion, you might consider using one of the following three statements. Taking partial responsibility will help maintain a relaxed atmosphere that encourages students to speak up and make mistakes without embarrassment.

- ***"Maybe I didn't express the question clearly. Let me try again."***
- ***"I guess I didn't cover that material well enough."***
- ***"Sorry, I think I might have confused you."***

TASK 1: Applying the Strategies

For each case below, write out a teacher response that reflects the strategies discussed in this section.

Case #1: You have just finished teaching the class a key concept in your field. Because you want to make sure the students have understood it, you call on a student to repeat back to you the main points. The student has a confused look on his face and says, “I have no idea. I’m totally lost.” Many other students say, “Me too!” What do you say?

Case #2: You presented a mini-lesson to your class last week on how to solve a particular type of equation. The students have been practicing the equation on homework problems for over a week. In class you ask a student to provide the answer to problem #1 and she gives an incorrect answer. What do you do?

Case #3: Your duty as a TA is to run a discussion section in which you go over the homework problems assigned by the course professor who gives the students weekly lectures. You are not required to attend the lectures that the students must attend. While you are in the middle of solving a homework problem on the board, a student raises his hand and asks for the definition of a particular term that you have used in your equation. You are stunned for a moment because you had assumed that all of the students knew this information already, and that you were just reviewing it. Now you wonder what else they might not know yet. What do you do?

Case #4: At the end of a lab experiment you ask students why a particular reaction occurred. A student gives an answer that is only partially correct. How should you respond?

Organizing Tasks and Giving Clear Directions

Sometimes the most difficult part of a lesson is organizing tasks and giving clear instructions. Students will generally do what you ask them to as long as they know what it is you are asking them to do! Here are some helpful tips to follow when giving directions:

- Give a reason for your request.
- Try to make instructions as clear and succinct as possible. Avoid long, wordy directions.
- When putting students in pairs or groups, try to use their names instead of calling each student, “You.”
- Confirm students’ understanding.
- Use proper stress and intonation.

If students are already in the middle of a task and you need to give them further direction, be sure to get everyone’s attention first. What are expressions you could use to do this?

TASK 2: Applying the Strategies

Your instructor will give each student a strip of paper stating (or dealing with) a situation which needs to be addressed, or a task which students need to complete. You will play the role of the TA as well as classroom students.

The tasks are simple but they require the TA to use effective classroom management strategies, including getting the students’ attention, using concise language, and giving clear instructions. Using some of the strategies you have learned so far, address the situation or give directions to the class for your assigned activity. In some situations, the TA may need to be firm (but polite), so remember to use the proper tone along with simple and clear language to effectively communicate your message.

Before each TA begins, all the students in class should engage in a conversation with their partners, so that the TA can practice getting everyone’s attention prior to speaking.

When you receive your activity strip, make sure you understand what you need to do, and ask your instructor to clarify any doubts you may have.

Please note: If the task requires physical movement, the students in class may need to stand up and move around to complete the TA's instructions.

After each student completes an activity strip, discuss what worked well, and if anything could have been done differently to make the activity go more smoothly.

Classroom Terms and Definitions

TASK 3: Matching Classroom Expressions

These are common expressions that are used in the classroom. Match each term with its definition.

Terms

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Partial credit | 9. Make-up exam |
| 2. To grade on a curve | 10. Pass/fail or Credit/Non-credit |
| 3. Multiple choice test | 11. Add/drop |
| 4. Closed-book test | 12. Open-book test |
| 5. Midterm exam | 13. Supplementary textbook |
| 6. Incomplete | 14. Review session |
| 7. Take-home exam | 15. Prerequisite |
| 8. Extra-credit | |

Definitions

- A. ____ A grade given to a student for a class in which he/she has not completed all of the required work.
- B. ____ A test that students complete at home.
- C. ____ Additional points earned by a student who does work in addition to what is normally required.
- D. ____ A test question that forces students to choose the best of several given answers.

- E. ____ A textbook that is recommended for additional study but that is not required for the course.
- F. ____ A test that is given after the scheduled time for students who missed the original test.
- G. ____ A test given halfway through a course that covers material up to that time.
- H. ____ A course that must be taken before another course.
- I. ____ A policy in which grades are based on a normal distribution curve.
- J. ____ A test answer that is not completely correct and receives less than maximum points.
- K. ____ A time period in which a student may join or leave a class without it affecting his/her grade.
- L. ____ A test in which students may not use any notes or books.
- M. ____ An extra class held for those students who want help with the material to be covered on a test.
- N. ____ An in-class test for which students can use their textbooks and notes.
- O. ____ A grade for a class in which a student does not receive a letter grade.

TASK 4: Fill in the Blanks

Using the above expressions, complete the dialogue below, then practice reading it with a partner, paying attention to intonation and rhythm.

TA: Does anyone have questions about the syllabus?

Student: Yes. Is there a (1)_____ in this class?

TA: Yes, there is. Halfway through the semester you will have a test on the material we've covered in class.

Student: Will it be (2)_____ or closed-book?

TA: You will be able to use your notes and books for the test, but you will do it in class. It's not a (3)_____.

Student: What about the grading scale? Do you (4) _____ ?

TA: No. I give grades based on a set scale: 90% is an A; 80% is a B, etc. I also give (5) _____, so you can do extra work to improve your grade if you do badly on the test.

Student: That's cool. But what if we don't do all of the work for the course?

TA: Then, you'll probably receive an (6) _____ instead of a regular grade. But if you have taken the (7) _____, Algebra I and Algebra II, you should be prepared for the class. I also recommend you read the (8) _____. They are not required reading, but they will also help you do well in class.

TA: Any more questions about the course before we start the class?

Student: If I decide that I don't want the course, when is the last day I can (9) _____ without it affecting my grade?

TA: That's a good question . . . I'm not quite sure. I'll find out and get back to you. But remember, the class is (10) _____, so you won't be graded. If you do the work at a satisfactory level, you'll pass the class.

References

- Byrd, P., Constantinides, J.C., & Pennington, M.C. (1989). Foreign Teaching Assistants Manual. New York: Collier Macmillan.
- Parrot, R. & Smith, S. (1999). "Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom," <http://www.sws.cornell.edu/OIS/tadw/Multicultural.htm>.
- Smith, J., Meyers, C.M., Burkhalter, A.J. (1992). Communicate: Strategies for International Teaching Assistants. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents / Prentice Hall.



Module 9

ITA/Student Relations: Sticky Situations & Resources for Help

Preview Questions

- How can I handle and resolve difficult classroom situations?
- Does the university offer any formal avenues of support to improve my teaching?
- How can I find out about informal avenues of support for advice and reflection about my work?

Task 1: Classroom Management- Handling and Resolving Difficult Situations

Directions: With the following situations, discuss the situation and suggest a) appropriate initial response, b) feasible long-term solutions 3) proper support systems to consult.

Situation #1

One student in your class is persistently challenging your teaching ability by intentionally asking difficult questions that may be irrelevant. The student often says your answers are not complete and are sometimes wrong. You overhear the student saying you are a terrible TA to other students. After several classes you notice that this student has been successful in winning support from other students. A group of dissident students that refuse to listen to you has formed.

Situation #2

A student who you find attractive has begun coming to your office hours quite often. This student seems to show a romantic interest in you. You can not stop thinking about this student and you are sure this is the “real thing”. You are certain the “vibe” is there and would like to date the student.

Situation #3

At the beginning of the semester you gave your email address and telephone number to your students because you wanted to be as accessible as possible to assist them. Two weeks into the semester you start to get crank phone calls in the middle of the night. At first you think it is just a wrong number, but as they persist you become convinced it is one or more of your students playing a prank.

Situation #4

A student comes to you with a rough draft of a paper and asks you to look at it and give some advice. As you are looking at it you become very suspicious about the student's work. It appears to have been copied verbatim from the internet or a text. You ask the student several questions about the content of the paper, but the student is unable to explain fundamental concepts relevant to the content.

Situation #5

At the beginning of the semester, one student asked for an extension on an assignment. The student seemed sincerely apologetic and had a valid excuse for the work being late. The day the next assignment is due, several students ask for extensions, but you tell them they will be downgraded for turning in the assignment late. They begin complaining loudly, "That's unfair! You gave that other student an extension last week!"

Situation #6

A good student whom you have bonded with has begun telling you about some personal problems. At first you listen, because you are fond of the student and would sincerely like to help the student. Gradually, the student begins showing signs of depression. One day the student says, "I don't know what to do. I don't have any friends here. I think I am failing two classes. Everything seems so dark. I can't talk to my parents. They don't understand me. You are the only one who listens to me..."

Situation #7

A few students are constantly eating and talking during your class. At first, you say nothing because they sit in the back and are not that disruptive. As the semester continues, more students bring food to class and assume that it is okay to "socialize" while you are trying to teach. The atmosphere becomes one that is not conducive for teaching. You are constantly competing with the noise the students are making.

Situation #8

Many students do poorly on the first exam. Upon receiving it back, they are obviously upset. Several of the students begin blaming your teaching and lack of proper language skills for their bad grades. They ask if they can get into another section with a different TA.

Situation #9

An attractive female student attends class regularly dressed as if she were going out to a night-club. Several male students make unwelcome comments about her appearance. One day, she starts to cry and runs out of the room.

Situation #10

Near the end of the semester, when you are busy with your own course work, the course instructor wants you to grade 75 exams. You know the exam was very long and each test will take at least 20 minutes to grade. You are angry because the instructor had not mentioned earlier in the semester that this would be your task.

Situation #11

After the midterm exam, you realize that most of the students missed an important question because you gave them the wrong information during the study session.

Situation #12

Your supervising professor tells you she will be attending a conference and will be gone the next week. She gives some notes and tells you to teach the class. Later, after she has already left, you realize the notes are from the previous week.

Situation #13

In the middle of class a student has a seizure. The student falls to the floor in convulsions. The student makes strange noises and his eyes roll back so you can only see the whites of his eyes. Some students are shocked, others are laughing.

Situation #14

While you are proctoring an exam, you notice one student is using a “cheat sheet”.

Situation #15

During a review session, one student becomes belligerent and starts using profanity. There is apparently no reason for this behavior. The student approaches you and you can smell alcohol on the student’s breath. It smells like Tequila.

Task 2: Resources for Help

There are a variety of helpful resources available to TAs. Refer to Appendix III of this Guidebook for a list of these resources.

MODULE 10

Handling Questions in the Classroom

Preview Questions:

- Do students in the U.S. ask the teacher a lot of questions in class?
- Is there a strategy that I should use to respond to student questions?
- Am I expected to provide answers to all of the students' questions?

What to Expect in the United States

In the United States university classroom, students are expected to ask questions. When students ask questions it shows the teacher that they are alert, thoughtful, and interested in the subject matter. Teachers anticipate and welcome student questions because they help the teacher assess student comprehension. Teachers do not perceive students' questions as a threat to their authority. In contrast, when students do not ask questions, the teacher may assume that the students are bored, lost (do not understand the subject matter), or perhaps too intimidated to speak up in class. In an interactive classroom environment such as we have in the U.S., you should anticipate questions from the students and recognize that this kind of student-teacher interaction is considered a normal part of the learning process.

Steps for Responding to Questions

In brief, you can follow these five steps when faced with a question in class:

- Identify the question.
- Acknowledge the question, verbally or nonverbally, within three seconds.
- Repeat or rephrase the question.
- Answer the question as concisely as possible.
- Get confirmation from the student. Check with the student to make sure you did indeed answer the question that was asked.

1. Identifying the Question

Aside from being prepared to answer student questions, as an ITA you first face the challenge of *identifying* questions in the classroom. Undergraduates may not articulate their questions using typical question formats such as a WH- question, a choice question using OR, or a YES/NO question of some kind. Students' statements or exclamations are often questions in disguise.

For example:

Student (looking at the incorrect result of his science experiment):

"My solution doesn't look the way your example did!"

The real underlying question that the student is asking might be:

"Why did I get this result?" or

"What went wrong with my experiment?" or

"Can you help me to figure out what I did wrong?"

TASK 1: Identifying Underlying Questions

In each case below, the student is trying to elicit a response from the TA. With a partner, alternate playing the student and TA roles. The TA should identify the student's question and rephrase it into a clear question to confirm what the student is really asking. The *italicized* words should receive added stress.

Example:

Student: "Antibodies *neutralize* antigens. At least that's what I *thought* you said the other day."

TA (Identify real question): Don't antibodies neutralize antigens?

1. **Student:** "So if we know the equilibrium price we can determine the equilibrium quantity?"

TA (Identify real question):

2. **Student:** "I didn't catch the part about interest rate spreads."

TA (Identify real question):

3. **Student:** "Uh-oh. The answer I got was 5."

TA (Identify real question):

4. **Student:** "But I thought you said it didn't matter if we kept the minus sign in here because we're not worried about the direction of the vectors in this lab. Now it seems like you're worried about it."

TA (Identify real question):

5. **Student:** "I thought you said last week that we have to apply Mendel's Law to understand this kind of problem, and now you're telling us we have to use this other law. I'm totally confused."

TA (Identify real question):

6. **Student:** "In your example where there are two people on a raft and one jumps off, and the weight pushes the raft in the opposite direction, I don't get how to calculate the effect of the jump on the raft."

TA (Identify real question):

7. **Student:** “I’m not sure I really get what you said about how work and power are different.”

TA (Identify real question):

2. Acknowledging the Question

Acknowledging student questions can be done either verbally, by saying something like, “*That’s a good question!*” or nonverbally, by looking at the student while nodding your head and keeping a thoughtful expression on your face, and/or making a “*Hmm . . .*” sound. In any case, you should give some indication that you have heard the question within **three** seconds. If you wait longer, the student will wonder if you have even understood that a question was asked. What you don’t want to do is freeze up or become tense because you hadn’t expected someone to ask a question.

It is also important that you do not discourage students by responding negatively to their questions. If a student asks a question, you should treat him/her with respect by taking the question seriously, even if the question shows that the student does not understand an elementary principle of the material you are covering. Never respond by saying something like, “*That was a dumb question*” or “*You should know that from lecture.*” This tone sounds punitive and students will feel demoralized by such a response. They will also not feel comfortable asking questions in the future.

TASK 2: Acknowledging Questions

What are some other ways that you can verbally or nonverbally acknowledge a question? Write some other responses here:

3. Repeating or Rephrasing the Question

This is the most important step! While it is important for *all* teachers to restate a student’s question, it is especially important for nonnative speakers. Repeating or restating a student’s question:

- Allows the student to know that you understood the question.
- Helps other students in the class to hear the question.
- Gives you a chance to rephrase the question so that it is clearer or more appropriate.

- Keep in mind that undergraduates do not always ask questions in a coherent way and may not be as familiar with the terminology in your field. They may need your help to rephrase or reframe a question.
- Provides you with a little more time to consider a response to the question.

Restating or rephrasing questions often involves changing the grammar of the original question.

For Example:

Student: “Can we email this assignment to you or do we need to give it to you in class?”

TA: “You want to know whether you can submit it via email rather than in person?”

Student: “How come my mixture didn’t turn blue like it was supposed to?”

TA: “You want to know why you didn’t get the right result?” or “You want to know what went wrong?”

TASK 3: Restating Questions

In pairs or with the whole class, practice restating or rephrasing the following questions. Use the phrases in parentheses to start your response. Pay attention to any grammatical changes you might need to make.

1. “When’s the homework assignment due again?” (Okay. Can I have everyone’s attention? Someone has asked. . .)
2. “How come we have to use that type of sum to figure out an integral if we already have formulas for it?” (That’s a good question. He wants to know . . .)
3. “Are we going to have a review session before the midterm exam?” (Did everyone hear that? She wants to know . . .)
4. “So, for this problem, you said that M stands for what exactly?” (So you’re having trouble understanding . . .)
5. “Can we apply this equation to any system or does it only hold true for closed systems?” (If I’m not mistaken, you’re asking . . .)

4. Responding to Student Questions

After you restate the question and clarify any misunderstandings, you should consider how to respond to it. In some cases, it’s best to provide an answer that is brief and accurate. Long responses can take time away from other students who have questions and from time needed to cover class material. Avoid getting into a

long conversation with a single student as this could cause other students to become frustrated and bored. Suggest that the student with the question see you in your office hours if more time is needed to explain an answer.

Another point to keep in mind is that when students ask questions, it's an ideal opportunity for you to find out what they have understood so far. Sometimes it will be appropriate to refrain from automatically supplying an answer. You could instead reply with a question of your own (a "question" answer).

Example:

Student: "I still don't understand the Doppler effect."

TA: "Can you tell me which part you don't understand?"

Student: "You said something about a change in frequency of waves and pitch, but I don't understand what makes those changes."

TA: "Okay. Did you understand what I said about the speed at which the source and the observer move toward each other? Do you remember the example I gave about the train?" (The TA continues to explain and asks for confirmation that the student has understood.)

Even when the student wants you to confirm his/her answer, don't respond automatically with a "That's correct." **Rather, encourage the student to think through his/her response by saying, "What do you think? And why?" This way, the student will be forced to explain his/her rationale and you will see where the student might need additional help.** For example:

Student: "So then relationship marketing is different from peer to peer marketing, right?"

TA: "What do you think?" OR "Yes, can you tell me how?"

TASK 4: Responding to a Question

Pair Work: With a partner, decide whether the following questions require

A) a *short answer* response or B) a *question* response

If you think both could be options for some, discuss why.

Example:

- a. *When do we have to turn in our term project? (A: Short answer response)*
- b. *I'm not sure I understand what Dr. Collins means about "fear of failure", so can you go over it again?" (B: Question response)*

1. What was the answer to number five on the quiz yesterday?
2. I don't know how that example relates to globalization. I'm just really lost.

3. So, what does realism exactly mean again?
4. Does the Theory of Relativity state that both space and time are relative?
5. Do I need to use the formula you explained yesterday to solve this?
6. Are there any negative effects of mass media on society?
7. What exactly is the importance of direct response advertising?

5. Getting Confirmation from the Student

After you give your answer, check to see if the student is satisfied with your response. If you provided an answer that does not match the student's intended question, you will have to go back to step two and try again to understand the question the student is asking.

Here are some phrases you can use:

"Did I answer your question?"

"Is that what you were asking about?"

"Does that help/make sense?"

"Do you understand it better now?"

"Is that clear?"

TASK 5: Role-play

With a partner, consider what went wrong in the interaction below and how the ITA could have responded more appropriately. With a partner, write a dialogue based on this scene, applying what you know about handling questions. Lastly, perform this role-play for the class.

It was the end of a math discussion section, and the ITA had just announced that she wanted her students to hand in their homework on the due date. (Many of the students had been handing in their homework late.) At that point, a U.S. student asked if he could hand in the homework that was due for class that day during her office hour, which was at a later time on the same day. At first she laughed. When he repeated his question, she paused for a long time. At that point, the bell that signaled the end of class rang, so everyone started picking up their belongings and standing up to leave, which created a lot of noise in the room. The student who had not yet received an answer to his question asked the question again in a different way: "Do you want it now or can I hang on to it until I see you in your office hour?" She answered, "Right," an inappropriate response to a question using or. He asked one more time, and she finally gave him an answer, but there was so much noise that hardly anyone heard her. The student later reported that he thought the ITA had misunderstood his question because of her inappropriate responses. During an interview with the ITA after class, she said that she had in fact understood his question but was unprepared for it

because she had not expected it. Both the student and the ITA said that all of the noise and movement made the situation worse.

(This scenario and exercise come from Smith, Meyers, and Burkhalter, 1992, p. 90).

Helpful Tips for Difficult Situations

What happens if you are unable to understand a student's question because of language or pronunciation? You can handle the problem in three ways:

- Admit that you do not understand the question and ask the student to rephrase it.
- Repeat the student's words as you understand them, or rephrase the question yourself. Then ask the student if you have understood it correctly (a confirmation check); say,

"Did you ask me if _____?" or "Is this what you said: _____?"

- Ask another student to restate the question without showing disrespect to the first student. For example, say, *"Perhaps someone else can help us restate the question."*

What do you do if you can't answer a question? Here are some suggestions:

- Repeat the question to the class and see if anyone in the class would like to attempt to answer it. If you recognize an answer that is correct, praise the student who responded! If you do not recognize the right answer, perhaps what others say will trigger the correct answer in your mind.
- If nothing useful occurs to you, be honest: Simply say, "That's a good question, but unfortunately, I can't think of the answer right now. I'll find out the answer and let you know in our next class. And if any of you have time, see if you can find the answer too, and let us know." By making it an interesting challenge, you have turned a potentially risky situation into a learning experience. When you handle this type of situation calmly and confidently, you do not lose your student's respect; rather, you increase it!

References:

Pica, T., Barnes, G., & Finger, A. (1990) *Teaching Matters*. New York, NY: Newbury House Publishers.
Smith, J., Meyers, C., & Stice. (1992). *Communicate: Strategies for International Teaching Assistants*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall.

MODULE 11

Presentation 3: Term Presentation #2 (Videotaped)

Refer back to Module 3 – Task 2.

Choose one of the terms you were given and prepare your term presentation. Keep in mind the points just reviewed in the previous Module on handling questions in the classroom. Try to apply these strategies when answering your classmates' questions during or following your presentation.

You will again be evaluated by your instructor, and for homework, you will be completing the Self Evaluation form after watching your video on Blackboard (Term Presentation 2 folder).

Term Presentation- Self Evaluation

PART 1:

PRONUNCIATION

LANGUAGE

DISCOURSE (Fluency, Teaching, Interaction, Etc.)

PART 2: Term Presentation 2- Evaluation Form

Provide a (√+) for very good, (√) for good, and (–) if needs improvement

1. Term written clearly on the board and good use of board – wrote down outline and key words	
2. Term presented clearly and examples and/or practical uses were provided	
3. Showed relevance/ importance of term	
4. Explanation not too technical; no jargon	
5. Responded well to questions, rephrasing, and asking for confirmation	
6. Good eye contact, relaxed posture and facial expressions	
7. Good volume/rate of speech	

Strengths:

Areas needing further improvement:

Module 12

Presentation 3 Feedback: Pronunciation, Language & Discourse; Wrap-Up

Task 1: Your instructor & uSC will provide you with feedback on yesterday's term presentation.

1. Review the feedback forms and note how they compare to your Self-Evaluation.
2. After reading the feedback, correct the language errors, and with a partner, review the language corrections. Next, practice reading the words you mispronounced.

Task 2: Ask your instructor to explain any comments which seem unclear. Try to keep the feedback in mind when presenting your term for the ITA Exam.

Task 3: (If time allows): Practice presenting your term with a partner and give each other some feedback on the three components below:

Pronunciation

Language

Discourse

APPENDIX I

The Language of Using Visual Aids

Preview Questions

How do I prepare visual aids?

How do I use visual aids in the classroom?

How do I present graphs and tables?

How do I emphasize trends and patterns in graphs and tables?

Using Graphs and Tables

Information is presented graphically in many academic disciplines. As an ITA you may find yourself discussing charts and graphs from textbooks, research articles, and lab reports. Many of these graphs and tables will contain important statistical information, and it is essential that you are able to present and discuss the data with your students.

Preparing Visual Aids

- Keep visual aids simple and clear.
- Each visual aid should focus on only one idea. It is better to show several simple visual aids than to put too much information on one.
- Be sure that your visual aids are aimed at the appropriate technical level of your listeners.
- Visual aids should be neatly prepared with as few words as possible. The lettering and numbers should be large and easy to read. Colors should be bright and in sharp contrast to the background.

Guidelines for Using Visual Aids

- Stand to the side when you present visual aids so that the students can see them. You can use a pointer so that your body does not block someone's view.
- You do not need to explain every item of information on the visual aid. Instead, you should focus on any important points or trends.
- When you show your visual aid you should continue to face your students. You should be familiar enough with the visual aid that you do not have to keep looking at it.
- Limit the number of visual aids that you use.

- Do not stop talking while you are showing the visual aid. You should explain and interpret the visual aid as you are showing it to the listeners.

The Language of Using Visual Aids

- Show each visual aid only when you are discussing it. Show the visual aid when you want people to look at it and then remove it when you move on to another point.
- Before your class, make sure that the room has the necessary outlets in the right place. Check that all the equipment is working correctly.

Graphs

There are four key questions that you must answer when presenting a graph:

1. What is the subject of the graph?
2. What do the X and Y axes/bars/components of the pie chart represent?
3. What trend does the graph illustrate?
4. What predictions can you make from the graph?

Useful Expressions

1. This graph shows . . .

This graph illustrates . . .

The bars represent . . .

The components/parts/segments represent . . .

2. The horizontal axis represents . . .

The vertical axis represents . . .

3. The line on the graph illustrates the relationship between _____ and _____.

The bars show that _____ increased steadily/went up dramatically.

The graph illustrates that _____ dropped/went down slightly.

The bars show that _____ decreased gradually while _____ declined sharply.

The graph illustrates that _____ remained (relatively) stable.

There was a significant/steep increase/rise in _____.

There was a gradual/steady decline/drop in _____.

The components in the pie show the percentage of _____ devoted to each _____.

We can see that _____ makes up the largest percentage.

4. By examining this graph, we can predict that _____.
If this trend holds, _____.
If this pattern continues, _____.
If these percentages remain unchanged, _____.

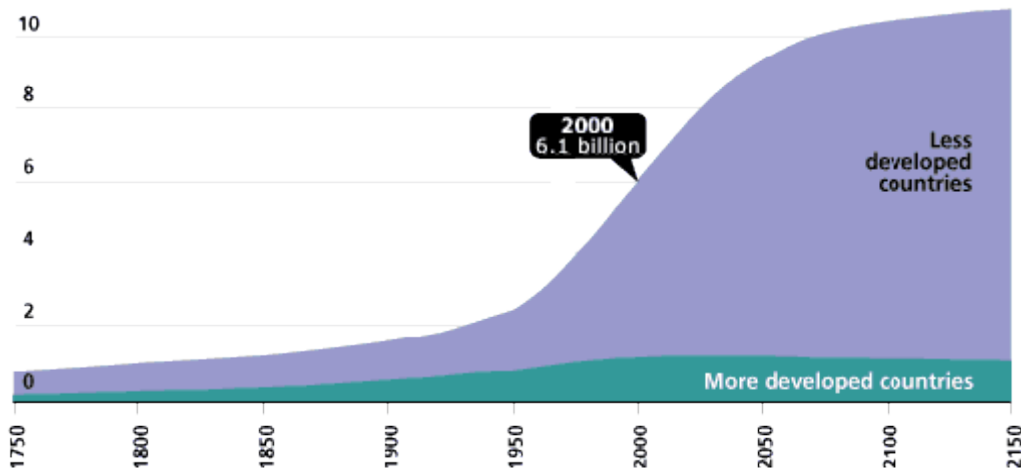
Example A (See Figure 1)

1. The subject of the graph: This graph shows the growth in the world's population from 1750 to 2000, and estimates growth to 2150.
2. The axis: The horizontal axis represents years with fifty year intervals marked. The vertical axis represents the world's population in units of a billion.
3. The graph's trend: The world's population has increased steadily since 1750 from less than two billion people to more than six billion people.
4. Predictions: If this trend continues, there will be approximately ten billion people in the world by 2150.

Human Population: Fundamentals of Growth Population Growth and Distribution

World Population Growth, 1750–2150

Population (in billions)



Source: United Nations, *World Population Prospects, The 1998 Revision*; and estimates by the Population Reference Bureau.

Graph Description

This graph shows the growth in the world's population from 1750 to 2000, and estimates growth to 2150. The horizontal axis represents years with fifty year intervals marked. The vertical axis represents the world's population in units of a billion. The world's population has increased steadily since 1750 from less than two billion people to more than six billion people. If this trend continues, there will be approximately ten billion people in the world by 2150.

TASK 1: Presenting a Graph

Work with a partner and prepare a description of a graph by answering the four key questions:

1. What is the subject of the graph?
2. What do the X and Y axes/bars/components of the pie chart represent?
3. What trend does the graph illustrate?
4. What predictions can you make from the graph?

TABLES

There are four key questions that you must answer when presenting a table:

1. What is the subject of the table?
2. What do the columns represent?
3. What order is the data arranged in?
4. What conclusions can be drawn from the information in the table?

Useful Expressions

1. This table shows . . .

This table illustrates . . .

2. The left-hand column indicates . . .

The right-hand column indicates . . .

The middle column represents . . .

The column on the far left represents . . .

3. The data are presented in chronological order.

The data are arranged alphabetically.

The data are arranged in numerical order, with the highest number at the top of the column and the lowest number at the bottom.

4. By studying the table we can see that . . .

The table shows that . . .

Example B (See Table 1 below)

1. Subject of the table: This table shows the breakdown of the U.S. population under 40, by age and gender.
2. The columns: The left-hand column indicates the age of the population. The middle column represents the number of males in each age range, and the right-hand column shows the number of females in each age range.
3. The order of the data: The data are presented in ascending order, with the youngest population range at the top of the column, and the oldest range at the bottom of the column.
4. Conclusions: By studying this table we can see that there are more males in the population in the five youngest age ranges. In contrast, there are more females in the population in the three oldest age ranges.

Table 1: United States Population (Under 40 Years) by Age & Sex (Population in Thousands)

—Year 2000—		
AGE	MALE	FEMALE
00-04	9,639	9,227
05-09	10,122	9,659
10-14	10,196	9,712
15-19	10,237	9,672
20-24	9,502	9,098
25-29	8,926	8,993
30-34	9,721	9,904
35-39	11,105	11,209

Table Description

This table shows the breakdown of the U.S. population under 40, by age and gender in 2000. The data are presented in ascending order, with the youngest population range at the top of the column, and the oldest range at the bottom of the column. The left-hand column indicates the age of the population. The middle column represents the number of males in each age range, and the right-hand column shows the number of females in each age range. By studying this table we can see that there are more males in the population in the five youngest age ranges. In contrast, there are more females in the population in the three oldest age ranges.

TASK 2: Presenting a Table

Work with a partner and prepare a description of a table by answering the four key questions:

1. What is the subject of the table?
2. What do the columns represent?
3. What order is the data arranged in?
4. What conclusions can be drawn from the information in the table?



APPENDIX II

Leading a Class Discussion

Preview Questions

How do I prepare for a discussion?

What types of questions should I ask?

How do I encourage student participation?

Discussion leading is a common duty of teaching assistants, especially those in the social sciences and humanities. In order to have active discussions, keep in mind the following tips.

Pre-Discussion

- Since students usually have read more than what can be covered in one class period, select the most important aspects of the reading for discussion.
- Tell students in advance which sections of the reading they should expect to discuss.
- Prepare good questions. What types of questions should you prepare?
- Write the discussion topics and goals on the blackboard at the beginning of class.
- Type up a handout with your discussion questions.
- Use a variety of discussion techniques, such as _____.
- If you notice that students are not doing the reading, what should you do?

During the Discussion

- Greet the class and state the discussion topic. For example:
- *"Good morning. Today we are going to talk about _____."*
- You may want to start off with some general comprehension questions about the reading before moving on to questions which elicit opinions and analysis.
- If you are having a whole-class discussion, be sure all the students are involved, not just the talkative ones. List three ways you can do this:

- When a student is speaking, be sure to use such active listening techniques as:

- Be sure to clarify unclear questions/answers.
- Give positive feedback to insightful answers and interesting ideas. Expressions you can use include: *good answer*, *excellent point*, _____.
- Be open to different ideas and opinions; in a discussion there is often no right/wrong answer.
- If a discussion becomes too heated, you will need to diffuse the situation by saying something like, "I can see we have some very strong opinions here. Perhaps we can agree to disagree." What are some other sentences/expressions you could use?

- Be aware of the pace of the discussion and keep it moving.
- Periodically summarize the discussion.
- Wrap up the discussion by restating the main points that were discussed, issues that were resolved, conclusions reached, and/or topics for further discussion.

** Keep in mind that a discussion is not a lecture. Your role is to **facilitate** the discussion, to clarify difficult points, and to maintain an environment which encourages participation and an exchange of ideas.

** See *Teaching Nuggets*, Modules 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 for further information about discussion leading and group participation.



APPENDIX III

SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR TAs

Formal Avenues of Support

1. The Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET)

<http://www.usc.edu/cet> or (213) 740-9040 or uscet@usc.edu

CET's group of Faculty Fellows provides USC teaching assistants many programs and materials to improve teaching and learning at USC.

- Sign up at the CET website, <http://www.usc.edu/cet>, to the weekly CET email updates. These emails list upcoming events offered by CET faculty.
- Attend the ***Principles of Teaching*** Series throughout the semester. Every other week CET offers a "brown bag" discussion of some teaching topic ("brown bag" means you can bring your own lunch). For instance, they have "The Art of the Lecture" and "the Art of Discussion Leading".
- Read the CET *Teaching Nuggets* for new teaching ideas and strategies. This book is distributed to all new TAs at USC and is available from the CET office. A pdf version is available at their website.
- Visit the CET library. This is a selective library of practical works on teaching and learning, all of which are available for browsing or borrowing. Also available is a variety of instructional videotapes on such subjects as lecturing, discussion-
- Leading, effective advising, collaborative learning, and interacting with students.
- Classroom Observation (or Videotaping). Individual faculty as well as TAs who are interested in developing their teaching skills can arrange to be videotaped in the classroom and receive feedback from one of the CET's Faculty Fellows. The Faculty Fellows are a select group of professors noted for their outstanding ideas, approaches, and techniques for teaching. They are also willing to observe a class (without videotaping) and provide constructive comments. Meetings can be arranged by contacting CET a few days in advance.

Support Systems for TAs

2. Departmental Faculty Advisors

Each department will assign a faculty advisor who will counsel and review your progress on a yearly basis.

- Every TA should have a faculty mentor in regard to their teaching. Although the faculty mentor may be your research advisor, this need not be the case. Each semester (and sometimes mid-semester) your students will formally evaluate your teaching. You and your faculty mentor should review your teaching evaluations at the end of each semester. This will help you to learn where your strengths are as well as where you need further development as a TA.
- Meet with your faculty advisor frequently to review material and discuss your students' progress.
- When you are unable to teach (or perform your duties), you should contact the instructor or arrange to be replaced according to a pre-established procedure. Find out what that procedure is in your department!

3. The American Language Institute (ALI)

The ALI (<http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali/>) offers several courses for nonnative English speakers to improve their communicative ability. Most of you will take an English exam before the beginning of the semester. Based on your exam results, you may be required to take an English course to help increase your language proficiency so that you can meet the academic standards of the university. Several elective courses are also offered by the ALI.

4. The Office of International Students (OIS)

OIS offers assistance and support to international students. OIS is dedicated to facilitating students' adjustment into a new academic environment. OIS offers a pre-semester orientation program for new international students. Check the USC website for more details (<http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/OIS/>). Their office is located in the Student Union Building.

Informal Avenues of Support

5. Departmental Assistance

As a TA, you should check with colleagues in your department to find out what resources are available.

The secretary in each department can be a valuable source of information. Make friends with this person!

Subscribe to relevant email listservs. TAs can check with their departments to find out what professional and academic listservs are available in their field.

6. Experienced TAs

Seek advice from other TAs in your department. Ask around for help when you need it!

- In some departments the TAs meet regularly for informal lunches or talks. Ask the departmental secretary or more experienced TAs to find out what goes on in your department.

7. Students

You can also elicit feedback from students.

- Talk to students casually and try to get clues about what may help facilitate their understanding of course material. This confirms that there is an open line of communication between you (the TA) and students. It also shows students that their TA is interested in helping them succeed academically.

8. Teacher reflection

It is important that all TAs reflect on their interaction with students and try to discover ways of improving their teaching. You could do this with other TAs or with your faculty mentor.

Other Available Avenues of Support

9. The Graduate Student Bill of Rights

The Graduate Student Bill of Rights document is available at: <http://www.usc.edu/org/gpss/information/billofrights.html>. TAs should read through this document to become more familiar with their rights and responsibilities. For example, graduate students have the right to refuse doing tasks that are not closely related to their field. (However, they should realize that this refusal may have future political ramifications.)

10. The Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS)

Through its programs, GPSS aims at providing community development, the advocacy of rights, and the highest quality service to graduate students on both campuses (University Park and Health Science Campus) at USC. More information on the services and academic resources that GPSS provides is available at: <http://www.gpssusc.com/>

11. Student Counseling Services - Division of Student Affairs

Student Counseling Services is committed to helping USC students creatively handle the stresses and challenges in their academic and personal goals. There are groups to help all students with problems they may face in their personal, academic or professional lives at USC. Be sure to take advantage of this service if you are feeling a lot of stress! A complete list of these groups is available at: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/Health_Center/cs.index.shtml.

12. Office of Student Conduct - Division of Student Affairs

The office addresses problems involving academic integrity. They also publish a booklet appropriately named *Trojan Integrity: A Faculty Desk Reference*. The policies in this booklet and other academic integrity publications are excerpted from the university student conduct policies published in SCampus. The booklet has sections on preventing academic dishonesty, confronting acts of cheating, reporting violations and handling disruptive classroom behavior. In addition to the booklet, “Trojans for Integrity” will send a representative to your class with copies of the booklet to discuss issues concerning academic integrity. They can be reached via email at: tfi@usc.edu.

More information about student conduct is available from the office’s website at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>

References

Handbook for graduate assistants

http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/current_guidelines_forms.html

The Center for Excellence in Teaching

<http://cet.usc.edu/>