

The following handout was prepared by Bryna Clover, Chemistry department, UMD

Student-GTA Communication

Communication between the TA and students has many nuances and is a tricky subject in itself; here are some tips.

- Speak clearly and confidently at all times. If you tend to speak softly or have language difficulties, it is important to personally address this and have a plan for how you will be aware of this in lab.
- Language barriers can be difficult, and can be due to either a student or TA with language difficulties.
 - Slang, idioms, and different styles of humor all add to misunderstandings between those of different languages and cultures.
 - Do not be afraid to check for misunderstandings. One technique to do this is to rephrase what a student is saying. Then, ask the student for clarification and if that is what was originally meant.
 - It's also a good idea to check for student comprehension and ask questions to gauge student understanding.
 - If you find you have difficulty pronouncing words, or it looks as though your students might not understand a word, use the chalkboard. Clarifying difficult words and ideas in this way helps students follow a pre-lab discussion.
 - Often, non-native speakers (and native speakers!) have a tendency to speed through a conversation and speak very quickly. Remember to talk slowly and leave time between sentences to be sure that students have understood the main ideas.
- Communication is not just about talking.
 - Both your body language and that of the student play a major role in your relationship, as well as the tone in your voices. It's important to show respect with each of these means of non-verbal communication.
 - Situations may occur when you want to role your eyes or even raise your voice. It is important to maintain a level composition when dealing with your students. If these urges strike you, try taking a deep breath before responding to a student, and think about the proper and most constructive response.
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." But be sure to follow it up in a way that the students tell you care: "I'll look into that for our next class."
- Communication also extends to email and online contexts.
 - Email communication with your students is a useful tool; however student assumptions about your availability and response time can quickly get out of hand.
 - It may be beneficial to let students know when you will check and respond to emails, for example during "work hours" or "not after midnight."
 - Also, telling students how quickly they can expect a reply (within the day, for example), can help avoid full inboxes from the same student.

Sources:

Instructional Development, University of California, Santa Barbara. "International TA Handbook." <http://oic.id.ucsb.edu/international-ta-handbook> Accessed 11.11.09

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