

# TA Starter Package

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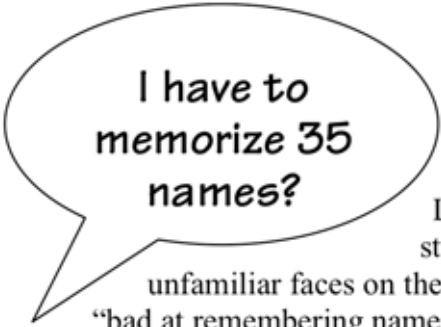
How can I establish a good classroom atmosphere?

## Favorite *Icebreakers* for the first day

Using an icebreaker at the beginning of a course can help establish a positive classroom climate for the rest of the term.

Students get to know one another and the instructor and will feel more comfortable participating in class. An icebreaker can be general, or it can do “double duty” by also incorporating some kind of introduction to the course content. Below are a selection of popular and adaptable icebreaker activities. **Hint:** Try to maintain the spirit set by your icebreaker in subsequent section meetings. Don’t let your students’ participation skills get rusty!

- ① **Pair interviews** Have students interview one another in pairs for a few minutes. Then they will take turns introducing partners to the whole class. The interview can be general (name, hometown, interests, etc.), or it can be more focused on the course (“What do you want to learn from this course?”, or some discussion question drawn from course content).
- ② **Small group activities** encourage everyone to get involved. Be sure group members introduce themselves before starting. Then, have each group start with a “round robin” so everyone has a chance to put a contribution on the table and one or two students do not dominate. After small group discussion, group responses are shared and discussed as a whole class. Similarities and differences in the groups’ responses form the basis for discussion of expectations, preconceived notions, or range of views among the class members. These activities can also help you get an idea of your students’ prior experience with the course content. Here are suggestions for small group icebreaker activities:
  - \* First, have students individually brainstorm expectations for the course, or questions about the course. In their groups they will reach consensus on one expectation or question to share with the class.
  - \* Have groups discuss a course-related question: What do they know collectively about the definition of an ecosystem? Why do we read and study literature? Who are the 5 most influential individuals alive today? Use their responses as a jumping-off point for introducing and defining course goals/content.
  - \* Have students individually complete a short course-focused survey. In groups, they will compare their responses and report to the class: what their group most had in common on the survey; in what area they had the most diversity of responses.
- ③ **Whole class activities** can build a sense of class community and set the tone for regular class participation.
  - \* Silly introductions: The general pattern here is for students to introduce themselves, and produce some bit of additional information that helps others remember them. Examples of favorites: each student pulls a random item from his/her backpack and tells its significance; each student tells one interesting or unique fact about him/herself. The instructor can set the tone by going first.
  - \* Class survey: The purpose is to give students an idea of what they have in common with classmates, as well as of the diversity of the class. Ask students to raise their hands in response to survey questions. You may want to begin with demographic questions: “How many of you are frosh? sophomores? etc” “How many are from outside of California?” “How many have part-time jobs?” Hobbies and interests are also good: “How many of you like baseball?” “How many of you read a book this summer?” Then you might venture into views on topics related to the course. This can lead into discussion.



I have to  
memorize 35  
names?

## How to *learn students' names*

Learning students' names is one of the most important signals to your students that you care about them. Yet when confronted with a sea of unfamiliar faces on the first day, it can seem like a daunting task. Even if you think you are "bad at remembering names," you *can* learn your students' names with a little effort. Following are some techniques that will help. **Hint:** Make this a priority. Students will be very appreciative of your efforts to learn their names at the *beginning* of the term.

- \* Give each student a 5x8 card, which they will fold in half lengthwise and write their first name on in large letters. They should bring these to class each day for the first couple of weeks and set them up on their desk as a name tag. Keep spare cards for people who lose them.
- \* Do an introduction activity on the first day, and take notes to aid your memory as students introduce themselves.
- \* Bring a digital camera to class. Take student pictures in groups of 4, with their names written above them on the whiteboard, or holding a sign with their name in large, legible letters. Study the pictures at home to memorize names. This is especially helpful if you have a lot of student names to learn.
- \* End class with a short writing activity or quiz. Students bring their papers up to you when finished, and then leave. This will give you an opportunity to match names and faces, particularly if there are a few students whose names you're having trouble remembering. Make a point of looking at the name, and then at the face, and thank the student, using their name.
- \* Use students' names at every opportunity, and ask them to correct you if you are wrong. Always call on students by name during discussion. If you don't know a name, it's fine to ask the student when you call on them ("Remind me of your name. . . OK, Jason, what do you think?"). Use their names if they approach you after or before class ("Hi, Sara, what can I do for you?").
- \* Use small group activities during the first class meetings. Go around to meet with each group, and work on matching names with faces during these small group meetings. It is often easier to remember names when associated with a small group.

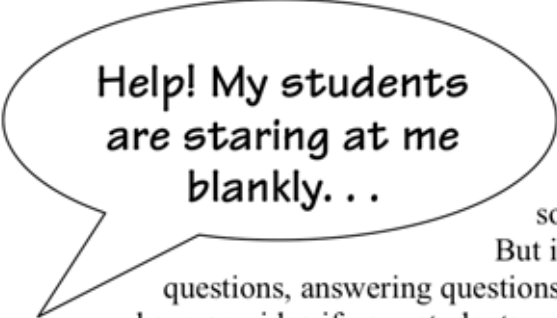
What shall I do  
in section this  
week?

## Planning Section Activities

The degree of autonomy a TA will have in planning section activities varies from course to course. In some cases, your faculty supervisor may tell you exactly what to do. In other cases, it may be entirely up to you to fill section time with meaningful learning activities. If this is the case, start by thinking about what kinds of understanding students are expected to demonstrate in this course. Plan activities to give them practice in those areas. One useful way to think about learning objectives is “Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives”\*, which proposes a hierarchy of learning from simple recall to more creative and evaluative activities. Different courses will emphasize different combinations of the six levels. The table below lists the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, with a quick definition for each, and a list of suggested learning activities. **Hint:** Try not to do the same thing in class every day. Many of the activities listed can be adapted for use by either the whole class, small groups, pairs, or individuals.

Objective	Students are expected to. . .	Suggested learning activities
<b>Knowledge</b>	recognize/recall facts, theories, terms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Group quiz</li> <li>▪ Drill-and-practice</li> <li>▪ Games</li> <li>▪ Mnemonic devices (student-generated)</li> <li>▪ Q &amp; A session</li> </ul>
<b>Comprehension</b>	describe facts, theories, etc. in their own words, or give examples to illustrate them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussion (stating concepts in own words)</li> <li>▪ Writing exercise</li> <li>▪ Brainstorming exercise</li> </ul>
<b>Application</b>	use theories, laws, etc. to solve problems, or apply them to practical situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Case studies</li> <li>▪ Practice problems</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>	understand organizational structure of material, cause and effect, make comparisons and contrasts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organizational matrix or concept map</li> <li>▪ Categorizing exercise</li> <li>▪ Case studies</li> <li>▪ Brainstorming exercise</li> </ul>
<b>Synthesis</b>	put together separate concepts or ideas to form a new idea or product, or engage in other creative uses of concepts they have learned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Simulation (e.g., give students “real-life” roles to play)</li> <li>▪ Discussion (e.g., propose new thesis from separate ideas, or “what if. . .”)</li> <li>▪ Propose an experiment or procedure</li> <li>▪ Project future impacts</li> <li>▪ Writing</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation</b>	make critical judgements based on evidence, or form their own views based on knowledge gained in the course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Debate</li> <li>▪ Discussion (opinions with support)</li> <li>▪ Select best solution/approach from alternatives</li> <li>▪ Evaluate or assemble evidence</li> <li>▪ Assess value of theories</li> <li>▪ Writing</li> </ul>

\* Bloom, Benjamin S. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Cognitive Domain* (David McKay Co., 1956).



Help! My students  
are staring at me  
blankly. . .

## Tips for improving participation

Most sections are designed on a principle of active learning. In some cases, this means having a defined lab activity to complete.

But in other cases, it means you want your students *talking*: asking questions, answering questions, discussing ideas. If participation is lackluster you may not have any idea if your students understand the material. Here are a few suggestions.

### \* Have them write

Give students a focused, provocative question and a few minutes to freewrite on it. Make sure they know you'll be asking them to talk about what they wrote. (It's OK to "cold call" if you've given them time to think about the question.)

### \* Put them in groups

It's best to give groups a specific outcome, so they know when they're done.

- Write a good definition of \_\_\_\_\_.
- List five characteristics of \_\_\_\_\_.
- Decide which article proposes the best solution, and be prepared to defend your choice.

Or, each group can be given a different problem to work together, with solutions to be written on the board when they're done. Give groups 10-20 minutes (depending on the task), then have follow-up discussion.

### \* Take a poll

Ask students to raise hands for an on-the-spot poll, and then call on individuals to discuss. For anonymity, have them respond on paper, then scan answers quickly.

Polling can be on content:

**"How many of you think the monster is a sympathetic character in Frankenstein?"**

Follow-up: "It looks like we're split evenly on this one. Let's have a debate!" OR, "Wow, no-one finds him sympathetic? Why not?" (Play devil's advocate.)

. . . or on understanding (e.g., to find out areas they had difficulty with):

**"How many of you would feel completely confident if asked to explain this concept**

**on an exam? (I won't call on you now to demonstrate your confidence. . .this is just a poll.)"**

Follow-up: "OK, not many of you. Let's start with the areas you feel OK about . . . Now, what is confusing you?"

### \* Give them a quiz

It can be ungraded if you like, but should give you some material to talk about. Have students share answers and use it to clarify areas of confusion.

### \* Plan your discussion questions more carefully

If you are simply saying "Let's discuss blank" that is probably too broad. If you are asking low-level factual questions, you may be boring your students. Before section, make a list of questions that will guide the discussion to the level of learning that is your goal.

### \* Give them homework

Shocking as it may seem, some students do not come to section prepared. That's why they are sometimes so quiet! If you can, assign them homework that establishes consequences for not being prepared—discussion questions on the reading, reading summaries, suggested quiz/exam questions from the reading, etc. Graded quizzes also work well. Earning even a few points will often be enough to goad them into doing the work.

### \* Get really creative

Assign roles in a simulation. Create teams and play "stump the TA" (or the other teams). Do something that makes them move.

## **SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION** **. . . suggestions for Teaching Assistants**

Based on the article “Seven Principles For Good Practice In Undergraduate Education,” by Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson (*AAHE Bulletin*, 29(7), 3-7).

In 1987 Chickering and Gamson published a seminal article synthesizing research about teaching and learning in higher education. Their seven principles have stood the test of time, and are now perhaps the most widely recognized guidelines for faculty practice. Below are Chickering and Gamson’s seven principles, with suggestions from UCSC’s Center for Teaching Excellence for how TAs can implement them in section.

Chickering and Gamson’s original article can be found online by going to:  
<http://www.tltgroup.org/Seven/Home.htm>

### **Good practice in undergraduate education:**

#### **1. encourages contact between students and faculty,**

- Get to know students’ names.
- Encourage students to come to office hours for help.
- Be sure you’re interacting with students throughout section.
- Share with students how you got into this field, and why it’s exciting to you.

#### **2. develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,**

- Start the quarter with “ice-breaker” activities designed to help students get to know one another.
- Incorporate small group activities during section.
- Encourage students to exchange email addresses and form study groups.
- Have opportunities for students to give one another constructive feedback on early drafts of writing or other assignments.
- Encourage the sharing of diverse viewpoints during discussion, and insist on respectful dialogue on all topics.
- Promote an atmosphere of cooperation and knowledge-sharing, rather than one of competition for grades.

#### **3. encourages active learning,**

- Use probing questions to help students find answers to questions, rather than telling them the answer.
- Provide opportunities for students to state concepts in their own words—both orally and in writing.
- Develop activities and games as ways of learning content.
- Bring in real-life case studies for students to discuss.
- Have students take turns solving problems on the board, or work in groups, as alternatives to you solving problems for them.

#### **4. gives prompt feedback,**

- Grade and return work within one week (less if possible).
- Give the most feedback earliest in the quarter.
- Give written feedback geared toward improvement.
- Give ungraded “diagnostic” quizzes and assignments for extra feedback to help students understand what they need to work on.

#### **5. emphasizes time on task,**

- Don’t provide “shortcuts” such as extra reading summaries; don’t demonstrate all the difficult problems for students. Emphasize that they must take the time to grapple with difficult material.
- Use the full time allotted for section; don’t dismiss students early.
- Make sure section time is “work time,” not an opportunity for passive sitting.
- Keep small group activities on-task; discourage idle socializing.
- Give reading quizzes to encourage students to keep up with the reading.
- Underscore the importance of regular pacing throughout the quarter, rather than “cramming” right before an exam.

#### **6. communicates high expectations,**

- Be clear about expectations for assignments.
- After grading tests or papers, discuss with students how to improve their performance. Help students see disappointing performance as a challenge.
- Design section activities to strengthen identified areas of weakness. Let students know this is what you are doing.
- Find ways to provide “scaffolding” for difficult concepts, leading students to increased independence and mastery.
- Be enthusiastic and encouraging about *all* students’ ability to succeed; don’t see yourself as responsible for “weeding out” weak students.

#### **7. respects diverse talents and ways of learning.**

- Give a survey at the beginning of the quarter to identify students’ prior knowledge and their experiences with learning in the subject area.
- Get to know your students as individuals.
- Use a variety of learning activities in section.
- Find ways of having students share their strengths with one another, such as in group activities.
- Remember that all students learn better if they use more than one approach to learning (aural, reading, writing, problem-solving, visual).

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## Resources for Teaching Assistants at UCSC

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If you can't find something you need in this guide, ask your department's graduate program coordinator, or call CTE at 9-5091. See **Index to Services** on reverse side.

### *Departmental Resources:*

#### **Graduate Program Coordinator/Advisor**

Each department has a staff person who coordinates graduate study in the department. This individual will be an important resource for issues such as TA assignments and program requirements; they can refer you to other staff in the department for questions on room assignments, textbooks, etc.

#### **Faculty Supervisor**

The instructor of record for the course you are TAing is responsible for course content, instructional goals, and assessment standards. This faculty member should be your first point of contact for questions related to course requirements, grading, student academic performance, and any judicial matters such as academic dishonesty.

#### **TA Trainer**

Many departments have a faculty member or experienced TA whose job it is to help train the departments' TAs. They sometimes also offer consulting or will arrange to have someone observe your class. If you haven't met this person yet, ask the department's Graduate Program Coordinator if your department has a TA Trainer.

### *Campus-wide Resources:*

#### **Center for Teaching Excellence**

<http://ic.ucsc.edu/CTE>

459-5091

Teaching resources for faculty and graduate students, including workshops, observation, videotaping, student feedback, and individual consultation. All services confidential.

#### **Library**

<http://library.ucsc.edu/home.html>

459-4000

In addition to books, the library provides films, slides, and maps; course reserves, electronic reserves; library instruction for classes; research assistance for students or faculty.

#### **Media Services**

<http://media.ucsc.edu>

459-2117

To reserve media equipment for your classroom, or get help in using installed equipment. Web site also has a classroom features database.

#### **Instructional Computing**

<http://ic.ucsc.edu>

See web site for phone numbers.

Course web pages, student computing labs, WebCT course management system, instructional technology training and support.

#### **Copy Center**

<http://copy.ucsc.edu>

459-4104

Photocopying for course packets, exams, etc.; copyright clearance; general photocopying; fax service.

#### **Evaluation Support**

<http://evals.ucsc.edu>

459-1573

Support for instructors writing student Performance (Narrative) Evaluations and electronically submitting evals; software tools for more efficiently writing evals.

#### **UC Copyright Education**

<http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/copyright/>  
Information on copyright, UC and campus policies, and using copyrighted works.

#### **Teaching Toolbox**

<http://teaching.ucsc.edu>

A web site maintained by the Center for Teaching Excellence, linking to a variety of teaching resources, including teaching tips.

#### **Disability Resource Center**

<http://www2.ucsc.edu/drc/>

459-2089

Assists in arranging accommodations for students with special needs. Their web site has information for instructors about working with disabled students.



### **EOP Learning Center**

<http://www2.ucsc.edu/eop/lc/lc.html>  
459-4333

Learning support services for Educational Opportunity Program students, as well as some services available to all students. Services include tutoring, academic success workshops.

### **ACE (Academic Excellence Program)**

<http://ace.ucsc.edu>  
459-5283

Study groups and other resources to help students excel in entry-level science/math courses. ACE's goal is to increase the diversity of those students earning bachelor's degrees in engineering, math and science.

### **STARS (Services for Transfer & Re-Entry Students)**

<http://stars.ucsc.edu>  
459-2552

Academic and personal support for transfer and re-entry students.

### **Title IX / Sexual Harrassment Office**

<http://www2.ucsc.edu/title9-sh/>  
459-2462

Assistance in investigating and resolving complaints of sexual harrassment; education and resources on sexual assault and sexual harrassment.

### **Counseling Services**

<http://www2.ucsc.edu/counsel/index.html>  
459-2628

Services for graduate and undergraduate students. Web site includes info for instructors on dealing with emotionally distressed students.

### **Ombudsman**

<http://www2.ucsc.edu/ombudsman/>  
459-2073

Assists students, staff, and faculty in achieving informal resolution of complaints and conflicts which stem from UCSC policies, procedures, practices, and intracampus relationships.

### **Graduate Student Association**

<http://www2.ucsc.edu/gsa/>  
459-2722

Represents the interests of UCSC graduate students in a variety of issues; offers travel grants; operates the Grad Student Commons.

### **Division of Graduate Studies**

<http://www.graddiv.ucsc.edu/>  
459-2510

Coordinates graduate study at UCSC. Web site has information on all aspects of graduate study, including financial, degree requirements, and policies.

### ***Index to services:***

<b><i>To find out about. . .</i></b>	<b><i>Look under. . .</i></b>
Academic support for students	EOP, ACE, STARS
Classroom features	Media Services
Classroom media equipment	Media Services
Computing labs	Instructional Computing
Conflict resolution	Ombudsman
Consultation on teaching	Center for Teaching Excellence
Copyright	UC Copyright Education
Course web site	Instructional Computing
Disability accomodations	Disability resource center
Electronic reserves	Library
Emotionally distressed students	Counseling Services
Films, showing in class	Library, Media Services

Instructional technology	Instructional Computing, Media Services
Library instruction	Library
Narrative evaluations	Evaluation Support
Photocopying course packets	Copy Center
Policies on graduate study	Div. of Graduate Study
Research assistance	Library
Sexual harrassment	Title IX/Sexual Harrassment
Slides, showing in class	Library, Media Services
Teaching improvement	Center for Teaching Excellence
Tips on teaching	Teaching Toolbox
Travel grants	Grad. Student Assoc.
Tutoring for students	EOP, ACE, STARS
Workshops on teaching	Center for Teaching Excellence

*Resource guide provided by the Center for Teaching Excellence.*

## Recommended Books for Teaching Assistants

**University Teaching: a Guide for Graduate Students**, Leo Lambert, et al.  
Syracuse University Press, 1996 / LB 2331 .U757 1996

**First Day to Final Grade: a Graduate Student's Guide to Teaching**, Anne Curzan and Lisa Damour.  
University of Michigan Press, 2000 / LB 2335.4 .C87 2000

**Teaching at its Best: a Research-Based Resource for College instructors**,  
Linda B Nilson.  
Anker, 1998 / LB 2331 .N54 1998

**Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers** (Eleventh Edition), Wilbert J. McKeachie.  
Houghton-Mifflin, 2002 / LB 1773 .M35 1999

**What the Best College Teachers Do**, Ken Bain.  
Harvard, 2004 / LB2331 .B34 2004

**Collaborative Learning Techniques**, Elizabeth F. Barkley, et al.  
Jossey-Bass, 2005 / LB1032 .B318 2005

**Engaging Ideas: the Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom**, John C. Bean.  
Jossey-Bass, 2001 / PE 1404 .B35 1996

**Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers**,  
Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross  
Jossey-Bass, 1993 / LB2822.75 .A54 1993

**Successful Beginnings for College Teaching**, Angela P. McGlynn  
Atwood 2001 / LB 2331 .P768 2001

**How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School**, John D. Bransford,  
et al.  
National Academy Press, 1999 / LB 1061 .H672 1999

**The Art of Changing the Brain**, James E. Zull.  
Stylus, 2002 / LB 1057 .Z85 2002