

## TA Training

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## Topics

- Intro
- Union information
- Doing your job
- Communication
- Giving tutorials
- Grading programs

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## Contacts

- TA assignments (which class are you hired for):
- Francois Pitt <[fpitt@cs](mailto:fpitt@cs)>
  - Signing contracts and other money issues:
    - Lisa De Caro <[lisab@cs](mailto:lisab@cs)>
  - Professional development, how to do your job well:
    - Your supervisor (the instructor)
    - TATP (<http://www.utoronto.ca/tatp/>)
    - Karen Reid <[reid@cs](mailto:reid@cs)>
  - Union stewards:
    - Tim Fowler [tfowler@cs.toronto.edu](mailto:tfowler@cs.toronto.edu)
    - Cristiana Chitic [cristi@cs.toronto.edu](mailto:cristi@cs.toronto.edu)
    - Matthew Kitching [kitching@cs.toronto.edu](mailto:kitching@cs.toronto.edu)

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## Doing your job

- Remember that this is **paid** work.
  - It is not a class.
  - You will not be penalized for asking questions.
  - Your supervisor wants you to work efficiently, and you need to learn how to do that.
  - Tell your supervisor about your strengths and weaknesses!
- You are part of a team that delivers a course to the students.
  - You have a responsibility to the instructor, your fellow TAs,
  - and **most importantly** to the students!

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## Communication

- You **must** keep in touch with your supervisor to
  - Notify him about your progress.
  - Notify her about any issues that came up during tutorial or if you deviated from the tutorial plan.
  - Notify him about any difficulties you are having.
  - Notify her **early** if you may not be able to meet a deadline.
  - Notify him **early** if you think you may be using more hours than budgeted.
- Your supervisor should **not** have to send you email to ask if you have completed a task you were asked to complete.

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## Your responsibilities

- Do the work that is asked of you by the expected deadline.
  - If something happens to make this impossible, notify your supervisor.
- If you are not given enough information or guidance to do the work in the specified amount of time, **ask** your supervisor for more input! (**Ask early!**)
- Act professionally to the students and your supervisor.

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## TA duties

- Giving tutorials
- Office/lab hours
- Grading assignments
- Grading exams
- Other?
  - Reading newsgroups/bulletin boards

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## The First Tutorial

- Set the tone for the whole term!
  - Arrive early and talk to the students individually
    - Are you here for cscXXX?
    - How has your first week been?
    - What other classes are you taking?
  - Write your name on the board and tell students something about yourself
  - Say something about how you expect the tutorials to work
    - What is the purpose of the tutorial?
    - You want to make sure every student in the room understands.
    - What do you find interesting about the course?

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## The First Tutorial

- Offer any tips you have for doing well in the course.
- Do your best to get the students talking in the first tutorial
  - Ask them questions
  - Get them to vote on an answer
  - Force them to participate in a problem solving exercise

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## The First Tutorial

- Speak clearly, loudly (enough) and slowly.

**Show your enthusiasm!**

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## Giving tutorials

- Preparation is key.
  - Make sure you know how much preparation you are supposed to do, and how much your supervisor will give you
  - **Ask** your supervisor for the main idea of each tutorial
- Engage the students:
  - Ask them questions
  - Get them to work through problems
  - Pause to allow them to ask questions
  - Use the board (rather than slides)
- Be enthusiastic. Act like you care.

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## Grading assignments

- Purpose
  - Evaluation (Fair and consistent.)
  - Feedback
- What to do and how to do it
  - Know the goal of the assignment
  - Solutions and grading schemes
  - Do the marking
  - Record the grades
  - Return assignments
  - Regrades

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## The goal of the assignment

- The better you know the assignment, the easier it is to grade.
- Read everything the students have to read:
  - The assignment. All of it. As soon as you get it.
  - Any starter code.
  - Any announcements made about the assignment.
- Think about how you would do it.
- Watch out for other correct ways to do it.
- Watch out for instructor mistakes!
- If you are confused, **ask** the instructor.

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## Solutions and grading scheme

- Grading scheme
  - Often given to you by the instructor.
  - Sometimes you will need to make up one.
- Why grading schemes are important:
  - Faster to mark with a good grading scheme.
  - Marking will be consistent.
  - Highlights the important concepts/skills.
  - It is easier (faster) to give feedback.
- When more than one person grades an assignment, they **must communicate** to ensure consistency.

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## Properties of a good grading scheme

- Concentrates on the most important ideas.
- Lets students know what the important ideas are.
- Very structured: correctness, commenting, style.
- Easy to distinguish good work from poor work.
- Even good marking schemes usually need to be modified.
  - It's hard to anticipate how students will get things wrong.

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## Grading scheme

- Get instructor to establish/approve of grading scheme
- Take care in disclosing it to students
- Read it early
- Augment it as you go
- Must not be vague

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## Marking for style

- Style, commenting, and writing quality are important.
- Vital for introductory courses.
- Maintain strong standards:
  - Students will get away with what they can
  - If you can't follow it, **don't** give it full marks
  - Remember that these students will eventually be employees and will need to know the difference between high quality work and low quality work.

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## Marking

- Don't spend too long.
- Read the important part, at an appropriate level of detail.
- Give adequate feedback, but not excessive.
- A student must be able to tell why marks were lost.
- Augment the grading scheme as you go.
- **Take notes.**
- **Coordinate with other graders.**
  - **Communication!**
- Indicate grades clearly.

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## Read a few before starting

- To know the range of student performance.
- To identify problems with the grading scheme.
- BUT
  - Don't grade the best/worst first.
  - Don't alphabetize prior to grading.

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## What is important?

- Correctness
  - When student output matches expected output, their work is **not** necessarily correct!
  - When student output does not match expected output, their work may still be correct!
- Mark by what the assignment asked for
  - Students are often asked to use a particular technique.
  - E.g., if they did not use recursion when that was the point of the assignment, they should not get full marks.

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## Detecting cheating

- Report **any** suspicions to the instructor
- Hints and clues
  - Something looks familiar
  - Students copy poor papers too
- If you find a suspicious assignment, report it to the instructor immediately
  - Do not confront the student

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## Recording grades

- Many different policies about how to record grades.
  - Follow the approach your instructor wants.
- Work out with the instructor
  - Who has the authoritative copy?
  - Who is going to post the grades?
- Hang onto email until the end of term.
- Do not discard grades or intermediate work!
- If you have any questions or concerns **ask** the instructor.

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## Returning assignments

- Promises
  - Don't make promises to the students.
  - Honour promises made by instructor.
- Hand out assignments by calling names
  - Make eye contact
  - Have fun
  - If you can't pronounce a name, don't feel badly. We all struggle with some names.

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## Regrades

- Students will ask for regrades.
- Find out the instructor's policy on regrades.
- **Never** give marks back immediately.
- If it is a simple error (e.g., addition)
  - Take the assignment back
  - Make a note of the problem immediately, on their assignment, and initial it.
  - Make sure the modified grade is recorded properly.

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## Regrades

- If it is not a simple error
  - Listen/read and consider the complaint.
  - Get a written explanation from the student.
  - Warn them that you may regrade the entire assignment.
- Be fair - they might be right.
- Don't change your marking scheme.
- Don't give marks back to avoid conflict.
- Follow the instructor's directions!!

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## Helpful phrases

- “Everyone was marked the same way.”
- “The assignment told you what to do.”
  - It helps if you have read the assignment thoroughly...)
- “Let me explain why I did that...”
- “Oops, sorry, you are right ...”
- “I’m sorry, that’s my final decision. You need to talk to the professor if you have more questions.”

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## How to speed up marking

- A good marking scheme is vital
  - Make sure you understand the provided one
  - Or, spend the time to write a good one
- Do not read every line of code.
- Figure out what’s important and mark that.
- Mark in at least 3-4 hour stretches of time.
- Don't mark in front of the TV
  - Turn off IM, email, etc.
- Don't write the same sentence 50 times.
- Do give feedback, but look for shortcuts.
- Use a timer.

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## Fast feedback

- On paper
  - Circle things that are wrong
  - Put ink on most pages that you read, even if it is just a tick.
  - Save detailed comments for a general summary.
- Electronically
  - Keep a file/clipboard of comments and use cut and paste.

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## Summary

- Remember all of the good teachers and TAs you had.
  - What made them good?
  - Try to emulate that.
- Take responsibility for your work
  - You are ultimately serving the students.
- Have some fun with TAing.
- Try to learn something from TAing.

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## Other

- Two upcoming training sessions for all TAs, both in BA5256 from 3-5 p.m.
  - Monday Sept 19: Giving Tutorials
  - Monday Sept 26: Marking Efficiently

*(Please RSVP to [ta-training@cs.utoronto.ca](mailto:ta-training@cs.utoronto.ca), so I can make sure the room is big enough.)*
- TA Training Program
  - <http://www.utoronto.ca/tatp/>
- Slides
  - <http://www.cs.utoronto.ca/~reid/ta/>

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