



GTA workshops – Notes on Content

Having consulted Associates and with reference to the UK [Professional Standards Framework](#) (mainly descriptors 1 and 2 for the GTA workshops) we have developed [an example GTA programme](#) to guide facilitators. The Professional Standards Framework encompasses activities, knowledge and professional values and should be referenced when you are planning your workshop.

The notes below are guidelines on the content for GTA workshops. Each session with a star is considered essential but extra topics can be included if time permits (the workshop can be organised as you wish). We have also provided example presentations, activities and hand-outs which can be customised and used as appropriate. Timings can be flexible, but the sample programme gives an indication of the length of each session based on past workshops.

Example GTA sessions

1. Being a GTA: roles, responsibilities and expectations

This is a good way to start – it breaks the ice, allows participants to gather their thoughts and express their expectations and concerns. Beginning with this can also set the agenda for some of the later sessions.

**2. Delivering effective classes*

GTA's may not be aware that small group teaching is one of the most complex and demanding settings for teaching. A standard reaction to this in practice is to allow the tutorial to become a mini-lecture. One of the key objectives in these workshops is to create the confidence to avoid this tendency and to facilitate active learning in tutorials. Throughout, it is worth returning to the complexity of small group settings to engender a critical and self-reflective approach to teaching. We are not trying to impart a set of prescriptive techniques that will work in all situations. GTA's should leave the workshop with a set of ideas to try out and the ability to critically reflect on them.

Examples of topics that could be covered:

- Introduction to theory of learning (best to keep this short and provide a reading list – Schunk, 2011 is good and up-to-date; it is worth introducing some key concepts such as deep and surface learning, perhaps constructivism)
- Problems in tutorials (e.g. one student dominates, no-one prepares work, everyone is silent)
- Planning the tutorial (ascertaining and “activating” prior knowledge, engaging students in the planning process, being selective and not just “covering the material”)
- Facilitation skills (listening, questioning and clarifying appropriately – Bloom’s taxonomy is often useful here; there is some good material in chapter 3 of Exley and Dennick, 2004 and chapter 3 of Exley and Barnett, 2006; also see chapter 5 of Brookfield and Preskill, 1999 on the benefits and practice of “discussion” tutorials; also Northedge, 2003).

It may be useful to include a session on how to deliver a particular type of small-group tutorial. For example, many presenters use a micro or macro exercise sheet and consider how to approach this in an interesting way without simply reproducing the answer on the board. One can introduce different



ways of learning here (visual, auditory etc.) and emphasise the need to work through material in various ways (diagrammatic, intuitive, mathematical). This kind of session can easily be participatory.

**3. The first tutorial*

GTAs do not always appreciate the importance of setting expectations and ground rules at the beginning of a module (e.g. about the nature of the tutorials, participation required, preliminary work required for each session, respect for others and so on). It is worth exploring this in a separate session to emphasise the importance of the first tutorial. Some useful material is in Exley and Dennick, 2004, chapter 2).

Many presenters find that an interactive session works best by initially asking the GTAs what a first tutorial might look like for a module and collecting their thoughts together in a discussion. Many presenters emphasise the need to do some actual subject work in the first tutorial (to establish that the tutorial is a place when students must think) as well as to set expectations more generally for the rest of the module.

**4. Assessment, Marking and Feedback*

It is unlikely that GTAs will be setting assessments for a module but quite likely that they will need to mark some formative and possibly summative assignments (these terms may need clarification in the session).

In this session, the key objective is to discuss the importance of assessment and feedback in the learning process. GTAs should be aware that feedback needs to be appropriate (i.e. tells the student where to go next, not just that they were wrong or right) and timely (within 2 weeks) to be effective. Different ways of providing feedback and their relative advantages could be considered (e.g. group feedback, peer feedback, videos and so on). The importance of marking criteria (with examples), especially in essays, could be discussed.

Some presenters use this session to do some practical work where GTAs mark a small piece of work and the comments are compared for effectiveness. The sheet on “feedback tips” may be useful here.

**5. Internationalisation and diversity*

This session should explore the issues involved with teaching mixed ability groups, students with disabilities and groups with international students. Various issues can be discussed, e.g. with internationalisation: the importance of the language used in class and double checking that students have understood what has been said; writing up difficult words and references on the board; using international examples and drawing on diversity of experience; sensitivity to cultural differences (e.g. international students may be less confident speaking in class). There is a useful discussion in chapter 10 of Exley and Dennick, 2004.

There may also be some GTAs without experience of the HE system in the UK. As an alternative, or in addition to the above, this session could be used to introduce aspects of the HE system in the UK to these participants.

6. Other sessions

Over the years different presenters have focused on their own areas of interest in delivering extra sessions. These have included sessions on games in economics teaching (there are a number of [resources on the Economics Network website](#)), the use of film in teaching (see www.dirkmateer.com) and problem based learning.

Some Useful References

Brookfield, S.D. and Preskill, S., 1999, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for University Teachers*, Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press

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Strawson, H., Habeshaw, S. and Habeshaw, T., 2013, *53 Interesting Things to Do in your Seminars and Tutorials*, Allen and Unwin

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