

# Frequently Asked Questions

## From new Teaching Assistants

1. I have been appointed a TAship that requires me to be in the lab, teaching and interacting with students. Why do I need to know about marking as a TA?
  - a. As a graduate student each year (or semester) you are appointed to a class to be a teaching assistant. This class may change next year and your role as the teaching assistant may change as well. It is important to understand all aspects of being a TA for your entire journey as a teaching assistant. As well, there may be instances in which your role as a TA may change throughout the duration of the term.
  
2. The marking examples in the PowerPoint are math and physics based, but I am more comfortable with other science-based courses, are there any more practise questions available for me to go through?
  - a. Yes! There is a database of example marking exercises on topics which include thermodynamics, fluid mechanics, statistics, material science, etc. These are all available on the Fireball academy website for you.
  
3. I will need to take attendance in the class that I am a teaching assistant for this fall. What is the best method to take attendance that is compliant with FIPPA (Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act)?
  - a. Generally, using the students macid and their signature is a great way to take attendance while complying with FIPPA. You never want to reveal multiple pieces of personal information while taking attendance (ie. Student ID number, name, and macid all at once). If students disclose that they are uncomfortable with writing their macid and signature, be sure to let students know they can approach you privately to account for their attendance.
  
4. I have been informed that the tutorial I am leading will be online (Microsoft teams). I need to record these sessions, but I know personal information (i.e., name, webcam image, etc.) will be included in this recording. How do I comply with FIPPA during these online sessions?
  - a. Before starting a video recording, include a statement informing the students of the recording and whether the video will be posted internally (i.e., Avenue to Learn) or externally (i.e., YouTube). Give the students the option to deactivate their camera and microphone to avoid video capture in the recording. You may also want to encourage students to use the chat function to continue to participate in the session if they prefer.
  
5. I am a marking TA and I know I will be handing out stacks of hand-written assignments, how do I make sure that students grades and personal information are not on display for their peers to see?
  - a. To comply with FIPPA while disbursing hand-written assignments, marking TAs are encouraged to write final grades on the second page of the students' solution. This

keeps personal information and grades hidden. As a TA you should never leave student assignments/exams/papers unattended.

6. I am approaching the end of my TA term and am running out of hours in one section of my HOW (Hours of Work) form (i.e., marking) but have an abundant number of extra hours in another section (i.e., tutorials). Can I just reallocate these hours to another section on my own?
  - a. No, TAs are not allowed to reallocate their own hours (i.e., take your extra hours from tutorials to marking). Throughout the term be sure to track your TA hours and if you notice you don't have enough time, be sure to reach out to the TA supervisor as soon as you can. The TA supervisor will reallocate your hours with you.
  
7. I am a full TA and my TA supervisor has asked me to work extra hours by marking the student exams, however at this point, I've already finished my 130 hours, what do I do?
  - a. As the TA, it is your responsibility to keep track of your hours. As a rule of thumb, notify the TA supervisor when you have exhausted 50% of your hours. However, in this instance, you are not obligated to work overtime (over the 130 hours). Consult with your TA supervisor on how to proceed.
  
8. I am spending a lot of time marking assignments, some students provide messy solutions, while others provide neat solutions. Overall, I have found that the students who provided messy solutions are typically receiving poorer marks. How can I improve my consistency while marking?
  - a. For assignments, students have a considerable amount of time and ample resources, to provide neat professional solutions. Before you begin marking, make a rubric that aligns with the course's expectations. It would be best to have your TA supervisor review the rubric before you put it into practice. Set a timer to make sure you are consistent with your grading time, i.e. try not to spend 2 min on one student and 15 min on another. Be sure that outside factors are not influencing your grading choices (i.e., your feelings towards the course, your feelings towards the neatness of the solution, your hunger levels, your tiredness, etc.). We encourage you to try some of the grading exercises to practise consistent timing before your TAship begins.
  
9. I have been receiving a lot of harshly worded emails from a student in the class that I am a TA for. I no longer feel comfortable interacting with this student, and I am unsure what I should do about it.
  - a. Before the semester starts, it is important to set an email policy as the TA. This policy can include your typical available hours and expected response times (these can differ on weekdays versus weekends). The policy should also highlight that students need to contact you through their McMaster emails only. If a student is not complying, you can ask the TA supervisor to reiterate your email policy. If students continue to not comply with the email policy or you do not feel comfortable with the tone of emails you have been receiving, bring it to the attention of the TA supervisor immediately.