Being a TA: Useful Tips
9/12/12

1. **Office Hours**
   a. Be there! (or get a sub)
   b. Be aware of what’s going on in your class, including content, terminology, notation
   c. If lots of students, group according to class and encourage them to work together
   d. Don’t be patronizing
   e. Get them to give you answers, rather than giving them yourself
   f. Always point out the bigger ideas a problem is getting at, so the student can generalize
   g. Give concrete examples when teaching concepts
   h. Reframe a student’s question to make sure you understand
   i. Be honest about what you don’t know
   j. Use the schedule to see when TAs specifically assigned to a certain class will be there
   k. Ask probing questions
   l. Find the relevant sections in the book, or ask them to find it for you
   m. Help them break a problem into smaller, more manageable chunks
   n. Help them get them started, then give them the chance to take it from there (often a little help framing the problem is all they need)
   o. Ask them to explain their understanding; learn their initial understanding (or misunderstanding)
   p. Use the board for teaching a concept, or ask them to use the board for a problem
   q. Make them ask specific questions; replace “I don’t get it” with specific points of confusion

2. **Computing Labs**
   a. Pace the class
   b. Stop for common questions and explain to whole class
   c. 10 minute (or so) intro
   d. Be flexible
   e. Hands on /practical examples
   f. Don’t assume the students come in with a complete understanding of concepts
   g. Parallel class lecture if writing own labs
   h. Use R code from class and add useful comments
   i. Always be circling to ask if they are doing okay
   j. Manageable assignments (minimal work outside of lab)
   k. Don’t go through the whole lab step-by-step: maybe explain theory behind task or go through one example
   l. Review relevant theory; ask them to catch everyone else up on the concept
   m. Give hints on code
   n. Wander among people to answer questions
   o. Learn/brush up on everything before TAing, so you know you can do it
p. Let kids problem-solve/trouble-shoot if they can’t figure out code, etc....
q. Set clear expectations for lab time
r. Ask them to turn in code, script, as well as answers
s. Clear the lab instructions with the professor
t. Use interesting datasets/examples
u. Encourage group work

3. **Grading**
   a. TA policies need to be consistent
   b. Ensure prof has a late policy and all TAs are following it
c. Use solutions/key and/or a rubric (or at least a loose version)
d. Get a rubric from the instructor, or make your own
e. Solutions should be available – either from instructor or you are responsible
f. Grade 1 question at a time – for fairness and it can go more quickly if you only have to keep one answer in your head
g. Begin by looking through 5-10 people’s work to see how well in general they perform
h. Blink grading: UID instead of real names can be more fair
   i. Go back or keep records to be consistent – taking off same number of points
   j. If getting a double batch of HW to grade one week, perhaps grade part for completion (check with prof) and/or give less detailed comments if possible
   k. Put one sentence feedback
   l. Group feedback in labs, or tell professors what to cover in lecture
   m. If creating assignments, make the questions very clear

4. **Email**
   a. Have specific time slots each day when you will reply to email, and don’t read emails outside this time
   b. Host a review session/office hours instead of lots of pre-exam questions