

Cockrell School of Engineering

Effective TA Practices

Students very often reach out to their TAs before they seek help from faculty. It is therefore imperative that TAs recognize the important role they play in the course teaching team. Encouraging students keeps them motivated, and helps them persevere through difficult times.

Here are some practices to follow:

OFFICE HOURS

- Acknowledge each student who attends your office hours. Make an effort to know their name. Remember that the student is likely intimidated and feeling embarrassed that they don't understand the course content.
- Listen to the student's questions non-judgmentally. Applaud them for what they do understand.
- Answer the student's question, and ask follow-up questions to make sure that they have understood your explanation.
- If you do not know the answer to that question, then offer to follow up at a later time. Remind the student that their question is a good one, and that you will think about it, and get back with them. Make sure that you close that loop after your office hours are over.
- Encourage students to study and discuss problems with the other office hour attendees.
- Share your own experiences with the students. It could be something related to a course you are doing, or some work experience. Students learn a lot from these stories.

EMAILS & DISCUSSION BOARDS

- Promptly return emails and answer questions on the discussion board.
- Offer additional resources (like more practice problems, or links to more problems) if needed.
- Forward any concerning emails to the instructor.

LABS & RECITATION SESSIONS

- Prepare for your lab/recitation session. It is likely that students are hearing the lab instructions for the first time, and are depending on you for the explanations.
- Give your full attention to all students. This includes those who do not understand the concepts.

OVERALL COURSE PRESENCE

- Help students deal with/reframe their setbacks or "failures." Talk about how they can apply the growth mindset to their educational experience. Some students can become very distraught if they have been performing poorly in the course. Showing empathy is very important. Sharing your own experiences with failure is often times very effective.
- Show that you genuinely care about their success.
- Understand the course structure, the grading scheme, and give students the impression that you are in communication with the instructor.
- Acknowledge students when you see them in other settings. It helps them stay engaged.