

# Working as a Teaching Fellow: Fundamentals

Hande Sevgi

Departmental Teaching Fellow

LING 241B  
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# Table of Contents

- 1 Know your 'audience'
- 2 Know your responsibilities
- 3 Think about your strategies beforehand

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# Harvard undergraduates

Share your opinion with us!

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<sup>1</sup>This presentation heavily relies on the Bok Center material.

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What do you expect to see?<sup>1</sup>

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# Harvard culture

The educational structure at Harvard differs from many institutions.

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<sup>2</sup>Check the terms in Harvardese

# Harvard culture

The educational structure at Harvard differs from many institutions.

| Most Higher Ed          | "Harvard-ese"        |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| major                   | concentration        |
| minor                   | secondary field      |
| Teaching Assistant (TA) | Teaching Fellow (TF) |

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# Harvard culture

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**Diversity:** The condition when individuals or communities from different backgrounds, cultures, social identities, or perspectives come together in a social context.

**Equity:** The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all students, faculty, and staff, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of marginalized groups.

# Harvard culture

**Inclusion:** The notion that an organization or system is welcoming to new populations and/or identities where this new presence is not merely tolerated but expected to contribute meaningfully into the system in a positive, mutually beneficial way.

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**Inclusion:** The notion that an organization or system is welcoming to new populations and/or identities where this new presence is not merely tolerated but expected to contribute meaningfully into the system in a positive, mutually beneficial way.

**Belonging:** Connotes full membership in the Harvard community. This entails success in achieving not merely formal participation but also rewarding participation for all members of a diverse campus community in the opportunities, resources, and decision-making structures of the campus.

# Harvard culture

Demographic information of our students

# Harvard culture

We are going to take those into consideration when we plan our section in the last part of our class.

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# An easy start

Hit the Ground Running

# Keep in mind!

There is no fixed description of our roles.

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Our responsibilities significantly vary across courses and head instructors.

# Basic responsibilities

- Attending the classes
- Leading sections
- Leading office hours
- Grading

As well as organizing the teaching material and questions before the semester, so that you're confident and ready to go before classes start.

# Basic responsibilities

The most important responsibility that we have is

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★ to be an efficient Teaching Fellow ★

# How to be an efficient TF

It is crucial for us to understand

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- the goals of the courses we teach

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It is crucial for us to understand

- the goals of the courses we teach
- what our obligations are for these courses

# How to be an efficient TF

Communicate with your head instructor!

# How to be an efficient TF

Communicate with your head instructor!  
Checklist

# How to be an efficient TF

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Checklist

You are a team with your head instructor - you can contribute to the syllabus as well.

# How to be an efficient TF

Be open to team work!

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- Linguistics Teaching Resources
- Student lounge/library
- Your head instructor & peers

N.B.: For Intro classes - If your head instructor uses Language Files, you can ask for a physical or e-book copy of the book.

# How to be an efficient TF

You can always join the Fall/Winter Teaching Conference and other workshops at Bok Center.

# How to be an efficient TF

For the advanced courses; you are a team with your head instructor

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What about big courses, i.e. LING101?

# How to be an efficient TF

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- you prepare your sections collaboratively

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Communication is the key!

# How to be an efficient TF

Useful to know our departmental requirements!

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You can find our curriculum here.

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Things to consider:

- Attending the classes regularly
  - Observing your head instructor will contribute to your teaching methods
- Active listening in class rather than just being present
  - Pay attention how your head instructor teaches a topic and what theoretical approaches they use.

Presenting a different approach might create confusion.

# How to be an efficient TF

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→ Try to figure out the possible difficulties that your students can have.
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→ You are the interlocutor between the head instructor and the students.

In most of the cases, you know them better.

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# Figure out the objective of that particular section

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How would you determine your goals?

# Communication is the key!

Design your own syllabus for the section

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Example section syllabus

# First day of the class

Let's discuss.

Think about your favorite class.

# First day of the class

Can you name one property of that class that made it unique for you?

# First day of the class

Can you name one property of that class that made it unique for you?

Was it the content or the instructor?

# First day of the class

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Diversity

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Diversity, class climate

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*How would you lead this process?*

# First day of the class

- ★ Introduce yourself.

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  - What is your background?

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- ★ Introduce yourself.
  - What is your background?
  - What do you find genuinely interesting about the course?
  - What are some of your other interests?
- ★ The more students are able to connect with you
- ★ the easier your job will be.

# First day of the class

★ Ask questions to your students.

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  - Why are they taking the course?

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# First day of the class

- ★ Ask questions to your students.
  - Why are they taking the course?
  - What do they hope to get out of it?
  - What is their previous experience with the subject?
  - What are some of their other interests?
  - Learn their names!
  
- ★ Knowing more about your students will make it easier for you to teach them.

# First day of the class

- Rapport building  
Moreover, you should help your students get to know each other.

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*How would you lead this process?*

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- ★ Be sure to start with icebreakers to get things comfortable.

It can be as simple as having students introduce themselves to a partner and then introduce their partner to the larger group.

# First day of the class

These are important because...

building rapport helps create a positive and inclusive learning environment.

getting to know your students enhances your ability to create a successful learning environment

knowing about their backgrounds and interests allows you to tailor how you approach the material, designing your next sections.

# Not only first day but always

**Provide a roadmap**

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**Provide a roadmap:** If your audience doesn't know where you are starting from and what your plans are, it will be much harder for them to follow your presentation.

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# Not only first day but always

**Provide a roadmap:** If your audience doesn't know where you are starting from and what your plans are, it will be much harder for them to follow your presentation.

**Give them a hook:** An attention-getting opening will keep your audience interested in your talk.

You can share an amazing (or surprising) fact, an anecdote, an interesting (but brief) story, or a famous quote with your students.

# Not only first day but always

**Provide a clear context and purpose showing what your goals are.**

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**Provide a clear context and purpose showing what your goals are.**

★ Cultural pieces in our education system

# Not only first day but always

| Low-Context Communication                                                                                                       | High-Context Communication                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Assume limited shared knowledge<br>Explicit/direct meaning<br>Simple and clear communication<br>Repetition, rewording, defining | Assume shared knowledge<br>Implied/indirect meaning<br>Ambiguous and interpretable<br>Subtle wording and details |

Figure: Meyer 2014<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Meyer, E. (2014). The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business. Public Affairs. New York, NY

# Not only first day but always



Figure: Meyer 2014

# Not only first day but always

## Low-context communication tends to:

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Word choices:</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use rephrasing and repetition to add meaning</li> <li>• Value simple, clear word choices</li> <li>• Say one thing multiple ways to ensure others' understand</li> <li>• For negative feedback, information is organized to "soften the blow."</li> <li>• For negative feedback, often indirect or less clear word choices.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Nonverbal signals:</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use intonation, pausing and emphasis to add meaning</li> <li>• Pair nonverbal signals with words to add meaning</li> <li>• Often gesture when speaking</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Body language:</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use gestures, posture and eye contact</li> <li>• Use spatial distance to show relationships</li> <li>• Value eye contact and body language which demonstrate "confidence" such as straight posture, firm handshake</li> <li>• Use head movements and eye contact when listening to another person speak</li> </ul>                    |

Figure: Meyer 2014

# Not only first day but always

**Conclude your class with the summary of the material.**

# During the class

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- ★ Use inclusive language and avoid assumptions about students' backgrounds or experiences.

# During the class

We want to have a nice learning environment.

- ★ Start your each class by asking how they are.
  - ★ Use inclusive language and avoid assumptions about students' backgrounds or experiences.
- Make your material/language accessible as much as possible.

# During the class

Let's discuss!

# During the class

Let's discuss! What is your favorite lecture type?

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Let's discuss! What is your favorite lecture type?

How to implement active learning in our classrooms

# During the class

Let's discuss! What is your favorite lecture type?

How to implement active learning in our classrooms

What determines your choice of active learning method?

## During the class

- ★ Foster a collaborative environment where students work together in groups and respect each other's contributions.

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What important?

## During the class

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This will actively encourage participation from all students and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard.

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What important?

This will actively encourage participation from all students and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard.

# During the class

- ★ Avoid unequal participation

## During the class

★ Avoid unequal participation

What happens if a TF consistently calls on the same students who are more vocal or confident?

# During the class

★ Avoid unequal participation

What happens if a TF consistently calls on the same students who are more vocal or confident?

Always remember the diverse nature of Harvard

## During the class

- ★ Ensure that all students have the chance to contribute by actively calling on different students during discussions.

# During the class

★ Ensure that all students have the chance to contribute by actively calling on different students during discussions.

Why important?

What can go wrong?

## During the class

- ★ Create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification.

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Answering the questions

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Answering the questions

What can go wrong?

## During the class

★ Help students see the personal relevance of the material by discussing how it relates to their lives, interests, or career goals.

This is only possible if you know your students.

## During the class

★ Appreciate and embrace your students' perspectives.

It will encourage them to participate in discussions.

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★ Appreciate and embrace your students' perspectives.

It will encourage them to participate in discussions.

You will be amazed at how different perspectives they have and how they contribute to you.

## During the class

★ You have the control of the class.

Do not allow any kind of conflict among the students.

# During the class

- ★ You have the control of the class.

Do not allow any kind of conflict among the students.

Try to mitigate the discussions.

# Remember

★ It is a learning process.

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Each class with different students brings new experiences with respect to teaching.

# Important reminder to ourselves

TFs may not have control over broader diversity issues in academia.

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★ However, you can still have a significant impact on the inclusivity and participation levels within your classrooms.

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★ However, you can still have a significant impact on the inclusivity and participation levels within your classrooms.

Recognizing and prioritizing this aspect of your role can be valuable in promoting a supportive learning environment for all students.

# Monitor yourself and ask for evaluation

Always ask for feedback.

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Always ask for feedback.

- From students
  - Minute paper
  - Mid-semester evaluations
  - Semester evaluations
- From the head instructors and peers
  - Class consultations
  - Video consultations

# Stay tuned!

How to design a course on Feb 28.