Classroom Management Skills for Humanities TAs

For OU’s Teaching Assistant Orientation

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Professional-ism

1. doctors, engineers, lawyers
*2. compensated as a means of livelihood
*3. poised, not easily disrupted in skillful action

Or the ability to regulate one’s own and others’ emotions in the process of performing a skill expertly.
Student Anxiety

What might be the source of students’ anxiety as they enter your classroom?
Student Anxiety

Be trustworthy with their identities and work to alleviate common sources of anxiety:

• Careful to limit putting students “on stage.”
• Careful not to alienate.
• Make expectations clear.
• Anticipate common mistakes and warn.
Impression Management

How do others know about you and what they can expect from you?
Teaching and Managing Impressions of Professionalism

Attire
Class Preparations
Self-Narratives
Language Choices
Demeanor
Creation of Class Texts
Email Exchanges
Ann,
This is Sam Student, and I wanted to talk to you about my group paper because I do not feel you were being fair at all. I actually feel that I was screwed out of many points that my group should have gotten, and I believe that we should get these points back. I can bring up many errors on your part in your grading and I feel that we should sit down and talk about the paper and that you should re-evaluate your decision on your grade. I am not trying to be a jerk or anything like that because I know how hard it is to be a TA, but I do feel that I was screwed over and now I can not get the grade in the class that
I need. So I would like to know if there is a possibility that our grade on our group paper could be changed. I know that I have extremely valid points and if you would just listen to me and try to understand our writing I could prommis you that our paper is at least a B. You gave us 0/25 points on grammer and paragraph, will do you really think we should hve! gotten that? You were grading extreamly harshly and the entire class feels the same way. You said you were going to ask Tracy if you were grading to harshly, well ofcourse she is going to say no you are not grading too hard.
I truly feel we deserve a better grade and that our paper was not evaluated fairly and I would like for it to be regraded after we talk. I hope you do not think I am trying to be a jack ass I just can not get a bad grade in this class and I am not going to let B work get graded lower than it should.

Thank

Sam
Encouraging a Positive Climate

Be cordial.
Assume the best of students’ intentions. Treat students the way you want to be treated. Praise publicly, correct privately. Careful not to “displace” frustration. Communicate confidence and certainty of curricular trajectory.
Beware the war story. . .

“That is unusual and inappropriate.”

Move the discussion forward. Get back on track.
Interest, Talent, and Potential

Our role as educators and graders.
Be Upfront

• **Determine** what matters to you.
• **Explain** and repeat to students what matters to you.
• **Reward** what matters to you.

• What are some ways of explaining what matters to you to students?
Talk Aloud Protocols

Tell
Show while **Telling**
Watch and **Listen**
Provide Feedback
Repeat
Upfront: Frame your feedback

“My belief is potential is unknown and unknowable.”

“Grades are NOT a diagnosis of potential, just an assessment of work at a time and in a place.”

Kick the rubber tree; butts in seats; chop wood.
My job is to coach you.
Your job is to get serious about practicing.
Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset
Based on the work of Dr. Carol Dweck

I believe that my [Intelligence, Personality, Character] is inherent and static. Locked-down or fixed. My potential is determined at birth. It doesn’t change.

I believe that my [Intelligence, Personality, Character] can be continuously developed. My true potential is unknown and unknowable.

Fixed Mindset
- Avoid failure
- Desire to Look smart
- Avoids challenges
- Stick to what they know
- Feedback and criticism is personal
- They don’t change or improve

Growth Mindset
- Desire continuous learning
- Confront uncertainties.
- Embracing challenges
- Not afraid to fail
- Put lots of effort to learn
- Feedback is about current capabilities
During

• Give sufficient time
• Be available **and tell them** you are available
  – Office Hours
• Remind them it is typical/normal/common/expected that **successful** students **use University resources**.
Grading in Humanities

• Have a sense of the average score
  – ~50% above that score/~50% below that score
• Review what you told them matters to you!
• Compare constantly
• Keep record of common mistakes
  – for collective feedback
  – for future explanations
  – for your sanity!
• Identify excellent examples
Which would you prefer?

- Great job!
- Nice work!
- Do better.
- C-

- Strong analysis.
- I like how many course materials are used.
- Not there yet. Focus on improving writing mechanics, especially numbers 3,4,7,9 on the “Top Ten Writing Tips.”
Additional thoughts

• Assign low-point value assignments early in the semester.

• Avoid grading more and more harshly throughout the course of the semester. . .
Afterwards

• Review key points collectively (both mistakes and successes)
• Report number of As
  – (Or fight the potential for students to argue that your demands are unreasonable)
• Give papers at the end of class
• Opportunities to keep refining?
Pause and Reflect

• What is your mental model of a “typical” undergraduate student?
Want to discuss a challenge? Want to share a success story?

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