

## Integration into a Discipline-Specific Training Program

### Facilitator's Guide

The Center for Teaching Innovation designed the Canvas-based Teaching Assistant Online Orientation (TAOO) to briefly introduce new teaching assistants to teaching and learning at Cornell University. It covers key frameworks, selected strategies, and essential information about university policies and resources. The TAOO emphasizes helping participants prepare for the first weeks of the semester. Moreover, participants will be able to use it as a reference throughout their time at Cornell. Any participant may self-enroll in the orientation. Please see the CTI Website for [additional information on the TAOO](#).

Participants should be able to complete all 5 modules in approximately 4 to 5 hours.

The orientation covers the following topics:

- Module 1. Overview of teaching at Cornell and teaching assistant roles at the university
- Module 2. Preparing for the first day of class, warming up the learning environment, and tips for working with a teaching team
- Module 3. Strategies for engaging students, leading discussions, implementing group work, assessing student learning, and grading
- Module 4. Introduction to Cornell University policies and resources related to teaching
- Module 5. Opportunities for developing teaching skills and future career preparation

While the TAOO may be used effectively on its own, courses, departments, or schools/colleges are welcome to incorporate it into their own orientation programming. The TAOO will be most useful if integrated into department-level programming that articulates discipline-, program-, and course-specific priorities and applications. We invite you to adopt, adapt, or take inspiration from any of the suggestions in this guide.

Center for Teaching Innovation consultants are available to help you to design an orientation to meet the needs of your graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and department colleagues. Please [contact us](#) to set up a consultation.



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## Orientation Preparation Checklist

Checklist	✓	Notes
Identify <b>the people</b> who will help plan and prepare your orientation activities. How will you integrate faculty, administrative staff, and experienced graduate-student perspectives into the planning process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Clarify <b>the intended audience</b> for the orientation. Is it for all current graduate students? Are postdocs included? Or is it focused on meeting the specific needs of incoming teaching assistants, graders, and discussion section leaders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Determine the most important <b>knowledge and skills</b> participants will need as they begin their teaching development. There will likely be far more to cover than is feasible; deciding on essential information ahead of time will help facilitators integrate discussions and other active-learning strategies for a dynamic, engaging experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Establish <b>the frequency and format</b> for teaching development activities. Is this orientation meant to be an intensive one-time experience or part of a series of meetings spread over a semester? Will the experience be in-person or online, synchronous or asynchronous, or a combination?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Consider how this orientation fits in with other teaching development activities offered by Cornell University (e.g., workshops, institutes, and conferences offered by the Center for Teaching Innovation and the Graduate School) and your discipline.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What are your goals and learning outcomes? (See more on learning outcomes below.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What specific department or college considerations are important for achieving your goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## Planning Your Orientation

- Invite participants to **complete part or all of the online orientation** before you host a session
- Clarify **the learning outcomes and expectations** for your program and communicate them to participants
- Begin the orientation with an activity to help participants get to know each other and learn names. This can **build a sense of community** among department or teaching team members and facilitate working together. Ideally, the community would continue as a development and support resource during the semester and beyond
- **Familiarize participants with the program / department** and introduce the **context and contributions** of the courses they will help teach
- **Review guidelines** or policies specific to your course/department/program
- Consider including **senior teaching assistants** in your department/field/course to plan or facilitate parts of the orientation or share their personal experience and specific examples in a question and answer session
- **Discuss discipline-specific teaching strategies and challenges** that are not included in the online orientation but that will help your teaching assistants succeed
- **Discuss discipline-specific examples** such as syllabi, learning outcomes, lesson plans, exam or assignment questions, and sample answers
- Use the orientation as an opportunity to **model and practice different active learning strategies** with your participants (e.g. think-pair-share, gallery walk, polling questions, small-group discussions, etc.)
- For programming that will last 4 hours (or longer), we also recommend including a **short teaching practice session (Microteaching)** in your plan (see [Appendix I](#) for additional information)
- Include time for **breaks between sessions**, and remember to provide snacks, lunches, and beverages for in-person programming
- For online orientation programs, schedule multiple, **shorter Zoom sessions** (rather than a full or half day), with sufficient time for breaks

## Leveraging the Action Plan

The TAOO invites participants to complete an Action Plan, which includes a useful checklist for getting started and an invitation to record individual reflections and notes on the modules. The Action Plan is intended as a launching pad to help participants map out their future teaching development. For example, consider asking participants to come to your orientation with their Action Plans, or their plan for the first day of class. Have them work in pairs or small groups to share and get feedback on their ideas. This can be an effective way of aligning their plans with department priorities, course goals, and expectations for student learning.

## Identifying Your Learning Outcomes

As you begin planning, identify two or three learning outcomes for the orientation. Here are some sample learning outcomes.

Through participating in the college/department/ course orientation, teaching assistants will be able to:

- **explore the goals and curriculum** of the majors, minors, and programs in the department
- **evaluate how the course** they are assigned to fits within the context of their students' majors
- discuss **teaching practices** and strategies
- identify **their role** within the department and in relation to their peers
- practice **grading** for fairness and reduced bias
- define **learning outcomes** for the courses they will teach
- prepare for their **first day of class and teaching responsibilities**
- discover the **teaching resources** and support available within the department and through other units on campus
- describe university/department/college/course **policies**
- build an **inclusive and collegial teaching community**
- develop plans for their **future professional development**

## Sample Agenda

Below is a sample agenda for a 4-hour, in-person orientation. If offering this orientation online, we suggest breaking it into shorter, synchronous sessions over two or more days.

Sample Agenda		
Through attending this orientation, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● define their roles and expectations as teaching assistants</li> <li>● plan for their first day of class</li> <li>● identify effective teaching practices to use this semester</li> </ul>		
Time	Topic	Notes
20 min.	<b>Welcome and introductions</b> Getting to know each other: icebreaker question or a name game	See the <a href="#">CTI website</a> for icebreaker suggestions.
40 min.	<b>Teaching in your department/field and college</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expectations for teaching assistant roles</li> <li>● College, department, or course learning outcomes</li> <li>● Attributes of the curriculum and students they will be teaching</li> <li>● Key policies, guidelines, and resources</li> </ul>	Have participants complete their checklist of teaching responsibilities in the Action Plan before the orientation.
30 min.	<b>Planning a Successful First Day of Class</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What strategies can help you and your students learn and remember names and get to know each other?</li> <li>● How do you want to introduce yourself?</li> <li>● How would you like to set expectations for interaction and engagement?</li> <li>● What activities or discussions might you use to help foster a sense of curiosity and give students an idea of what it will be like to participate in this course?</li> </ul>	Have participants bring a plan for their first day of class and work in pairs or small groups to share and get feedback on their ideas.  Have participants review their first-day-of-class checklist in the Action Plan before the orientation.
15 Minute Break		

45-60 min.	<p><b>Teaching essentials:</b> Spend time on one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fostering an inclusive class environment</li> <li>● Leading discussions</li> <li>● Grading and feedback</li> <li>● Common teaching dilemmas</li> </ul>	<p>Ask participants to work and discuss together (e.g., evaluate discussion questions, grade a sample assignment and compare criteria, or discuss solutions to common teaching dilemmas, etc). See the <a href="#">suggested activities and discussion prompts</a> below for additional ideas.</p>
15 Minute Break		
45-60 min.	<p><b>Microteaching</b> Have participants practice developing a five-minute lesson (define a learning outcome, assessment, and activity) and teach it to a group of 3-4 other teaching assistants for peer-feedback. Plan to allocate approximately 15 minutes for each person to present and receive feedback. See <a href="#">Microteaching Guidelines</a> and <a href="#">Feedback Form</a> (Appendices I and II).</p>	<p>Ask participants to prepare a short lesson ahead of time. This activity can also be done online with Zoom or with peer review of video recordings.</p>
15 min.	<p><b>Wrapping up and questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What are your key takeaways from discussions today?</li> <li>● Do you have any concerns or questions that were not addressed today?</li> </ul>	

## Additional Activities and Discussion Prompts

We invite you to incorporate the activities suggested below into your orientation or on-going professional development activities.

Time	Topic	Activity	Notes
10 min.	Getting Acquainted	Common ground icebreaker: Groups of 4-5 people try to find three things that they all have in common.	This can also be done online in Zoom breakout rooms
10 min.	Identifying and Reflecting on Teaching Values	Think-pair-share prompt:  Recall a teacher who really inspired you to learn. What characteristics or attributes of their approach to teaching and learning would you like to adopt?	Think-pair-share instructions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Present a question or statement/quote for reflection</li> <li>2. Give people a minute or two to think about or write their responses</li> <li>3. Have people share their answers or responses in pairs or small groups</li> <li>4. Debrief by asking a few pairs to share their thoughts with the larger group</li> </ol>
20-30 min.	Inclusive Teaching Practices	Small-group or pair discussion:  When did you feel the greatest sense of belonging in a class? What made this possible? What might you do in the first week(s) of class to foster a sense of a community and belonging in your class?	For online teaching, see: <a href="#">Inclusion in Online &amp; Hybrid Settings</a>  See also the CTI resource on <a href="#">setting expectations and classroom norms</a>
20 min.	Responding to Incidents (e.g., bias incidents, national, or global events)	Reflection: have you been in a class where a bias incident occurred or someone said something disrespectful? How did the instructor respond (or not respond)? Ask a few volunteers to share their thoughts.	See the CTI resource on <a href="#">responding to incidents affecting the teaching &amp; learning climate</a> for suggestions on responding.



Time	Topic	Activity	Notes
15 min.	Teaching Strategies	Ask participants to identify one teaching strategy that they would like to try this semester.	For online orientations, have participants post their answers in the chat in Zoom, or use a polling app, such as Poll Everywhere.
30-45 min.	Designing Lessons or Class Sessions	<p>Option 1: Ask participants to bring a lesson plan with them. Have small groups provide feedback through discussion.</p> <p>Option 2: Ask pairs or small groups to create ideas for a lesson plan based on a specific topic. Consider breaking this into smaller components such as: defining learning outcomes, designing a learning activity, etc.</p> <p>Option 3: Bring sample lesson plans from a specific course in your discipline to discuss.</p>	<p>Guiding questions when planning a lesson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning outcomes: What do you want students to learn during this class session?</li> <li>• How will students prepare to learn?</li> <li>• How will you ask students to think about the topics, discuss with others, or practice skills?</li> <li>• How will you encourage all students to participate in these learning activities?</li> <li>• How much time do you think you will need for each part of the lesson?</li> </ul>
30-45 min.	Leading Discussions	<p>Error analysis: Provide examples of bad discussion questions (e.g., too narrow, too obvious, etc.) for critique and improvement.</p> <p>Case studies: Find examples of potentially challenging discussion situations that they may face (unprepared students, a "monopolizer," off-topic discussions, etc.). Discuss possible strategies to address these situations.</p>	Ask the group to share strategies for encouraging student participation.

Time	Topic	Activity	Notes
20 min.	Holding Office Hours	Role play: Ask participants to work in pairs. Have one person play the role of a student with a difficult question in office hours; have the other play the instructor role. After five minutes, switch roles. Debrief by discussing what was challenging in the teacher's role?	Ask senior teaching assistants to discuss their experiences with office hours and share useful strategies for supporting students.
20-30 min.	Facilitating Group Work	Think-pair-share prompt: In what situations do you think group work experiences are valuable in your discipline?  If your course uses group activities, what guidelines might you implement to ensure an equitable distribution of the work?	
20-30 min.	Grading and Feedback: Working with a teaching team to ensure fairness and consistency.	Option 1: Ask teaching assistants to practice grading a typical problem or answer type and compare the grades, criteria, and feedback they would give.  Option 2: Ask teaching assistants to try writing good exam or quiz questions for peer feedback, or have them critique sample questions.	
20-30 min.	Grading Tools (rubrics, Gradescope, Turnitin, SpeedGrader)	Ask teaching assistants to try using grading tools such as rubrics or online tools such as <a href="#">Canvas SpeedGrader</a> , <a href="#">Turnitin</a> , or <a href="#">Gradescope</a> .	

Time	Topic	Activity	Notes
15-20 min.	Using Canvas as a Learning Space	Scavenger hunt: Ask participants to familiarize themselves with Canvas by searching for information within a Canvas course site or the <a href="#">Canvas Resource Library</a> . This activity is more fun if done in pairs.	This can also be done in an online orientation by using a Google doc, Google form, or Canvas quiz.
15-20 min	Online Teaching Best Practices	Ask faculty, senior teaching assistants, or participants to share online teaching and learning strategies that have worked well for them.  Have participants practice using Zoom's features, such as breakout rooms, the chat feature, or polling.	See also, <a href="#">Strategies &amp; Resources for Teaching Online</a>
15-20 min	Wrapping up and Reflecting	Ask each participant to share one takeaway, observation, or lingering question from the day's session.	For online orientations, have participants post answers in the chat or a Google doc. For large groups, consider using index cards or a Qualtrics survey.

## Appendix I

### Microteaching

Microteaching is an opportunity for participants to practice teaching, gain confidence and receive formative feedback from a group of supportive peers. The focus is on teaching a general/entry level idea, concept, or model that you might include in an introductory course for undergraduates in your discipline.

Microteaching Modules	
Process	<p>Groups of four to five participants work best (one presenter and 3 - 4 peers), for a session lasting approximately 1 hour.</p> <p>Participants practice developing a five-minute lesson that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a focus on one learning outcome (<b>What</b> do you most want participants to know?)</li> <li>• a brief assessment (<b>How</b> will participants demonstrate their mastery of the material?)</li> <li>• engaging participants in a student-centered activity (<b>What</b> do you want participants to be able to do with this information?)</li> </ul> <p>While one person presents, everyone else plays the student role. As students, they must attempt to genuinely engage with the topic and ask and answer questions in as realistic a manner as possible.</p> <p>Allow each presenter approximately 15-20 minutes. The presenter should use the first 5 (up to a maximum of 8) minutes to teach. Then, we suggest the presenter begin with a self-assessment by sharing one thing they thought went well and one thing they would like to change in the future. Next, the students provide feedback. Finally, the group should conclude with a few things that the presenter might try doing differently in the future. Providing the presenter with brief written feedback is a nice addition as they will then have a reference for the future (see the sample feedback form in <a href="#">Appendix II</a>).</p>
What to Teach	<p>Take one introductory concept (e.g., an idea, model, theory, or process) drawn from your discipline that you think would be important for an entry-level undergraduate to understand. Think about the most important aspect of the subject and how it might be relevant for students (now and in the future). Also, consider how you will present yourself, manage class time (~5 minutes), and actively involve your students.</p>

Microteaching Modules	
How to Prepare	<p>Choose a topic in your field that you would expect to teach in an entry-level course. Avoid preparing a presentation that you might typically give to your colleagues in a formal department or conference presentation. The goal is not to show everything you know about the subject but to provide an opportunity for practice and receive feedback on your teaching.</p> <p>First, clarify your precise learning outcome for the module. By design, modules are meant to be brief; the most critical task is to decide the most important information for students to learn in the limited time available. One way to do this is to answer the following three questions.</p> <p>At the end of my 5-minute teaching module:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participants will know (content) _____</li> <li>• participants will be able to (skill) _____</li> <li>• participants will appreciate (value) _____</li> </ul> <p>Next, consider what participants may already know about this subject and what they may need in preparation for learning your material (pre-assessment).</p> <p>Prepare a brief (4-5 minutes), clear, and interesting explanation. Think about who your students are and consider ways to engage students in the lesson. Often this is called a "bridge;" a connection between the new information and the participants' existing knowledge or experience. Also, consider ways to actively involve students in achieving your learning outcome goals (participatory learning) by creating an interactive, experiential learning environment. Think about ways to assess whether participants have reached the objective (post-assessment).</p> <p>You may use an outline or brief notes but should not memorize or read your notes.</p>
Timing	<p>Everyone worries that their plan will not use the full amount of time, and they often over-prepare as a result. Don't worry! In this case, less really is more: more time for participants to engage with you and each other.</p> <p>If you take longer than anticipated (which is often the case), don't worry! We will stop you at the time limit so that there is enough time for everyone to teach. Nobody will hold it against you if you do not finish everything you planned to say.</p>
Feedback	<p>Tell us what types of feedback will be most useful to you at this time? Microteaching can be a good opportunity to focus on one or two aspects of teaching practices. For example, use of visuals, piloting a specific exercise, or eliciting answers from students. If you plan to focus on one or two specific components, we can concentrate our feedback on those areas.</p>

**Microteaching Modules**

Relax

Most importantly, try to relax and focus on learning from the experience. Remember that everything discussed in the session is confidential, and you will learn a great deal just by preparing and teaching your material to your peers!

# Center for Teaching Innovation

## Appendix II

### Microteaching Feedback Form

Presenter's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Check all elements you observed in the lesson:

Greeting / Introduction	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preview of activities (outline)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Explanation of purpose/importance of activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transitions between sections/topics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of interactive activities/questions	<input type="checkbox"/>

Eye contact	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relevant examples	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clear visual aids	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conclusion/Summary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Call for questions	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What did you find most effective about the lesson?

3. What recommendations do you have for future lessons (language, organization, interaction, method of handling questions, other)?