SURVIVING CAAP 601: WHAT EVERY ONLINE TEACHER ASSISTANT NEEDS TO KNOW TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

BY

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A Final Project submitted to the Campus Alberta Applied Psychology: Counselling Initiative in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF COUNSELLING

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Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certifies that she or he has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled **SURVIVING CAAP 601: WHAT EVERY ONLINE TEACHER ASSISTANT NEEDS TO KNOW TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT** submitted by ERIN L. LUONG in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Counselling.

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December 14, 2006

Date
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January 8, 2006
Date
ABSTRACT

The main focus of this project is the development of a manual to support online teacher assistants (TAs). E-learning theory can be used to provide a framework showing how TAs can be instrumental in building an online community. The first half of the project consists of a review of the current literature on e-learning theory, including asynchronous learning systems, the roles of the e-moderator, skills required for facilitating effective discussion forums, and student response patterns. The second half of the project is an online TA manual, developed for the Campus Alberta Applied Psychology (CAAP) Counselling Initiative community to use as a working document within their training program for TAs working online. This manual reflects the theoretical foundations of e-learning theory. Additionally it incorporates practical suggestions provided by the author, who has experience working in an e-learning environment. This project represents a merging of research and TA experience to produce a document that will support TAs working in an e-learning environment. This manual is instrumental in the continued development and enhancement of CAAP’s TA program.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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On a personal note I would like thank my husband, who has provided me with emotional, spiritual, and technical support over the last three years. Without his flexibility and understanding, I would not have been able to complete this program. I would also like to say a final “thank you” to my friends and colleagues in the program. Everyone I have worked with over the last three years has taught me the value and strength of community.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The role of Teacher Assistant (TA) is valuable in the face-to-face classroom, but how does a TA’s role transfer into an online learning environment? E-learning theory can be used to provide a framework demonstrating how TAs can be instrumental in building an online community. Through the development of this TA training manual, the Campus Alberta Applied Psychology (CAAP) Counselling Initiative will address a significant gap in the development of its TAs. This project represents a merging of research and TA experience in the formation of a document designed to support TAs working in an e-learning environment. One of the first of its kind, this manual is meant to be a working document that will be shared with others within the online community.

Context of the Manual

The CAAP Program is made up of an equal partnership among three leading universities in Alberta: Athabasca University, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. It offers a Master of Counselling (MC) degree, which has been created specifically for CAAP graduates. This partnership developed in response to a need for better access to graduate programming in counselling, in Canada and around the world. The program is committed to providing high quality, accessible, and flexible graduate education to students regardless of their location (for more information, please refer to the program website: www.abcounsellored.net). CAAP is a unique institution because it provides its graduate students with an asynchronous, online e-learning environment with residential components. CAAP employs senior graduate students as TAs in a number of its intensive core (required) online courses.
Campus Alberta’s compulsory introductory course is CAAP 601: Theories of Counselling and Client Change. This course is intended to engage students in a critical evaluation of a range of contemporary counselling theories. It also represents one of the first opportunities that students have to participate in a course online. A TA is assigned to each class to support students with the transition into the e-learning environment.

TAs are an important resource within the academic graduate community, as they provide support for both professors and students. According to Taradi and Taradi (2005), the role of an online TA can be described as a montage of content expert, learning process design expert, and process implementation manager. Palloff and Pratt (1999) emphasize that “It is critical to remember that people are using the machinery that make courses go. The human element, therefore, will inevitably play a role in the electronic classroom” (p. 45). They contend that a TA working online acts as the linking force between individuals, classrooms, and content. To students new to an e-learning environment, a TA may be equated to a buoy that helps them keep their heads above water until they are confident enough to swim on their own. This project has been designed to highlight the ideas and skills necessary to facilitate a classroom of swimmers.

First a brief overview of literature will be provided, including the theoretical foundations of this project. Thereafter, the procedures used to create the manual will be presented. A summary of the project follows, including a discussion of its implications for future research. The paper will close with a copy of the manual, which is intended for use in orienting TAs to an e-learning environment.
CHAPTER II
Theoretical Foundations of E-Learning

Introduction

This section will review the theoretical foundations necessary to sustain this project. It will begin with an overview of asynchronous e-learning environments, which have been described as a virtual third culture where students can meet to exchange ideas (Salmon, 2004). In addition, specific aspects of the e-learning environment will be explored, including the roles of the e-moderator, skills required to facilitative effective discussion forums, and student response patterns.

Asynchronous E-Learning Environments

The internet has had a profound impact on distance education programs. Asynchronous e-learning environments allow multiple senders and receivers to participate in an open, text-based environment (Collins & Berge, 1996; Murphy, 2001; Salmon, 2004). Time and location are no longer barriers, and students are not required to commit themselves to a set classroom schedule. An asynchronous e-learning environment can range from simple email discussions between individuals to a more complex system involving a group software program accessed through dedicated servers that one must log into (Collins & Berge).

A number of advantages have been associated with asynchronous online discussions. First, this method allows time for reflection and the development of thoughtful and articulate responses (Fahraeus, 2001; Salmon, 2004; Taradi & Taradi, 2005). Second, it allows opportunities for direct feedback (Collins & Berge, 1996; Salmon; Taradi & Taradi). Third, an asynchronous environment allows students to seek clarification or help as the need arises.
Asynchronous environments are also beneficial for providing a voice for shy students, thereby reducing conference domination by extroverted students and equalizing the learning environment (Collins & Berge; Klemm, 1998; Taradi & Taradi). Finally asynchronous environments are flexible. Without the need to be online at a specific time, students are able to coordinate schoolwork with their daily responsibilities (Salmon).

Organization is a necessary feature in any asynchronous group software program. Many programs use a threading system to coordinate student posts. Threads are a collection of messages stemming from a single original posting (Lowe & Oughton, 2005; Salmon, 2004; Taradi & Taradi, 2005). Threaded discussions are easier to follow because it is clear which responses relate to which postings. Online discussions also provide transcripts, which may be used as reflective tools (Black, 2005; Taradi & Taradi). Through reviewing threads, understanding is enhanced when students are able to observe visually the flow of the conversation. Subsequent posts are more likely to be on topic, which helps to move the conversation forward to deeper levels of reflection.

Since student participation leads to the development of the learning environment, an asynchronous classroom can be viewed as a learner-controlled instructional system (Collins & Berge, 1996). Considering the fluid nature of the learning environment, a traditional lecture-based teaching method would be ineffective. Consequently, the instructor’s role shifts from being at the center of the course to being a facilitator whose participation in the discussion forum guides and supports the learning process (Gunawardena as cited in Collins & Berge). Palloff and Pratt (1999) recommend that instructors “relinquish their role of power within and over the educational process in order to allow the learners to take on their process management role” (p. 85). This can be accomplished though posts which foster interaction.
among students rather than between students and the instructor (Schweber as cited in Salmon, 2004). Instructors who are willing to adopt the philosophy of learner-centered instruction in a virtual environment are often given the title of e-moderators.

Roles of the E-Moderator

When institutions first began to develop distance learning programs, the primary focus was technology (Salmon, 2004). As the academic community gained more experience with distance learning, however, the human element of successful e-learning became more apparent (Constantino-Gonzales & Suthers, 2001; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Salmon; White, 2004). While software programs were important, they were not indicative of student success. Coordinators of distance learning programs began to explore ways in which support could maximize student learning. Through such explorations, the multiple roles of effective e-moderators have been developed and defined.

E-moderation involves more than content transmission. As Berge (1995) points out, successful e-moderators monitor their electronic classroom from the following perspectives: social, managerial, technical and pedagogical. An effective e-moderator works to maintain all four aspects in the virtual environment. Each of these perspectives will be reviewed from the standpoint of a TA’s contribution to the e-moderation process.

Social. The social focus of instruction involves developing a supportive, cohesive online classroom environment (Collins & Berge, 1996). Salmon (2004) emphasizes the importance of having individuals share a few details about themselves. Participants tend to feel more comfortable when they know a little about the people with whom they are working. Once students start viewing each other as unique individuals, they are more likely to show compassion to one another. Empathetic responses lead to cohesive classrooms.
Students in a face-to-face classroom use body language to monitor how others react to them. In an e-learning environment immediate feedback is not available, so students must be conscious of the words they choose. TAs can assist students by modeling the use of precise language and references. They may also ask students for clarification if a post is unclear.

Other ways in which cohesiveness is built include monitoring the e-tone (mood) of a discussion and modeling an attitude of acceptance. By monitoring the e-tone of a discussion forum, a TA can gain valuable insight into the cohesiveness of the group. Collins and Berge (1996) provide many suggestions for creating a supportive e-learning environment. TAs are encouraged to model responses that demonstrate respect, tentative language, and curiosity, since these qualities project an attitude of acceptance for alternative ideas.

Comments posted to a discussion forum have the potential to seem disrespectful, even if it was not the author’s intention to convey such a message. TAs should become involved if they notice strong differences of opinion or objections to procedures. Salmon (2004) suggests that TAs should handle tense situations in private by using e-mail, rather than allowing participants to ‘flame’ and cause discomfort in conferences. TAs need to addresses negative discussion behavior, which may lead to tension and fear within the online community.

**Managerial.** The managerial aspect of instruction relates to the administrative roles held by the e-moderator (Collins & Berge, 1996). Berge (1995) provides a variety of suggestions for assisting students to stay on top of the workload. TAs can assist their students by making sure that students are aware of the time lines and expectations for all assignments.

In addition, a TA will need to establish a system for tracking student progress and marks. Various software programs have been developed to record data such as the number of
posts each student makes in a discussion forum. However such programs still require an individual to interpret the results.

**Technical.** The technical aspect of instruction involves the role of providing technical support (Collins & Berge, 1996). Students who are novices at using technology may limit their contributions because they lack confidence in their ability to use the system. It is the e-moderator’s job to check in with the students and assure them that technology is not limiting their ability to respond. TAs should not take ownership for providing answers to all technical concerns. Rather than solving all issues, e-moderators should direct their students towards the correct path (White, 2004). This stance will be beneficial in the long run, since students need to learn to function independently in the online environment. Encouraging students to consult and support their peers helps to provide technical support and develops positive group cohesiveness.

**Pedagogical.** The pedagogical perspective relates to how information is passed on to students (Collins & Berge, 1996). In order to draw out student responses that center discussions on essential concepts, principles and skills, TAs should use questions and probes. The creation of a strong pedagogical foundation involves a focus on student learning. For instance, ensuring that the objectives of the course are presented in a clear and direct manner makes students aware of expectations. When they relate to students in a warm and open style, rather than an authoritarian style, TAs encourage students to become active learners. Finally, by summarizing discussions TAs lead students to reflect on the dominant themes within the discussion.
Facilitation of Discussion Forums

A strong online TA who has strong facilitation skills is able to build cohesiveness and support among students. These skills enhance both social and pedagogical perspectives, as outlined above. Facilitation can be broadly defined as the act of managing the learners and the learning process (Backroad Connections, 2002). Collins and Berge (1996) speculate that learning occurs in two different ways, through direct interaction with the content and through interaction with others in relation to the content. Both types of interactions are necessary for effective learning to occur (Collins & Berge). In an e-learning environment, it is particularly important that instructors are cognizant of both types of interactions and strive to facilitate such opportunities. They can do so by fostering member interaction, interjecting stimulating material for conversations, and encouraging the learning community to become self-sufficient (Berge, 1995; Collins & Berge; Salmon, 2004; Salmon & Giles, 1997; White, 2004).

Timing responses. Effective facilitative practice encourages TAs to reflect upon a variety of concepts such as the quantity and quality of their participation. Research has shown that an overactive facilitator can actually stifle conversation and limit student growth (Mazzolini, & Maddison, 2003; Salmon, 2004). Students often interpret a post from an instructor or TA as the official answer; they believe they would have nothing to add to the conversation. Therefore, if a discussion appears to become stagnant, a TA should prompt students to reflect upon answers rather than making direct statements. This can be accomplished through declarative probes such as “Tell me more.”

Promoting student-centered experiences. Hoostien (2002) provides a number of suggestions for facilitating online discussion forums, including fostering learner-centeredness and providing informative feedback. For example, online TAs can challenge students to
explore issues while scaffolding (supporting) conversations with comments and reinforcement to guide learner achievement. It is imperative that the TA does not take ownership for providing answers to questions, but rather points students in the proper direction. Hoostien also advocates providing informative feedback in order to guide learners as to how they may improve their performance. Examples of supportive feedback are detailed extensively in the TA manual.

Role shifting over time. According to Salmon and Giles (1997), both the quantity of participation and the purpose of the TA’s role become more focused throughout the semester. The quality and quantity of e-moderation are quite broad at the beginning of the semester in order to create a sturdy foundation for the forum. In the beginning, a TA needs to provide a great deal of positive feedback and technical support. However, as students become more familiar with posting reflective responses, the questions raised by the TA become fewer and more focused. Learning continues because a successful forum is one where students become actively involved in the questioning and investigation process. As student involvement increases, the e-moderator’s role will move into the background.

Student Response Patterns

Salmon (2004) proposes that students progress through five stages, or levels of dependence, during their maturation as learners in an online learning environment. While all groups will move through the stages during the semester, it is not guaranteed that every class or every student will progress to stage five.

Stage one. Individuals at this stage are being initiated into the e-learning environment. Students’ experiences in the first stage are influenced by their attitudes towards computers, effective help, time, and effort (Salmon, 2004). It is beneficial for e-moderators to take the
initiative to contact all new students. Initially this can be accomplished through e-mail. However, if some students do not appear to be responding to e-mail, it may be necessary to telephone in order to assist with their journey online. E-moderators should also share with students their feelings and experiences around online learning. This can be a normalizing and inspirational experience for new students. In order to ease the initial apprehension of online learners, TAs can provide instructions and tips for using software. Finally, they should encourage students to practice using the various functions available in the online learning environment. Once students have successfully posted their first online messages, they are ready for stage two.

Stage two. Students who are functioning at stage two are learning to become familiar with the virtual learning environment. At this stage students work to develop their online communication patterns, sometimes referred to as “netiquette” (Salmon 2004), as well as group norms (Collins & Berge, 1996; Salmon; Salmon & Giles, 1997). Mann (2001) maintains that, if e-learners feel isolated, they may distance themselves from the program. Therefore, opportunities for socialization, both academic and non-academic, are important (Rohfeld & Hiemstra, 1995). According to Salmon (2004), this is the point where “e-moderators should take the lead in promoting mutual respect between participants, defusing problems. and counselling any apparently alienated or offended individuals” (p. 36). Through role modeling and mediation, e-moderators can co-create a positive virtual environment. Once students have become familiar with the norms and protocols of online instruction, they move into stage three.

Stage three. During stage three, students are active in critical reflection, problem solving, and sharing resources (Stein, 2000). At this stage, e-moderators should acknowledge
information shared by participants and allow students the time and space to understand the material being presented to them. It is also important that e-moderators confirm the credibility, authenticity, and validity of information offered (Salmon, 2004). Feedback of this nature motivates students to continue to pursue active thinking.

One way in which an e-moderator can facilitate student understanding is through a process called weaving. This is accomplished by creating one statement that is a culmination of the pattern of responses found in a number of previous comments. In order to create a weaving comment, it is necessary to summarize past comments, clarify confused expressions, identify themes, and make connections (Feenburg & Xin). Weaving posts can be used as prompts to encourage student reflection. Once students are able to create plausible arguments to support their comments, they are ready for stage four. For a more detailed explanation of weaving, please refer to the manual for online TAs.

Stage four. This stage is characterized by a tendency toward classroom debate. Students working in stage four tend to ask more questions, seek more discussion, challenge the ideas of others, and provide compliments (Salmon, 2004). Organization and management are particularly crucial at this point, as students can become caught up in the flurry of information. E-moderators who summarize discussions, avoid authoritative statements, stimulate debate, offer ideas, and offer resources support student development at this stage (Salmon).

Stage five. Students who progress to stage five have matured into a meta-cognitive state. E-moderation at stage five involves a collaborative method of instruction (Salmon, 2004) as students begin to highlight topics of interest. By this stage, students have established and maintained an environment of curiosity and respectful inquiry. No longer satisfied to
make decisions based on the opinion of others, students now demonstrate the ability to able to reflect critically on course material. They are also able to create cohesive arguments to support their opinions.

The most effective TAs are the ones who adapt their role to meet the needs of the learners. It is beneficial to educate TAs on e-learning stages because the degree of student dependence will impact the type and level of support required by the TA. A TA training manual is an excellent source to provide this information.
CHAPTER III

Method

Review of the Literature

The first half of the project consisted of a review of the current literature on e-learning theory. Specifically, this stage involved synthesizing the literature around strategies used to facilitate effective discussion forums. The literature review was conducted using material from 1990 to the present. The following books were reviewed: *E-moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online* (2nd ed.) (Salmon, 2004); *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace: Effective Strategies for the Online Classroom* (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

The following terms were used during the online and database searches: “e-learning,” “e-moderation,” “facilitating discussion forums,” “online,” “distance learning,” and “web-based education.” A review of the following databases occurred: Academic Search Premier (March, 2006), ERIC (March, 2006), and PsychINFO (March, 2006). In addition, the researcher accessed the following online libraries: Online Collaborative Learning in Higher Education (February, 2006), E-moderators (February, 2006), and e-Learning Center (March, 2006). Finally, a review was completed using the following search engines: Google (February, 2006) and Search (March, 2006).

In May 2006, the author attended the Alberta Distance Education and Training Association (ADETA) Interface ’06 conference at the University of Lethbridge. This conference was an opportunity to network with others in Alberta involved in distance education. Additionally, the conference highlighted current and future trends in e-learning.
Developing a TA Manual

The second half of the project involved the creation of a TA manual for the CAAP community to use within their evolving TA program. The manual is based on the findings of the literature review and integrates the author’s two years of experience as a TA in the CAAP program. In the second year of working as a TA, the author completed a reflection on her practice throughout the term, including facilitating discussion forums and marking student assignments. She reviewed email and discussion forum conversations between herself and her students and also reflected on conversations with the course instructor, in order to identify common themes. TAs in CAAP 601 commonly collaborate concerning the students’ needs. Consequently, the author also reflected on informal email or telephone conversations with colleagues in which ideas were discussed for offering additional support to students. These steps were taken before work began on the project, in order to establish if the project was feasible and also to learn what skills are required of a TA in the CAAP program.

The work proceeded over six months, culminating in the writing of a letter of intent and subsequently the chapters for the project. All work was read and reviewed by my supervisor, selected peers, and a professional editor.

Sharing with the Academic Community

Dr. McBride encouraged the author to network with others in the academic community. In July 2006, the author participated in the University of Lethbridge Inaugural Graduate Students On-Campus Conference. At the conference she presented a preview of the TA training manual. Dr. McBride provided suggestions and support for creating the power point presentation. In addition, all conference participants were required to submit a 2000-word article to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. As this was the author’s first
experience with peer review, she required support to create a document that appeared professional and well researched. The author and Dr. McBride exchanged drafts and revisions of this piece of work by email. The development of this document formed a strong foundation for the manual.

In November 2006, the author presented at the Online Learning Symposium in Calgary, discussing how teacher assistants enhance the online learning environment. The author developed the power point for this presentation and submitted the document to Dr. McBride for suggestions and revisions. The symposium provided an additional opportunity to network, as well as to consider future areas of research.
CHAPTER IV

Implications for Creating a TA Training Manual

Impacts of this Project

There are many advantages to completing this study. The results of this project will be very beneficial for those interested in working as TAs in an e-learning environment. The manual will provide a preview of the expectations of the role so that students can make an informed decision before accepting a TA position. It will also alert students to skills they will need to develop in order to be successful as TAs.

The manual will also benefit current TAs. It can serve as a reference to help TAs monitor which aspects of their position are running smoothly and which areas may need some refinements, and then to take proactive steps towards success. Furthermore, this manual will alert TAs to potential challenges they may face in their work as TAs, as well as possible steps for resolution.

Finally this document will benefit the academic community. As a working document, the manual will serve as a basis for future development in TA support and training within the CAAP community. This may be important given the lack of resources for TAs working in an online environment. The manual may also be a source of inspiration for other agencies and organizations wishing to implement an online learning program. As a final point, this manual may also be modified to support professors who are unfamiliar with the role of e-moderation.

Limitations of the Study and Implications for Future Research

Five main limitations associated with this project are worth noting, as they may restrict the generalizability of the content to other settings. First, the information in this manual focuses on supporting TAs in the online learning environment; therefore, the
information may not be beneficial to CAAP TAs who are classroom based. Furthermore, the results of this project are based on working with graduate level students during the first course of a Master’s program. Consequently, some of the suggestions may not be relevant to TAs working in second- and third-year courses. In addition, although the concepts underlying the manual are supported by research, many of the ideas and suggestions it presents are based on the individual experiences of the author. Thus the findings of the study may not apply to every TA situation. Furthermore, since this is not an empirically tested project, the validity and reliability of the content of this manual have not been established. A final limitation is that no data has been or will be collected from the CAAP community to gain insight into the needs and expectations of TAs for this manual. For the most part, the author has decided what to include in the manual.

As a result of the above limitations, the project should be viewed as a working document that can be modified from year to year to meet the evolving needs of TAs within the CAAP program. This said, I give permission to the CAAP community, in particular Dawn McBride, (a) to make modifications to this project as they deem necessary, and (b) to research and publish material from this project, providing I am always referenced as the original author of this project.

Conclusion

Overall, this project represents a necessary tool for the continued development and enhancement of a CAAP TA training program. This manual reflects the theoretical foundations of e-learning theory. It also incorporates practical suggestions provided by those who have experience working in an e-learning environment.
This manual was developed as a means of support for TAs assigned to CAAP601. Although feedback from the academic community has thus far been very supportive, the manual’s effectiveness as a training tool for future TAs has yet to be determined.
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http://www.fullcirc.com/community/communityfacilitation.htm
SURVIVING CAAP 601: WHAT EVERY ONLINE TEACHER ASSISTANT NEEDS TO KNOW TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Chapter 1: Erin’s Top Ten Tips for Surviving 601

10) PLAN AHEAD. Review lesson plans ahead of time, anticipating points in the course where students will need more support.

9) USE TEMPLATES. Keeping track of student records is challenging. Submitting marks into a pre-established template of expectations allows you to quickly scan each student’s progress.

8) STAY CONNECTED. Biweekly meetings (or chats) can help you to stay in sync with your professor’s expectations and to feel supported as the students progress through the various learning stages.

7) ASK QUESTIONS. Consult with your fellow TAs around topics such as APA formatting or student behavior.

6) EMPOWER YOUR STUDENTS. Facilitate, don’t direct.

5) BE STRICT WITH APA STANDARDS. You do a disservice to beginning students if you are slack in enforcing APA standards.

4) FIND A BALANCE. Your job as a TA is important, but so are your family and other course work. Be aware of burnout.

3) BE PATIENT. New students are probably intimidated by the technology and the volume of work required of them. Take the time to walk them through their first experiences.

2) REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE FOR YOU. What was it like to be in 601? What did your TA do for you that you appreciated? Share this with your students.

1) HAVE FUN. If your attitude is upbeat and passionate, you will model that learning can be fun.

Note: These tips are based on the author’s two years of TA experience in CAAP 601. Feel free to print off this list and refer to it as often as you need.
Chapter 2: TA Duties

1.

This chapter addresses three main topics: your roles and responsibilities as a TA, how to manage your time, and how to offer students feedback on their writing style and APA adherence.

WHAT ARE MY ROLES AS A TA IN CAAP 601?

The TA job description for online work in CAAP 601 is based on the TA employee contract (2006). The following chapters will elaborate on many of these tasks.

Generally, your position as a TA involves the following responsibilities:

✓ To help the course instructor foster an online learning environment that is supportive, of high quality, and inquiry based.

✓ To stay in regular contact with the course instructor about the progress of students, course related issues, and student concerns.

✓ To develop, facilitate, and maintain TA assigned forums.

Specifically, you have a number of duties and responsibilities as a TA, both before the course begins and during the course.

Before the course begins:

Salmon (2004) captures it best: “be abreast of the [course] issues, and also have some knowledge of the material in the discussion” (p. 14). Before the course begins, you should complete the following recommended activities.

✓ Review the lessons and assignments. If you have suggestions on how to improve this content so that it is presented in a clear fashion, let your course instructor know. (P. Jerry, personal communication, October 3, 2005).
✓ If you have any questions about the course content, ask your course instructor.

✓ Review the assignment dates. Ensure that they are current for the term.

✓ If you can, ensure that all of hyperlinks are working (in the digital reading room). If not, alert the course instructor, who will appreciate this information.

✓ Obtain copies of specific course guidelines, checklists, and marking rubrics (Black, 2005). (See Table 2.1)

✓ Develop a spread sheet in order to maintain appropriate records on the students’ participation in relevant discussion forums (Salmon, 2004). (See Table 2.2)

✓ Make contact with your course instructor to introduce yourself and to provide your contact information

✓ Send a welcoming email to the students with a cc to your course instructor prior to the course start date, introducing yourself and explaining your role and responsibilities to your students.

Salmon (2004) suggests that these welcoming emails should clarify your office hours, specify response times to email/Q & A forum postings, and define the TA’s general responsibilities. This type of information will be useful in diminishing unreasonable expectations that students may have of TAs.

During the course:

✓ Respond to student inquiries (via email and in forums) within 48 hours.

✓ Direct all relevant email inquiries to the appropriate forums so that all of the students can benefit from your advice.
✓ Track student participation rate in the theory discussion forums, per question (frequency). Submit your weekly track totals to your instructor by the first day of the next week (i.e., Wednesday). (See Table 2.2)

✓ Identify to the instructor those students with low participation rates.

✓ Post weekly questions to the appropriate discussion forum by Tuesday night at 6 p.m.

✓ A week before each assignment is due, send an email to students reminding them to contact you if they need help with or clarification about assignments.

✓ Maintain your boundaries. Your role is to guide and advise. It is not to do the work assigned to the students.

✓ Mark each paper for writing style and APA adherence within three days of receiving the assignment. (See Table 2.3)

✓ Maintain regular contact with your course instructor.

**HOW SHOULD I MANAGE MY TIME?**

Acting as a TA in an online environment requires a fair amount of time management. While you may be working a contracted number of hours per week, your activities will be spread out over a seven-day period. It is very easy to become caught up in your work and not realize how much time you are actually putting in.

One useful suggestion is to keep a journal of daily activities (Salmon, 2004). A journal will assist you in tracking your hours, as well as identifying patterns of response. Once I began tracking my hours and response times, I could tell when the most important times were for me to be online. This helped me become more efficient with my time.
WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR MARKING PAPER ASSIGNMENTS?

Part of your role as a CAAP 601 TA is to assist your professor with marking, in particular evaluating students’ writing style and their adherence to APA format.

As a TA for CAAP 601, it is required that you complete your marking within three days after the assignment is due. Why this short deadline? Course instructors are asked to return student papers within ten days after the assignment is due. Course instructors for CAAP 601 need at least 25 hours to mark 20 papers; hence your turnaround time of marking the writing needs to be short.

Step-by-step guide for marking writing style and APA adherence:

a. Collect all assignments from the student drop box.

b. Resave the file if the student did not follow the required format (i.e., student’s last name, title of assignment, course, date).

c. Attach your instructor’s marking rubric to the end of the assignment (See Table 2.3). Sometimes this can be tricky.

d. Mark students’ papers, focusing on their APA use and writing style. (See Table 2.4)

e. Provide positive and constructive feedback. You should try to make a comment on each page. (See Table 2.5)

f. Assign recommended marks for writing style and APA adherence, according to the rubric. Also, provide a written summary of the quality of the students’ writing, noting their strengths and areas for improvement. Unfortunately, many students do not score well in this category. You have to be fair in awarding points. To be fair, stick to the rubric expectations. Do not be surprised if students fail this part of the paper.
g. Forward all marked assignments (i.e., writing style/APA standards) to the course instructor, who will then grade the content of the paper.

h. The instructor may ask you to post the marked papers. Ask about your instructor’s preference concerning who returns the papers to the students.

**IMPORTANT:**

Do not release any information about a student’s grade to anyone, including the student him/herself, unless you have the instructor’s permission to do so. This means you do not have the right to release the student’s writing style grade until the instructor gives you clearance to do so. Keep in mind that the instructor can alter your grading of APA.
**TABLE 2.1. RUBRIC OF ACCEPTABLE RESPONSES FOR DISCUSSION FORUMS**

**POSTING CRITERIA FOR MOST CAAP DISCUSSION FORUMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core constructs accurately identified and described</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material from previous units integrated to formulate ideas and generate dialogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal perceptions, attitudes, values reflected in the contributions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness, sensitivity to others, openness to personal growth demonstrated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New and related perceptions of an issue raised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to synthesize, personalize, and apply learning to personal development demonstrated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant readings and research cited to support points</td>
<td>ONLY NEED TO DO THIS FOR ONE POST PER WEEK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(D. McBride, January, 20, 2006, personal communication)
**TABLE 2.2. EXAMPLE SPREAD SHEET FOR TRACKING STUDENT DISCUSSION FORUMS**

**WEEK #: ____ CAAP 601, WINTER 200_**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT First name &amp; initial for last name</th>
<th># of “cheerleading” comments</th>
<th>Question # 1. FREQUENCY-MEETS CRITERIA</th>
<th>Question # 2. FREQUENCY-MEETS CRITERIA</th>
<th>Question # 3. FREQUENCY-MEETS CRITERIA</th>
<th>YES/NO Student answered all 3 questions &amp; replied to 2 students’</th>
<th>WEEK 1 YES/NO Student interviewed another student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**USE A TALLY SYSTEM TO TRACK PARTICIPATION UNLESS PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT HAS BEEN MET.**
### Table 2.3. Sample Marking Grid for Writing Style and APA Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Style and Presentation</td>
<td>2 marks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling and Punctuation</td>
<td>2 marks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heading Style</td>
<td>2 marks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotations and Within-Text Citations</td>
<td>2 marks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference List</td>
<td>2 marks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marks out of 10:**

**Mark for assignment:**
TABLE 2.4. EVALUATING APA FORMAT

APA MARKING: Guidelines for TAs in 601

Based on the expectations outlined by the Course Coordinator, Dawn McBride (2006, February 8).

A. Teaching students to identify their own errors

The goal is to put the responsibility on the students to learn to identify their APA mistakes and to learn where to access the information to correct their errors. This approach to marking should significantly reduce your marking time, compared to the time an editor needs to proofread a student’s paper.

B. Identify the error

The marking of the students’ writing style and adherence to APA is not meant to be onerous for the TA. Rather, the role of the TA is to alert students when they have not adhered to an APA standard in an assignment. For example, in a review bubble in msword review function, the TA would insert the following message if there was a sentence structure error (which I denote as “s/s”).

“Sally, accurate in-text reference. Great! However, there is an s/s problem.”

You could include in the message: “Hint: look up run-on sentences in your APA manual, section X, part 1, p. x.”

In addition, it may be useful to highlight an APA error related to formatting. Table 2.4 provides various examples of informative statements related to common APA errors.
C. APA score and comment

At the end of the student’s paper, the TA will attach the instructor’s desired grading grid sheet (the instructor will send this form to the TA in advance). The TA will insert a recommended APA score, along with a comment to justify the score.

“Sally, your reference list was fairly good except for capitalization of titles. Overall, good attention to detail regarding the use of headings. I noticed you had a lot of s/s problems, so you might find reviewing the APA manual pages 4-7 very useful. You might also want to re-read the section on run-on sentences.”

TIPS:

Abbreviations I use (which Dawn explains to students in advance):

ref. prob = reference citation problem
s/s = sentence structure problem (usually focuses on grammar)
sp = spelling problem
ft = format problem (underlined when they should have used italics)
hd = heading problem
**Table 2.5. Informative Feedback Regarding APA Format**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>General</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refer to sample paper provided in end of Chapter 5 of 5th Edition Publication Manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit, edit, edit... a paper does not read well or reflect professionalism with minor editing errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch for one space after periods and commas. To catch these &quot;strays&quot; the easiest solution is using edit/find/replace, searching for 2 spaces and replacing with one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Writing Style and Presentation (Chapter 2: 2.01 – 2.17; 5: 5.01 – 5.14)** |
| Ensure that all pronouns have obvious referents (2.01) |
| Be concise. Avoid jargon, wordiness, and redundancy (2.02) |
| Avoid anthropomorphism (2.04) |
| Avoid “editorial we” (2.04) |
| Use precise language; avoid very informal writing or local slang (2.04) |
| Use “I” and “me” rather than writing in 3rd person (2.04) |
| Set paper aside before proofreading; get critical review from a “study buddy” (2.05) |
| Proofread to find things that spellcheck misses... “and/an,” “of/on” (2.05) |
| Ensure appropriate and consistent verb tense (2.06) |
| Use active (not passive) tense (e.g., We conducted the survey, not The survey was conducted) (2.06) |
| Ensure agreement of subject and verb (2.07) |
| Ensure single/plural agreement (e.g., a client/his or her; clients/their) (2.08) |
| Try to use simpler sentence structure for flow in reading (2.09) |
| Ensure “parallel construction” (2.11) |
| Avoid bias (i.e., gender, ethnic, disability, age) (2.12 – 2.17) |
| Indent paragraphs (5.08) |
| Use uppercase and lower case letters appropriately (e.g., in headings and titles) (5.09) |
| Select appropriate levels of headings and apply consistently (5.10) |
| Insert only one space after punctuation, including periods (5.11) |
| Hyphens have no spaces before or after (5.11) |
| Dashes have spaces before and after, except when combining 2 words of equal weight (5.11) |
| Block quotes (40 or more words) are indented but not single spaced (5.13) |
| Quoting within quotes: within a block, use double quotation marks; within a short quote, use single quotation marks for quoted material and double to enclose full quote (5.13) |

<p>| <strong>Spelling and Punctuation (3.01 – 3.29)</strong> |
| Comma between elements in a series (i.e., before &quot;and,&quot; “or,&quot; and “&amp;&quot;) and after i.e. and e.g. (3.02) |
| Comma to set off non-essential clauses (that, if removed, would leave an intact |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>sentence</strong> (3.02)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comma to set off year in exact dates (e.g., July 1, 2005) but not for July 2005 (3.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-colon to separate two independent (stand-alone) clauses (3.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-colon to separate elements in series that contain commas (3.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colon (3.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dash to indicate an interruption in sentence continuity. Don’t overuse (3.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To type a dash, type word space hyphen space next word (it's after the space and next letter that the hyphen should convert to a dash)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double quotation marks for irony, slang, or invented expressions on first use only (3.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double quotation marks for titles of articles or chapters when mentioned in text (3.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italicize anchors of a scale, linguistic examples, technical/key terms (3.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parentheses (3.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brackets (3.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slash – not used for comparison (e.g., test-retest) (3.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling – do use the dictionary ☺ (3.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyphenation (3.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalization (3.12 – 3.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If key words are capitalized, capitalize both parts of hyphenated word (e.g., The Impact of Work-Life Balance on Productivity). If key words aren’t capitalized, and hyphenated word comes first, do not hyphenate second half of word (e.g., Work-life balance for counsellors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italics (3.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use italics, not quotation marks, for book titles referred to within text (3.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations – use sparingly and, in most cases, spell out before first use (3.20 – 3.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plurals of numbers don’t have an apostrophe (e.g., 1980s) (3.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spell out numbers under 10 (3.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Headings (3.30 – 3.33)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid subsections unless there are more than one (3.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omit “Introduction” heading: It is always implied (3.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headings are not bolded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select appropriate style for number of levels (3.31 – 3.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider using letters or numbers to organize a series (3.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quotations and Within-Text Citations (3.34 – 3.41 and 3.94 – 3.103)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block quotes are used if quote is 40 or more words (3.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotation marks: instructions for using single or double (3.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is okay to change capitalization at beginning of quote or punctuation at end to fit with context (3.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite exact page numbers (or paragraph numbers if document isn’t paginated) (3.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retain citations within quotes, but don’t list in reference list (3.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert punctuation within closing quotation mark, unless citation ends the sentence (3.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use author(s)’ last name only within text citation (i.e., no initials) (3.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within a single paragraph, APA permits that the year not be repeated for subsequent citations. However, the CAAP faculty prefers that all citations include author and year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple authors: for 6 or more, cite first author only, followed by “et al.,” and the year (3.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: “et al.” ends with a period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a chapter in an edited book, cite the author of the chapter, not the editors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For multiple authors, within parentheses use “&amp;” but within text, use “and” (3.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To cite works with no author identified, use the first few words of reference entry plus year (3.97) If the reference is a book title, italicize. If an article or chapter, use quotation marks (3.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When citing two different authors with same surname, always include initials in citation (3.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To cite several works within same parentheses, see 3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To cite classical works, see 3.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite personal communication within text only (not in reference list) (3.102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid redundancy, once a source is cited within the paragraph, continue with language such as &quot;The same authors found...&quot; Or &quot;They continued by saying...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference List (4.01 – 4.16)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that all references cited in text have a corresponding entry in the reference list (4.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that all references on list are cited within text (i.e., this isn’t a list of general sources) (4.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable abbreviations and simplified publisher’s locations (4.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To organize order of items (4.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General format for references (4.07) (Note: journal articles are particularly tricky, so check for detail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide retrieval information for web pages (e.g., Retrieved July 1, 2005, from <a href="http://www.lifestrategies.ca">www.lifestrategies.ca</a> or Retrieved July 1, 2005 from the PsycARTICLES database.) (4.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See 4.16 for examples of a wide variety of references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tips to avoid most common errors…</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article titles: Capitalize first word only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide start and end pages for journal articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use hanging indents (i.e., 1st line at left, 2nd and subsequent lines indented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italicize book titles, journal titles, or titles of independent online documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For periodicals and journals, italicize the journal number but not the issue number: 45(2), 22-40

In reference list, separate two authors with a comma and & (this is different from any other series)

Only capitalize first letter of article title, except the first letter in a title after a colon is also capitalized

End reference with a period

Italicize number before brackets (referring to journals)

**Manuscript Preparation Tips**

- Set indents rather than using tabs to prevent formatting problems when editing
- Avoid shading and other formatting techniques: APA format is very basic in terms of graphics
- Use left alignment rather than full justification or block formatting

Chapter 3: Online Theory

How can online theory help me to excel at my job?

This chapter provides information on and suggestions for a number of topics related to e-learning theory: e-moderation, learning stages, and posting styles.

E-MODERATION

Successful online instructors and TAs monitor their electronic classroom from the following four perspectives (Berge, 1995): pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical. Your role as an online TA is to do your best to tailor the online environment to meet these areas.

Following is an overview of each perspective:

Pedagogical. This perspective relates to how information is passed on to students (Collins & Berge, 1996).

Although CAAP 601 TAs are not expected to participate in the theoretical discussion forums, you are warmly invited to do so. When you are participating in discussion forums as an e-moderator, the key is to draw out student responses and to ensure that these responses center discussions on essential concepts, principles and skills (Berge, 1995). Questions, probes, and transition statements are useful to the instructor or TA managing the discussion forums.

Strategies:
Double check that the objectives of the course are presented to the students in a clear and direct manner. It is helpful to remind students of these objectives at various points in the course so that they see a connection between what they are learning and the course goals.

Use a warm and open style to relating to the students, as opposed to an authoritarian style.

Summarizing discussions is a valuable service you can offer to your instructor and the students. Both the instructor and the TA should summarize whenever they see a need to, but remember that it is important for students to learn this skill. Since the majority of the students taking 601 will not be aware of the need to summarize, TAs can model this skill for the first month of the forums being open.

Social. The social focus of instruction involves developing a supportive online classroom environment (Collins & Berge, 1996).

Through monitoring the e-tone (mood) of a discussion forum, a TA can gain valuable insight into the cohesiveness of the group. It is very important that an online TA immediately addresses (with consultation with the course instructor) negative discussion behavior, as it may lead to tension and fear within the online community.

Strategies:

Emphasizing the humanness in participants by encouraging students to review each other’s bios. Ask your instructor if you could open a “get to know you forum” where students can share more details about who they are as well as make connections with other students.

Encourage the use of colour and emoticons in the postings. However, you may need to guide students in the frequency of use because, sometimes, when students use too many colours in their posts, the posts are not read.
 ✓ Model postings that demonstrate respect, tentative language, and curiosity, qualities that project an attitude of acceptance of alternative ideas.

 ✓ Address negative comments promptly and privately in order to provide support for the student, while intercepting a potential negative situation. (see Chapter Nine for more information)

Managerial. The managerial aspect of instruction relates to the administrative roles held by the e-moderator (Collins & Berg, 1996).

Students new to an e-learning environment may require support with time management and ideas on how to stay on top of their work load (Berge, 1995).

Strategies:

 ✓ Remind students a week before an assignment deadline.

 ✓ Encourage students to record all due dates in a daytimer.

 ✓ Establish a forum where students can post their questions regarding assignments.

 ✓ Establish a system for tracking student progress and marks (see Chapter Two).

Technical. The technical aspect of instruction involves the role of providing technical support (Collins & Berge, 1996).

Students who are novices at using technology may limit their contributions because they lack confidence in their ability to use the system.

Strategies:
Do not take ownership for providing answers to all technical concerns. Rather direct students towards the resources to find answers to their questions. This stance will be beneficial in the long run, as students will need to learn to function independently in the online environment.

Encourage students to consult and support their peers. This not only provides them with technical support but also helps to develop group cohesiveness.

LEARNING STAGES

Did you know that learners go through several stages during an online learning experience? Salmon (2004), a respected researcher in online learning, proposes that students progress through five stages, or levels of dependence, during their maturation as learners in an online learning environment. The degree of dependence will impact the type and level of support required of the TA.

While all groups will move through the stages during the semester, it is not guaranteed that every class, or every student, will progress to stage five. Following is a summary of each of the stages. In addition, recommendations are provided for effective TA facilitation at each stage.

Stage One: Initiation. A student at this stage is becoming initiated to the e-learning environment. “Stage one is when e-moderators can look out for any sign of life online from new students” (Salmon, 2004, p. 32). The length of time that students remain in stage one may be influenced by their attitudes towards computers, effective help, time and effort.

Strategies:
Contact all new students within a few days after the course begins to ensure that they have begun their journey online. This can be done by email or phone.

Share your feelings and experiences when you were a student new to online learning. It can be normalizing and inspirational for new students to know that they are not the only ones feeling confused.

Ease the apprehension that online learners often feel in the first few weeks by providing instructions and tips for using software. Encourage students to practice using the various functions.

Once students have successfully posted their first online message, they are ready for stage two.

Stage Two: Group Norms. Students in stage two are learning to become familiar with the virtual learning environment and starting to feel that they are part of a community of learners. To this end, students in this stage are developing their netiquette or communication patterns and learning about group norms, or what is appropriate behavior when working online (Collins & Berge, 1996; Salmon, 2004; Salmon & Giles, 1997).

Mann (2001) argues that, if e-learners feel isolated (i.e., not part of the online community), they may distance themselves also from the learning process.

Online TAs need to create a virtual third culture (Salmon, 2004). This involves initiating contact between members, using tentative language to promote reflection, and modeling a supportive environment.

Strategies:
✓ Teach and remind students about netiquette. For example, remind them to label messages, to increase the organization in the forum.

✓ Provide opportunities for socialization, such as informal chat-rooms (e.g., “coffee rooms”) where non-classroom content can be discussed. Post examples of suitable topics, such as good movies, etc.

✓ Model strategies to co-create a positive virtual environment.

Students often feel overloaded at the beginning of the term and may forget certain netiquette techniques at various times throughout the semester.

If you notice a general pattern occurring with your section, you may want to post a reminder message in the general discussion forum. If, however, you notice that a particular student is having difficulty, it may be more appropriate to address the student directly and privately, through a personal email or phone call. Also, keep your instructor aware of these types of conversations, as he or she may have advice to offer.

**Stage Three: Reflection.** Once students have become familiar with the norms and protocols of online instruction, they move into stage three where they are active in critical reflection, problem solving, and sharing resources (Salmon, 2004).

**Strategies:**

✓ Publicly acknowledge student posts that reflect critical thinking.

✓ Don’t hog discussion forums. Instead, allow students the time and space to understand the material being presented to them.

✓ Provide students with informative feedback (see Chapter Seven) to improve their posting style. Do this in a private way (e.g., by email).
**Stage Four: Debate.** Students in stage four tend to ask more theoretical and applied questions, are more active in the discussion forums, challenge the ideas of others, and provide positive feedback (Salmon, 2004). Organization and management are particularly crucial at this point, as students can become caught up in the flurry of information being discussed in the forums.

**Strategies:**

- Avoid authoritative statements, as such statements tend to be interpreted as the final word, and therefore conversations become stifled.

- Stimulate debate by posing questions and asking for alternative interpretations if you sense that the discussion thread is weakening.

- Offer resources in the form of articles or websites of interest related to the topic.

**Stage Five: Meta-cognition.** Students who progress to stage five have matured into a meta-cognitive state. By this stage, an environment of curiosity and respectful inquiry has been established and maintained by the students. No longer satisfied to make decisions based on the opinion of others, students now demonstrate the ability to reflect critically on course material. They are also able to create cohesive arguments to support their opinions (Salmon, 2004).

**Strategies:**

- With instructor support, encourage curiosity and respectful inquiry by challenging students to evaluate their own ways of thinking.
Explore students’ responses to the learning process (e.g., how did it feel to become an expert on a particular theory?)

THE MOST EFFECTIVE TAS ARE THE ONES WHO ADAPT THEIR ROLE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS.

WHAT DO POSTING STYLES TELL US ABOUT STUDENTS?

While every student is unique, certain personality types tend to respond with distinctive patterns and styles (Salmon, 2004). TAs should be aware of the patterns and modify their approach to provide optimal support for each student.

The “Go Getter”
According to Salmon (2004), “Activists and pragmatics frequently behave online as if they were extroverted personalities” (p. 111). This type of student tends to value information that is realistic and practical to use. Such students are often eager to become involved early in a discussion forum. TAs can provide support by encouraging them to reflect (e.g., “Tell me more.”).

The “Reflector”
Theorists and reflectors, on the other hand, tend to project a more introverted style (Salmon, 2004). These students often post late in the week, once they have had time to ponder over the questions. Encouraging students to respond at least once before the start of the weekend will stimulate group conversation.

The “Lurker”
A third style of student is sometimes labeled the “lurker” (Salmon, 2004). Lurkers are students who make minimal responses to the discussion forum. They may lurk for a number of reasons: they are having difficulty using the system and tools, they spend a substantial amount of time considering other
people’s responses, they lack confidence in their familiarity with the material, or they are experiencing difficulty with time management. TAs are encouraged to establish personal contact with these students, either through phone or email, in order to determine which area of support would be most beneficial to them.

**The “Cheerleader”**

Cheerleaders are students who typically respond with statements such as “I agree,” without moving the conversation forward. It is particularly important at the beginning of the term to watch for students who tend to cheerlead, as cheerleading may become detrimental throughout the semester. A TA can address this problem by modeling, providing a general reminder in course announcements, or sending a personal communication through e-mail.
Chapter 4: Keeping the Communication Lines Open With Your Professor

As a TA for CAAP 601, you will have been assigned to a course section, which is lead by an instructor associate. While some instructors may be seasoned and have preconceived notions of how the TA relationship will work, other instructors may be new to the position. Communication is the key to making the experience between you and the course instructor the best it can be.

**HOW DO I INITIATE CONTACT WITH MY INSTRUCTOR?**

Establish a working relationship prior to the start of the course. As a TA you should take the initiative to make contact with the course instructor, who may not have your contact information. Confirm your instructor’s preferred email addresses and other contact information, such as a work or home office phone number. As well, it may be important to establish appropriate times to call (for example, what is the earliest or latest that your instructor is available to receive a phone call from you?). Table 4.1 may be used as a model for information collection.

TAs are also strongly encouraged to send a brief bio/background to the instructor. This is not only a fantastic networking tool, but it also allows the instructor to become aware of your areas of interest and strength.

**HOW CAN I SUPPORT THE LEARNING PROCESS?**

According to Salmon (2004), TAs “know something of the subject matter...and have training and experience in dealing with students” (p. 51). As a result, your primary role as a TA is to moderate with the students. Individuals new to the online experience often feel very isolated. It is common for students to want to check in with you as a way of reassuring themselves that they are on track. By responding to their technical questions, offering reassurance and providing support, a TA ensures that students feel they are a valuable part of a virtual community.
It is important to keep the instructor in the loop. By maintaining regular contact with your course instructor, you will be able to clarify any questions that students may have. As well, you can watch for patterns in student responses, which when shared with your instructor may help to identify any holes in student learning.

**Speaking from experience**

When I was a TA, my instructor and I would exchange emails around minor questions throughout the week. We scheduled a weekly *Sunday morning chatroom visit* for the first few weeks of the term in order to make sure that we were in sync. Later on we moved to a bi-weekly meeting, once the general pattern of responses was established.

These meeting times were beneficial for both exchanging information and providing feedback. We shared compliments, concerns and ideas back and forth. I really felt that I was a valuable member of the team. Ask your instructor if he or she would be interested in this type of arrangement. He or she might not know you are willing to have regular contact.

*Note: Although we chose a chat format, phone or personal meetings may be more useful for other teams.*
### Table 4.1. Contact Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor Name:</th>
<th>Section:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
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<td>Phone:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Information</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Making Use of Your TA Team and Mentors

Since you’re a TA, you should automatically know all the answers, right? Wrong!!!!!

This chapter provides information regarding peer support within the TA team.

DON’T FORGET TO NETWORK

During my two years of experience, I have come to believe that networking among TA team members is imperative for creating a support network in an online community. I encourage TAs to establish resources for peer support, such as a TA group email system. One way to start this process would be to email a positive anecdote or observation from your section to other members of the TA team.

To create group e-mails, you may find it useful to construct an address book entry. Simply create a name you will use to remember the group by (e.g., TA2007) and create an address book entry. Include the full address of each person in the group. Separate each address by a semicolon (;). You can then use the pull down menu in the Create Message link to address your e-mail, instead of searching for each e-mail address elsewhere.
Group emails provide an opportunity for individuals to post questions to the team regarding issues such as course content, marking, or time management. TAs are then able to collaborate on solutions for presented inquiries. This method not only creates a support system but also promotes consistency between different sections in a course.

**MAKE USE OF EXPERIENCE**

Weldford (1996) speculates that “Most new TAs seek the advice of other senior TAs in their respective courses (or at least departments) for advice and guidance” (p.7).

In order to simulate this relationship in an online environment, Campus Alberta sometimes assigns a TA with previous experience to the position of senior TA, or TA mentor. This person’s role is to assist the TA team with answering “TA” type questions, and referring to the course coordinator any questions that cannot be answered immediately.

In addition, as the role of TA may become overwhelming, TA mentors will check in with the team members in order to determine how everyone is coping. They may provide tips and tricks that they have learned in the past for staying on top of the workload.

If you do not have a TA mentor, then it is very important that you seek support and guidance from other CAAP TAs and from your course instructor. If you do not seek support or ask questions, it might be assumed that “all is well with you.” Do not expect your course instructor to read your mind.
Chapter 6: Communication Media

This chapter provides suggestions for efficient management of communication between yourself and your students.

**CREATING GROUP LISTS**

TAs need to create a group email list of the students in their class and send it to the course instructor before the course begins. This list can be useful for sending out mass emails as well as tracking student participation rates. (For information on creating group e-mail lists, see Chapter 5).

The names and contact information for all students in your section can be determined by accessing your course home page and then referring to your student user list.

**APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TIMES**

Standard response times are particularly important in an asynchronous environment, as there is no set time when all individuals are required to be online. While other institutions may have different standards, CAAP has a response time of 48 hours. If you are not able to check your email within 48 hours (e.g. due to illness), post a course announcement for your students. Also alert your course instructor about your absence.

Ensure that you post expected response times at the beginning of the semester so that students become accustomed to waiting for a response.
Q. Why is response time important?

A. It sends a message to students that their questions and comments are important, and that the faculty member is visible and involved. It also keeps the discussions current (Young, 2000).

**ANSWERING STUDENT QUERIES**

If your instructor has not already done so, you should establish a forum for your section labeled *Ask Your TA*. Encourage students to access this forum if they have any questions regarding the course and its content.

There are many advantages to encouraging students to post their course inquiries in the *Ask Your TA* forum rather than by email. Doing so will reduce the volume of emails and save you from having to answer the same question over and over again.

**TIP:** Train students to post their inquiries in the TA forum. When they send you an email, thank them for their good inquiry and say that you will be pleased to answer it when they post it in the TA forum.
Chapter 7: Facilitating a Discussion Forum

As a TA for CAAP 601, your primary job is to facilitate the TA forum and other forums related to the administration of the course. However, your course instructor may encourage you to join him or her in facilitating forums. This is a great opportunity that I encourage you to accept, as it will be a grand experience. Make sure you include this “teaching” experience on your resume. Remember, your course instructor cannot read your mind. If you want to be more involved as a TA and to gain valuable experience, let the instructor know!

The following tips describe how to facilitate a discussion forum. Most are relevant to both administrative and theory-driven forums.

**HOW DO I START A FACILITATIVE PROCESS?**

According to White (2004) the following activities can be very useful:

- **Initial engagement:** encouraging members to become active participants

  Example: *Great reflections, Jane, as you shared your opinion by linking it to a personal experience and a reading from this week. Thank you. I’m now interested in knowing what others think about your comments about x and y.*

- **Building trust:** modeling appropriate and respectful responses

  Example: *I appreciate how you have related your experience of being a parent and a teacher to the question at hand. This was a risk and will help us go deeper with the topic. Thanks for taking the lead on this, Steve.*

- **Modeling norms:** supporting students to become accountable in the online environment

  Example: *Erin’s Re: Mary: Question one.*
Hi, Mary. I appreciated your views on question one. I am wondering if you could recommend any readings to support your opinion?

✓ **Anticipating and handling conflict**: allowing new ideas to emerge while still protecting individuals from harassment

Example: *Jason, I can sense that you are very passionate about this topic. With passion, sometimes it is hard to clearly communicate one’s ideas as there is so much energy! Let’s take things to a deeper level to help clarify your position... What references support your arguments? Which references do not support your view?*

✓ **Summarizing, weaving and supporting**: highlighting appropriate content and connections

Example: *I’ve noticed that a number of students have referred to the need to establish balance in their lives. For example, Mariam spoke about x, which led into a really interesting discussion with a number of you (Steve, Fatima, Michelle, Brad, and Tracy). Let’s keep this discussion going but let’s re-focus back to the lesson objective: What strategies could we use to achieve this type of balance?*

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**What does weaving have to do with online work?**

As a communicative function, weaving enables the group to organize its ideas.... To create weaving comments, it is important to review the discussion forum carefully, identifying the themes, making connections and summarizing ideas.

(Feenberg & Xin, http://www.textweaver.org/facilitation.htm.)
**HOW DO I WEAVE?**

Salmon (2004) recommends using the following steps when weaving a message:

1. Copy all replies to a question into your word processor program.
2. Read through quickly and colour code key themes.
3. Identify unifying themes together.
4. Identify points of disagreement.
5. Summarize each theme that you have identified in a sentence or two. Be sure to add example points of agreement or disagreement.
6. Add your informative feedback.
7. If you wish to move the conversation forward, add a specific but open-ended question.
8. Post your newly created weaving comment to the discussion forum.

**Example:** I’ve noticed that a number of students have referred to the need to establish a treatment plan for their clients. However, there appears to be some debate around empirical validation. What are some positives for adopting an empirically validated approach? What are the negatives? How does a counsellor decide which approach to adopt?

9. Use a clear title that invites further comments.

**Example:** How do you determine your treatment plan?
WATCH THE PROPORTION OF TA CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION FORUM

DANGER!!!!

In discussion forums, an overly active TA can actually stifle conversation and limit student growth (Salmon, 2004). Examples could include offering answers to the discussion questions too early in the week, being usually the first to respond to students’ contributions, using declarative statements, debating student’s answers, and others.

TAs working in an e-learning environment can participate without dominating by adopting the strategies recommended by Lowe and Oughton (2005):

✓ Remind students of the need to keep their posts organized, brief and properly labeled.

✓ Let students lead the discussions and challenge each other.

✓ Deal with inappropriate behavior privately (e.g., by email or phone).

✓ Monitor quality and regularity of postings.

✓ Provide public feedback about what is going well with the postings (e.g., frequency, quality, linking). For example, “This is a great discussion. You folks are really getting the hang of x and y.”

✓ Monitor your eTone and that of your class.
ANOTHER WARNING!

Students often interpret a post from an instructor or TA as the *official answer* and do not believe they would have anything to add to the conversation. Salmon (2004) labels this effect as e-moderating by silence. To avoid this, it is recommended that online TAs use prompts rather than statements. To prompt, use tentative phrases such as “What is your position on…?”

**ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO FIND THE ANSWERS THEMSELVES**

Your role as a TA is to guide your students, not to do the work for them.

‘*I know when I need to join in -- after 20 posts (not before!)*’

Dr. McBride, one of the core faculty members with Campus Alberta, encourages TAs to allow students to discover the answers for their own questions, because “*They will remember the answer for a much longer period of time than if it is given to them*” (personal communication, March 10, 2006).
**PROVIDE INFORMATIVE FEEDBACK**

Informative feedback offers students direction on how they might improve their performance. Both what a TA says and how the TA says it have an impact on learners. If giving praise, facilitators should communicate in a concrete fashion why they believe the performance is positive. For example, “Your speech is clear and concise" provides more constructive feedback than "Good job, I like the way you speak" (Hootstein, 2002, p. 2).

Supportive, formative feedback is motivational and will contribute to modification of participants’ thinking…. E-moderators should celebrate, give value to and acknowledge sharing by participants, and give credibility, authenticity and verification of information offered (Salmon, 2004).

**HOW DO I KNOW IF STUDENTS ARE ON TRACK?**

Students who are truly participating in student-directed learning incorporate **creative and cognitive active thinking**. As a TA, you will be able to distinguish whether or not your students are working at a higher level by referring to the following guidelines (Salmon & Giles, 1997). Ask yourself if your students are:

- ✓ **offering** ideas or resources and inviting others to critique them
- ✓ **asking** challenging questions
- ✓ **articulating**, explaining and supporting their positions on various issues
- ✓ **exploring** and supporting ideas by adding explanations and examples
- ✓ **reflecting** and re-evaluating their personal position
✓ **critiquing**, challenging, discussing and expanding others' ideas

✓ **negotiating interpretations**, definitions and meanings

✓ **summarizing** and modeling previous contributions

✓ **proposing actions** based on developed ideas

If not, invite your students to demonstrate these skills in their postings. For example, “We are on day 5, and in reading the posts, I notice that no one has posted challenges towards x and y. I invite someone to take this task on. Any volunteers?”

**APA AND THE DISCUSSION FORUM**

Often one of the biggest challenges for a first-year graduate student is adjusting to a higher standard of writing. Many students have not written an academic paper in number of years and may not feel comfortable using the APA manual. One of the best places where a student can practice using APA formatting is in the discussion forum. A TA can support students’ growth through:

✓ Always modeling the appropriate use of quotes and references in posts, emails, PPT slides, handouts, etc.

✓ Recognizing students who do take the time to reference and encouraging all students to use appropriate references and quotes.

✓ Creating a space, possibly under your Ask a TA section, where students are able to post any questions they have surrounding APA issues.

✓ Expecting students to cite references in the discussion forums and in their assignments (PPT slides, handouts, papers, etc.)
Chapter 8: Ethical Considerations

Ethical decision making is a process that requires reflection and consultation. TAs employed by CAAP are considered to be responsible scholars and are therefore expected to adhere to the ethical principles of the Canadian Psychological Association (CAP, 2000). Accordingly, it is recommended that TAs employ the following decision-making model when confronted with an ethical dilemma.

1. Identify which individuals or groups may be potentially affected by a decision.
2. Using the Code of Ethics, identify the values which will potentially affect the decision making process.
3. Reflect on how personal biases may impact a choice between various courses of action.
4. Create a number of alternative choices of action.
5. For each alternative, reflect on the short-term and long-term risks and benefits.
6. Determine which alternative will result in the least amount of harm.
7. Take action, using the alternative selected.
8. Evaluate the result of the selection.
9. Assume responsibility for the consequences of the decision.
10. Determine a strategy to prevent the issue from resurfacing in the future.
Chapter 9: Handling Disruptive Behaviour

3.

The best way to deal with disruptive behavior is to be proactive about it. During the first week of class, TAs should make clear to students the need to maintain respect within the forum. When everyone is aware of the boundaries, it is easier not to overstep them.

Some recommendations offered from my own experience for thoughtful, respectful discussion include the following:

- Making students aware of the specific guidelines, checklists, and rubrics regarding acceptable responses.
- Acknowledging students who provide reflective contributions.
- Helping students stay centered on a particular topic through the use of prompts and open-ended questions.
- Sending a private note to students who are inappropriate or off topic in their talk.

However, proactive action does not guarantee that there will not be conflicts in the classroom which may require some response from you as a TA. The following suggestions provided by Wright and Herties (1992) may be used as guidelines for handling challenging situations:
Whenever possible, discuss the issue with the course instructor, who not only bears primary responsibility for the course but may have more experience dealing with interpersonal conflicts.

Be aware of how different students may be experiencing the course and how they may be approaching various activities. By being aware of student behavior patterns, such as posting at the last minute, the TA may be able to predict and intervene earlier in potential dilemmas.

Be aware of the potential power differential between TAs and students. Students look to TAs as role models for appropriate behavior; therefore, it is imperative that you set a positive example.

Be conscious of the language you use when corresponding with students, because even a casual comment has the potential to harm. Students can become defensive if they feel they are being judged. Focus on identifying behavior using tentative language.

For example, instead of asking “Why aren’t you contributing?” reframe your question: “I’ve missed reading your posts in the forums lately. Is everything all right? Anything I can help you with?”

**HOW DO I DEAL WITH A DISPUTE BETWEEN A STUDENT AND THE COURSE INSTRUCTOR?**

There may be times when a student disagrees with an instructor’s evaluation of his or her learning within the program. At such times there is a potential for the student to “flare” or vent frustration in the discussion forum. It is important for the TA to intervene to prevent the incident from affecting others in the course.

First, e-mail or call the student, and in the conversation, emphasize with the student’s shock and disappointment. Ask the student to refrain from posting his or her individual views in the course discussion forum. Explain to the student how such behavior can impact the morale of the classroom. It may be useful to recommend that the student review the Student Handbook C.5
Academic Appeals, as well as the CAAP Policies and Procedures: Appeals of Grades and Section XIII.E.

Second, remind the student that all evaluations of coursework are based on the clearly stated evaluation criteria. Encourage the student to review the evaluation procedures to determine which areas were missed.

Finally, remind the student that if he or she is dissatisfied with a grade on an assignment, the first step is to address the issues directly with the course instructor. All appeals need to be made within fifteen days of receiving a mark. A student should have a clear explanation as to why the grade should be different and be prepared to offer a sound rationale and evidence for his or her perspective.

**Please Remember:** It is never appropriate for TAs to criticize publicly an instructor, the CAAP program, or any CAAP policy or procedure. As a member of the CAAP staff, TAs have an ethical obligation to support the program and its members.
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