TA Tips from Travis Beaver

1. Don't save all your paper grading until the night before the professor wants it done. After grading more than 10 papers in a row you will struggle to concentrate so get in the habit of grading 5-10 papers per day and it will make grading much less tedious.

2. Be prepared to answer students' questions about why they received a certain grade. Don't get angry or let them put you on the defensive, but DO explain how they can improve on the next paper - encourage them to bring you a draft of the next paper (if the professor allows this).

3. Do not tell students that you will read and comment on rough drafts over emails - this is too time consuming and there is too much room for miscommunication.

4. Realize that not every student cares about getting an "A" in the class - some are perfectly fine with a "C." so don't stress out or feel guilty about giving students C's or D's if they've earned them. The "A" students who get a "B" will be the most upset and concerned students you will have to deal with.

5. Use the rubric that is handed out during orientation as a guide for grading papers - this is extremely helpful in making those tough decisions such as "Is this paper a C+ or B-?" It also comes in handy when you need to explain why a student received a specific grade.

6. Act interested and engaged in the material even when you're not - students can easily pick up on your attitude towards the material and things will go much more smoothly if they see that you are engaged and enthusiastic.

7. Be flexible with meeting students outside of office hours but don't let students guilt you into meeting with them at the last minute - I tell me students that I will meet by appointment if they give me 24 hours notice.

8. Don't feel like you have to answer student emails that are sent at 3am before their 9am exam - if you have time to do it then great, but don't feel like you have to bend over backwards when the student is not taking responsibility.

9. If you have a question about the material and how you should explain it to the students, don't be afraid to ask the professor! They will not look down on you - we are all here to learn.

TA Tips from Nicole Ryan:

1) It IS actually important to do the readings, because inevitably, there will be students who have questions

2) Listen to your students, especially in situations where you have to lead labs. Getting their feedback on who they are and what they hope to gain from the class will help you understand how you can present the material in a way that they understand and enjoy.

3) Remember what it was like when YOU were an undergraduate. What did you think a successful TA looked like? When you came to class, what was on your mind? What do you wish had been done differently in some of your classes? The more you think like your students, the more you'll get through to them.

4) Don't be afraid to interact with your students and show them who you are. The more they get a feel for how you think and start to see that you're human (and even a student) like they are, the more likely they are to respect you and understand the message that you're trying to get across.

5) Think of different ways to explain things. Not every person is the same, so it's hard to expect them to
learn material in the same way. The more examples you're able to come up with to explain a topic, the better equipped you'll be to explain something to a student.

6) You may have to TA for a class that you have no interest in whatsoever. Fake it to the best of your ability. If you don't, the students will call you out on it later.

7) You may not be given a lot of direction on grading. In this type of situation, if you're the only TA, create a system of your own and be consistent all the way through the semester. Be sure that you know that system backwards and forwards, though, because you'll probably be asked at some point by a disgruntled student to give feedback on why you gave a certain grade. If you're not the only TA, consult with the other two before touching any of the assignments so that you can make sure each of you are grading the same way (it's worse to have to fix it on the back end by regrading).

8) There may be a class where the workload is insanely tough for you and the students. Try to sympathize with the students and help them through it as best as you can without showing them how much you hate the workload as well (it'll come back to bite you). Though it's not your job to tell the professor whether or not the workload is too high, give constructive feedback when you're asked or allowed—otherwise they'll continue to do the same thing over and over each semester.

9) Depending on where your office is, there's a chance you'll either have to share it with a couple of people or twenty people. Whatever the case, do your best to focus on the students that come in to see you. If you don't focus well with lots of people around, you may want to take that into account when scheduling your office hours and when choosing WHERE to schedule them.

10) Communicate with the professor. Sounds silly, but this is an opportunity not just to show them how you perform as a TA, but what your work ethic is like in general (which is especially handy if you haven't picked a specialization yet or are paired with someone you're considering as your adviser).