

# Professionalism and Communication Skills

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# *Today outline*

## *Professionalism*

- Professional and unprofessional behavior
- First impression and beyond
- Feelings and Difficult situations

## *Communication Skills*

- Effective Communication
- Communicating as a Teaching Assistant
- Culture and Communication
- Canadian Norms
- Developing a productive relationship with a supervisor
- Status-preserving strategies to show respect
- Being Direct



***Professionals ...***

- ✓ What do you expect from a professional person?
- ✓ What are the unprofessional behaviours?

# Being professional (UBC TA Manual, 2008)

## *a. Being prepared*

know the material (reading, researching, keeping current)  
have a plan for all classes with questions and resources  
be on time and ready to go & don't go overtime!!  
return assignments promptly

## *b. Academic honesty*

admit to mistakes or lack of knowledge - you don't have to be the expert, but you should know where to find the answers

## *c. Leave your personal problems at home*

## *d. Confidentiality – maintain confidentiality of discussions and grades*

## *e. Professional distance*

Do not become friends with the students- leave the office door open when meeting with students - avoid commenting on student dress or appearance

## *f. Neutral & appropriate language (Gender, religion, sexual orientation, ...)*

# Be a Professional Teacher

([www.wikihow.com](http://www.wikihow.com))

- Inspire the trust of your students
- Present the notes and handouts professionally.
- Never miss a deadline
- Keep up to date with your marking and grading of students' tasks.
- Treat your colleagues and supervisors with respect.
- Be passionate, positive, and enthusiastic about your work.
- Welcome new ideas and change.
- Treat your students with respect.

# Dress appropriately ...



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<http://www.cagle.com/2014/08/school-dress-codes/>

*Confidential information is not to be shared beyond the professional context.*

This includes:

- i) your informal observations about students.
- ii) information from student records.
- iii) information relating to home and family background.
- iv) information relating to medical conditions.
- v) information shared informally by teachers.



# Professionalism and Social Media

Ontario College of Teachers : Professional Advisory – Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media

- Facebook: Be aware of your presence on it both as a student/teacher.
- Reconsider pictures and message boards from an admin perspective.
- Do not respond to invitations from your students.
- Do not post pictures of your students on Facebook.

# *First impression and beyond*

- Smile
- Make an effort to get to know the names of the students
- Review responsibilities and expectations
- Show your commitment to teaching by actively participating in the classroom
- Believe that you can make a difference in progress of your students
- Because of your patient and caring approach you will play a significant role in students journey
- Talk with other TAs
- Try to do a teamwork and provide support to other TAs

# *First impression and beyond*

- Do not whisper with other TAs in the classroom or while proctoring
- Turn off your cellphone
- Try to arrive 15 min before classes begins.
- If you plan to be absent notice to the instructor and course coordinator in advance if it is possible. This can be discussed as a case.
- You might need medical certificate for your absence depending on department policy.
- Avoid gossip and/or making inappropriate statements about students or staff both inside and outside university.
- Do not be drawn into criticizing other teachers or the administration.
- Frame discussions of student issues positively, with a focus on improving your own teaching practice.

# American name and nick name

- **Male**

- Jeffrey (Jeff)
- Robert (Bob)
- Alan (Al)
- William (Bill)
- Joseph (Joe)
- Andrew (Andy)
- Anthony (Tony)
- James (Jim)
- David (Dave)

- **Female**

- Christine (Chris)
- Rebecca (Becky)
- Andrea (Andy)
- Kathleen (Kathy)
- Nancy (Nan)
- Diane (Di)
- Jennifer (Jenny)
- Nicole (Nicky)

# Feelings and difficult situations

1960 ...

What's the meaning of these marks?



2013 ...

What's the meaning of these marks?



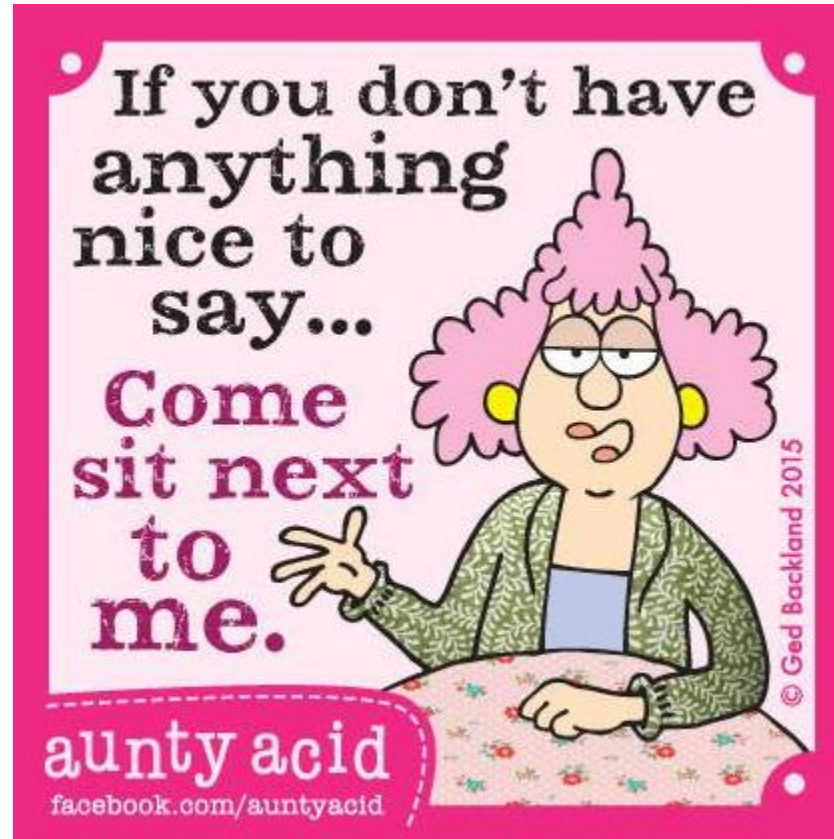
<http://language-testing.info/features/2013/review.html>

# Feelings and difficult situations

Susan Bentham and Roger Hutchins (2006)

- Stress is good thing that energizes and motivates us.
- Problem begins when we experience high level of stress.
- You are not inferior to anybody else, but neither are you superior
- Remind yourself of the limits of your responsibility in the school and that you are not solely responsible for what happens around you.
- Plan to increase your knowledge and improve your skills.
- It is normal to find yourself emotionally involved with issues or some students but it can be a danger.
- Be realistic.
- Nothing and nobody is perfect
- You cannot change everyone's world everywhere.

*If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.*



# Communication Skills





# *Effective Communication*

- Is not just exchanging information.
- It's about understanding the emotion behind the information.
- It can improve relationship at home, work and social situations.
- It can help in teamwork, decision-making, and problem solving.
- Prevent motivation losses.
- It combines a set of skills including nonverbal communication, attentive listening, the ability to manage stress in the moment, and the capacity to recognize and understand your own emotions and those of the person you're communicating with.

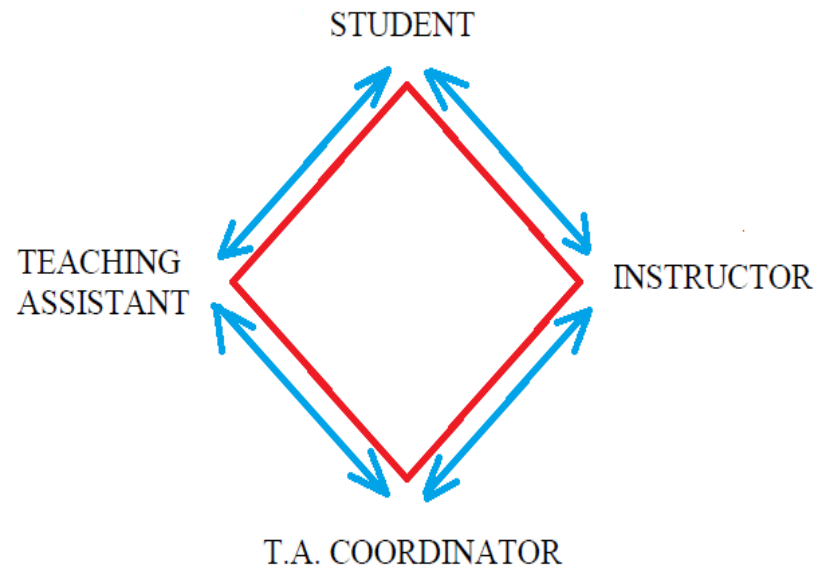
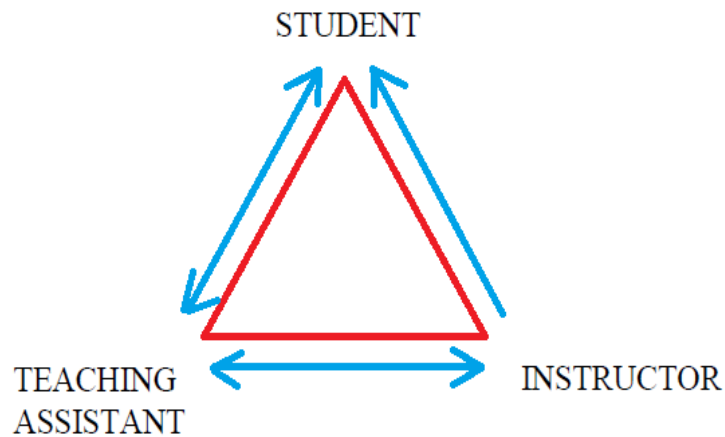
# Communicating as a teaching assistant

(UBC TA Manual, 2008)

- It is necessary to have an effective communication for the smooth flow of information between TA, instructor and students.
- Suggested formats for communication:
  - regularly scheduled meetings,
  - e-mail,
  - voicemail
  - WebCT discussion

Communicate often about developing your skills as a Teaching Assistant and workload expectations.

# Loop of Communication for Teaching Assistants



Do not become an **intermediary** between the instructor and the student.

# *Culture and Communication*

Sources of the greatest difficulty for foreign TA's in American classrooms (Landa and Perry, 1984):

- English
- Cultural differences

# *Culture and Communication*

- Being unable to communicate is a core aspect of experiencing culture shock. Therefore, a road out of culture shock involves increasing one's awareness of cultural differences, being able to engage in discussions about the differences, and becoming aware of one's own expectations and values. Some of this might entail a new awareness of one's self.

# Culture

*“Culture [is] those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, which they communicate without knowing, and which form the backdrop against which all other events are judged.”*

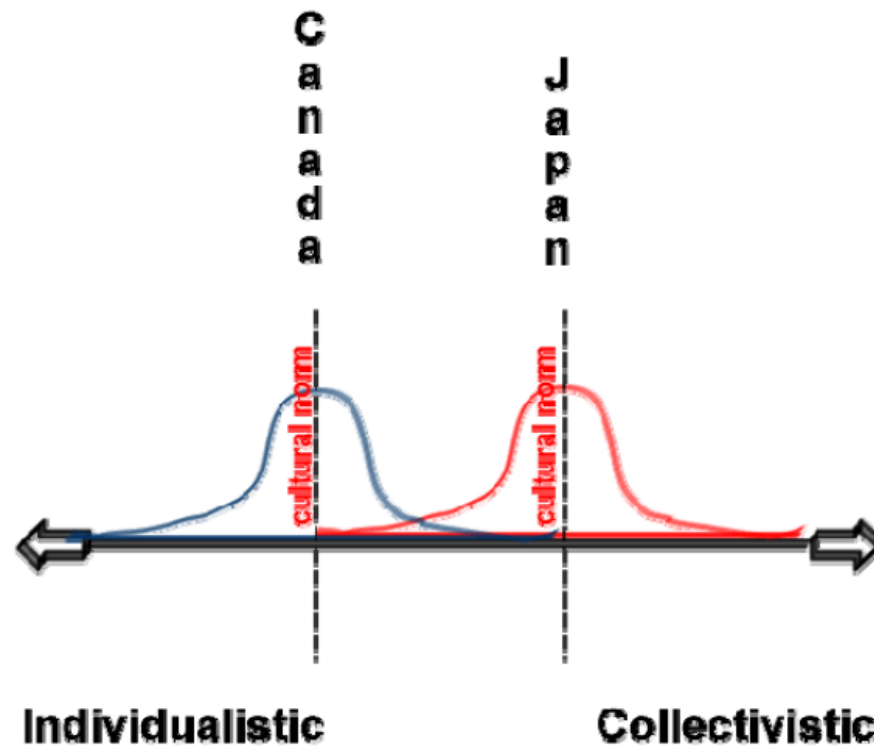
- Edward T. Hall

*Different cultural background=different expectation*

# Norms

(N. Le Gros, 2009)

- *Norms are behaviours that most people in a given society would consider to be appropriate.*



(Adapted from M. Bennett)

# Norms

(N. Le Gros, 2009)

- There are certain norms and communication patterns in Canada of which you need to be aware in order to understand people's intentions accurately.
- ***For example: Asking for clarification might not be common in some cultures.***
- In all English speaking countries, it is an expectation that if one does not understand something, one *should* ask for clarification.
- Each newcomer must decide for himself or herself how much to adapt their behaviour to reflect Canadian norms while in Canada.



# Canadian Norms



Marilyn, 2010

<http://www.alotofloves.com/2010/07/canada-day-is-for-pancakes/canada-day-cartoon/>

# *Canadian Norms*

*(N. Le Gros, 2009)*

- **Facial expressions:** Do faces move more or less when people speak in Canada than they do in your country?
- **Eye contact:** Is it respectful to look somebody in the eye when they are speaking? Is it more respectful to look down when somebody is speaking to you?
- **Pause time in conversations:** How long do people pause after another person speaks before they begin speaking? Is it appropriate to interrupt/speak at the same time as another person?
- **Importance of time:** Are people punctual or are appointment times flexible? Do people do more than one thing at a time? Do people engage in conversation before getting 'down to business' or do people 'get straight to business?'

# *Canadian Norms*

*(N. Le Gros, 2009)*

- **Concept of personal space:** How close do people stand to each other when speaking? What is acceptable within personal space? Is it acceptable to be able to smell another person's personal scent, or does it feel like a violation of one's space if another person's scent 'intrudes?' How does it feel if somebody keeps greater distance than is the custom?
- **Line ups:** Do people line up for buses, in stores, etc? Do people respect the sequence in a line up?
- **Door opening behaviour :** Do people hold doors open for others who they do not know?

# *Canadian Norms*

*(N. Le Gros, 2009)*

- **The teacher's role:** What is the relationship between the teacher and the students in your country? Does the teacher encourage informality or insist on formality? Are teachers all-knowing authorities or are they facilitators of learning? Is the role of the teacher to give students answers or to ask questions?
- **Concept of leadership:** Does a good leader give people freedom to make decisions or does a good leader make decisions on one's behalf? Does a good leader closely follow one's progress or trust people to be accountable for their own progress? Does a good leader expect people to take initiative or to obey?
- **Work ethic:** Is it appropriate to take initiative with work, or is it more appropriate to wait for direction from a superior? Does it make them appear aggressive or ambitious? Are those adjectives positive or negative?

# *Canadian Norms*

*(N. Le Gros, 2009)*

- **Concept of self:** Do people derive their sense of worth from accomplishing personal goals or from membership in a community? Is it appropriate to want to be alone? Do people solve their problems alone or do they talk to friends, family, or community leaders?
- **Nature of friendship:** Are friends available night and day, or does access to friends depend on their busy schedules? Do friends drop by someone's home unannounced, or do they call first?
- **Foods:** Do people avoid foods with strong after-odours such as garlic, or is it acceptable to have such smells on the breath?
- **Eating habits:** Is it acceptable to make noise when eating or not? Is it acceptable to burp after eating or not? Is it appropriate to eat in front of somebody who is not eating? When do people offer to share what they are eating?

# *Canadian Norms*

*(N. Le Gros, 2009)*

- **Personal scents:** Do people wear perfumes? Do they prevent personal body odour?
- **This business about noses:** Is it appropriate to sniff or to blow one's nose?
- **Political discussions:** Do people often engage in political discussions? A common belief in Canada is that one should not discuss religion, politics, or money with people one does not know.
- **Notions of modesty:** How do men and women behave with each other? Is it appropriate to have physical contact with a member of the opposite sex in public? Is it acceptable to shake the hand of someone of the opposite sex when meeting or not?
- **Concept of fairness:** Do rules exist with the idea that they can be bent to accommodate different situations, or are rules universally applied to everybody with no concept of exceptions? Is it appropriate to negotiate about rules?

## Developing a productive relationship with a supervisor (N. Le Gros, 2009)

- Take initiative (Investigating the work of different scholars before asking a supervisor for suggestions, speaking one's mind during meeting or making suggestion about the direction of the work being undertaken)
- The importance of pause times and responding to questions directly (do not interrupt your supervisor)

# Having successful meetings with advisors

(N. Le Gros, 2009)

## *More Appropriate*

- Provide history
- Request information
- Request permission
- Request advice

## *Less Appropriate*

- Make suggestions
- Correct advisors
- Offer evaluations
- Reject advice



# Status-preserving strategies to show respect (N. Le Gros, 2009)

- 1) Phrase something in the form of a question rather than a statement.
- 2) Use downgraders such as I was wondering, I think, I guess, etc.
- 3) Do not begin with inappropriate contribution. Begin with acknowledging that you have some suggestions to make but that you are not sure whether they are appropriate and that you are interested in your advisor's feedback.
- 4) Be brief
- 5) Use appropriate subject/content in each meeting

# ***Being Direct***

- As Canada is a nation of immigrants, we usually express ourselves in a ***low context*** manner. This does not mean that we never use ***high context*** communication; we will sometimes be high context with family members, close friends, and close colleagues. As a society, however, we communicate with a low context style.

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## Low Context



## High Context



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Very direct communication.

No assumption that other people know what you are talking about or that they share your ideas or definitions of things.

It is the speaker's responsibility to make himself understood.

The logic is very linear and step-by-step.

The speaker goes straight to the point.

Only approximately 5% of the world uses low context communication. (J. Bennett, 2006, personal communication.)

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Very indirect communication.

Unconscious assumption that other people know what you are talking about and that they will understand what you mean.

It is the listener's responsibility to understand the speaker.

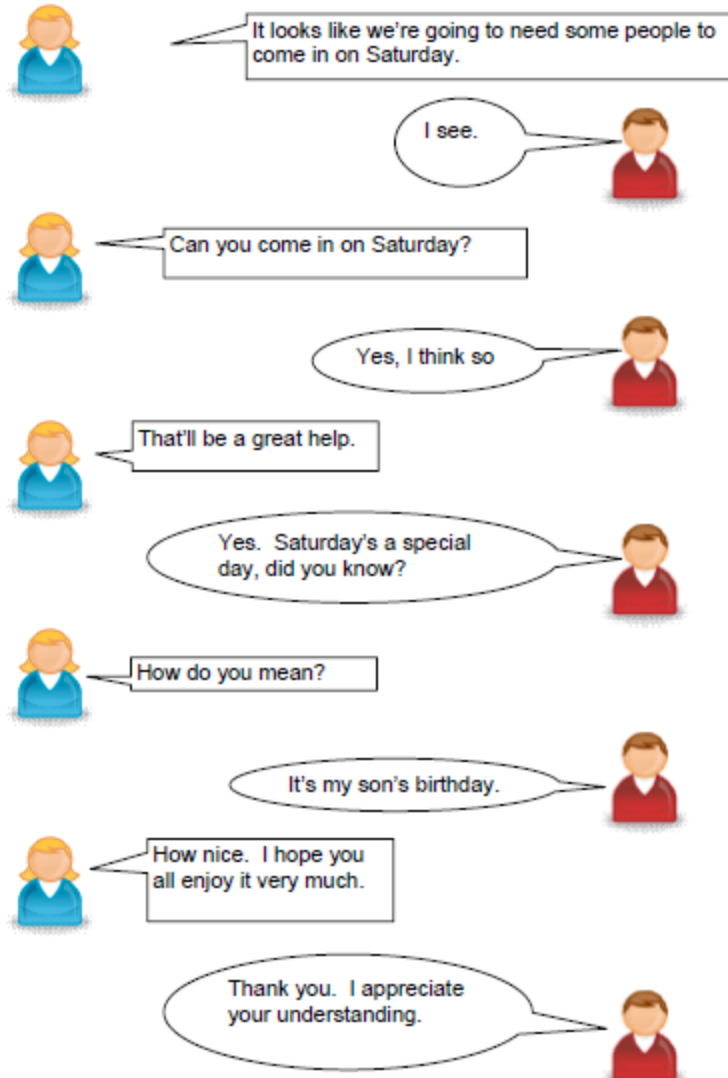
The logic might be 'circular,' and make use of repetition, implication, stories, etc.

The speaker leads the listener near the point and expects the listener to arrive at the point by himself.

Most of the world is high context, making use of different elements of the above-mentioned logic.

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EXAMPLE OF A HIGH/LOW CONTEXT MISCOMMUNICATION



Adapted from Figuring Foreigners Out

# References

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Thank you ...

Any questions?