Graduate Student Instructor
TEACHING & RESOURCE CENTER

Teaching Guide for GSIs

Fostering Your Professional Development

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From GSI to Professor

Research shows that graduate students who work on their teaching while pursuing their graduate degrees have an easier time staying on track with their research as they pursue tenure as junior faculty. Developing your teaching skills as a graduate student not only helps you teach well at Berkeley, it also enables you to prepare for the teaching you will do in future academic and non-academic careers, as the teaching skills you develop are eminently transferable to other professional settings. By using the worksheets linked below, you will chart the many dimensions of pedagogical competence that you will need and that employers will look for, take stock of available resources, and make a plan to foster your professional development in teaching through the unique opportunities available at Cal.

What teaching competencies will you need in your further academic career? (pdf)

What resources can help you develop those competencies? (pdf)

What steps can you take to develop those competencies while still in graduate school? (pdf)

Develop your own plan to foster your professional development as a teacher (pdf)

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Identifying Needed Instructional Competencies

1. Where would you ideally like to be employed as a future faculty member?_____

2. Which of the competencies listed below will you need in the position? (Put a check next to the competencies needed for that position.)

3. Rate your current skill level in that area.

        1. **Extremely limited** knowledge and experience

        2. Know something about this, but have **limited experience**

        3. **Pretty well developed**, but would like to improve

        4. **Well developed**, better to spend my energy improving other areas

Competency/Skill	Need this skill for position? (✔ if needed)	Current State of Skill (1,2,3, or 4)
Skillfully fosters a community of learners		
Fosters inclusion in the classroom		
Teaches to different learning styles		
Promote collaborative learning		
Understand the dynamics of student motivation		
Understands and practices ethical conduct in teaching		
Has a basic understanding of how students learn		
Other?		
Design effective courses		
Drafts motivating course desscriptions		
Articulates learning objectives		
Designs effective assignments and projects		
Selects appropriate and dynamic teaching methods		
Selects useful and effective readings		
Determines and communicates course policies		
Other?		

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Uses a variety of teaching methods and strategies		
Prepares and gives effective lectures		
Handles student questions to promote learning		
Asks effective questions to promote learning		
Ably facilitates discussions		
Designs and guides effective group learning activities		
Models effective problem solving		
Knows and uses instructional technology selectively		
Guides student writing activities to promote learning		
Organizes effective case studies for student learning		
Guides student debates effectively		
Teaches students to do research as a learning activity		
Incorporates service learning in the classroom community		
Fosters improvement of student writing skills		
Other?		
Makes effective oral presentations		
Prepares and gives effective lectures		
Explains concepts clearly		
Asks good questions		
Responds to student questions effectively		
Use visuals to support oral presentations		
Other?		
Assess student learning fairly		
Designs and uses grading rubrics		
Gives students oral feedback		

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Gives students station-to-station feedback in labs, studios, or group work		
Creates effective assignments		
Designs clear and meaningful examinations		
Designs interesting and realistic student research projects		
Other?		
Assesses her or his own teaching on an ongoing basis		
Keep a teaching log		
Uses Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)		
Elicits and makes use of midterm evaluations of teaching		
Administers end-of-semester teaching evaluations		
Works profitably with teaching evaluations		
Assembles and updates a teaching portfolio as part of effective teaching department		
Other?		
Advises and mentors students		
Knows what constitutes effective mentoring		
Knows how to resolve conflicts that may occur in mentoring		
Other?		
Knows the field of higher education		
Is familiar with the Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education		
Knows the responsibilities of faculty at different types of institution		
Is aware of and participates in professional associations		

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Knows and consults the teaching publications in his or her field		
Other?		
Understands the role of teaching in the job search process		
Knows how to respond to requests for teaching materials in job announcements		
Understands how to present teaching to different types of institutions		
Is familiar with campus resources to help present teaching in the academic job search		
Other?		
Competent in Subject Matter		
Knows and continues to learn the discipline		
Other?		

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Resources for Professionalization as a Teacher

All items marked (GSI TRC) are available at the GSI Teaching & Resource Center Library

<u>Skillfully Fosters a Classroom Learning Community</u>

- GSI Professional Standards and Ethics Online Course, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/ethics/index.html
- Teaching Guide for GSIs, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/
- Teaching Effectiveness Award Essays, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-onlinelibrary/teaching-effectiveness-essays/topical-index-to-teaching-effectiveness-awardessays/
- Barkeley, Cross, and Major (2005), Collaborative Learning Techniques (GSI TRC) · Felder, Index of Learning Styles, https://www.engr.ncsu.edu/stem-resources/legacysite/learning-styles/
- Galvin (1991), "Building an Interactive Learning Community," ch. 34 in Nyquist et al., Preparing the Future Professoriate (GSI TRC)
- Gardner (1993), Multiple Intelligences (GSI TRC)
- Ramsden (2003), Learning to Teach in Higher Education, 2nd ed. (GSI TRC)
- Sarasin (1998), Learning Style Perspectives (GSI TRC)
- Wlodkowski (1999), "Establishing Inclusion," ch. 4 in Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn (GSI TRC)

<u>Designs Effective Courses</u>

- GSI TRC workshop series on syllabus design, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programsservices/workshops-seminars-institutes/fall-workshops/
- GSI TRC handout, "Step-by-Step Syllabus Design" (GSI TRC)
- Center for Teaching & Learning, "Syllabus Design," https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/design/syllabus
- Department pedagogy course/pedagogy instructor
- Davis (2009), "The Comprehensive Course Syllabus," in Tools for Teaching, 2nd ed. (GSI TRC)
- Davis (2009), "Designing or Revising a Course" in Tools for Teaching, 2nd ed. (GSI TRC)

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- Fink (2003), Creating Significant Learning Experiences (GSI TRC)
- Fink (2003), A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning, https://www.deefinkandassociates.com/GuidetoCourseDesignAug05.pdf
- Prégent, Charting Your Course (GSI TRC)
- Richlin (2006), Blueprint for Learning: Constructing College Courses to Facilitate, Document, and Assess Learning (GSI TRC)

Uses a Variety of Teaching Methods and Strategies Effectively
- Teaching Guide for GSIs, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/
- Teaching Effectiveness Award Essays, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-onlinelibrary/teaching-effectiveness-essays/topical-index-to-teaching-effectiveness-awardessays/
- GSI TRC workshop series on teaching, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programsservices/workshops-seminars-institutes/fall-workshops/
- Research, Teaching, and Learning, https://rtl.berkeley.edu/
- Digital Learning Services, https://dls.berkeley.edu/
- UCB Library, Information for Faculty and Instructors, "Teaching Support," https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/information/faculty
- Department mentors, department pedagogy course/pedagogy instructor • Bligh (2000), What's the Use of Lectures? (GSI TRC)
- Boice (1994), First-Order Principles for College Teachers (GSI TRC)
- Brookfield and Preskill (1999), Discussion as a Way of Teaching (GSI TRC)
- Davis (2009), Tools for Teaching, 2nd ed. (GSI TRC)
- Neff and Weimer (1989), Classroom Communication: Collected Readings for Effective Discussion and Questioning
- Disciplinary journals on teaching

Makes Effective Oral Presentations
- Bligh (2000), What's the Use of Lectures? (GSI TRC)

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- Davis (2009), "Preparing to Teach the Large-Enrollment Course," in Tools for Teaching, 2nd ed. (GSI TRC)
- Garston and Wellman (1992), How to Make Presentations that Teach and Transform (GSI TRC)
- Neff and Weimer (1989), Classroom Communication: Collected Readings for Effective Discussion and Questioning (GSI TRC)

Effectively Assesses Student Learning
- Teaching Guide for GSIs, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/
- GSI TRC workshop series on teaching, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programsservices/workshops-seminars-institutes/fall-workshops/
- Department pedagogy seminar/pedagogy instructor
- Davis (2009), "Grading Practices," in Tools for Teaching, 2nd ed. (GSI TRC)
- Walvoord and Anderson (1998), Effective Grading (GSI TRC)

Assesses Teaching on an Ongoing Basis
- Teaching Guide for GSIs, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/
- Department pedagogy seminar/pedagogy instructor
- Student evaluations
- Brookfield (1995), Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher (GSI TRC)
- D'Angelo and Cross (1993), Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers (GSI TRC)

Advises and Mentors Students
- GSI TRC course, Becoming an Effective Mentor, GSPDP 301, Spring Semester, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programs-services/workshops-seminars-institutes/gspdp/
- Canton and James (1999), Mentoring in Higher Education: Best Practices • Johnson (2007), On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty (GSI TRC)

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- The Mentor: Innovative Scholarship on Academic Advising, https://journals.psu.edu/mentor/index
- National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine (1997), Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend (GSI TRC)

Understands the Field of Higher Education

- Graduate Division, Summer Institute for Preparing Future Faculty, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programs-services/workshops-seminars-institutes/summerinstitute/
- Career Center, https://career.berkeley.edu/Phds/Phds
- Department mentors and advisors
- Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, https://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/
- Boice (1992), The New Faculty Member (GSI TRC)
- Chronicle of Higher Education, https://chronicle.com/
- Inside Higher Ed, https://www.insidehighered.com/
- Tomorrow's Professor Listserv, https://tomprof.stanford.edu/welcome

Has Prepared Adequately for the Job Market

- GSI TRC workshops on teaching and the academic job search (videos available), https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programs-services/workshops-seminars-institutes/fallworkshops/
- GSI TRC consultations on teaching portfolios, statements of teaching philosophy, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programs-services/consultations/
- Graduate Division, Summer Institute for Preparing Future Faculty, https://gsi.berkeley.edu/programs-services/workshops-seminars-institutes/summerinstitute/
- Career Center, "Academic Job Search – The Hiring Process form the Other Side," https://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDhiring
- Career Center, "PhDs - The Transition from Graduate Student to Assistant Professor," https://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDtransition

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- Department mentors and advisors
- Department placement program/committee
- Chronicle of Higher Education jobs list, https://jobs.chronicle.com/
- Science Careers, https://www.science.org/careers

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Steps You can Take as a Graduate Student

For Beginning GSIs

- Participate in the Teaching Conference for GSIs sponsored by GSI TRC
- Take departmental pedagogy seminar
- Complete GSI Online Course on Professional Standards and Ethics in Teaching
- Have faculty member observe your teaching and give feedback
- Observe a peer teaching
- Keep a teaching log
- Read the Teaching Guide for GSIs
- Read Teaching Effectiveness Award essays from GSIs in your discipline
- Conduct a mid-semester evaluation of your teaching
- Experiment with Classroom Assessment Techniques, e.g., the Minute Paper
- Analyze your end-of-semester evaluations and set goals for improvement

For Intermediate GSIs

- Diversify your teaching methods
- Have your teaching videotaped and get feedback from a trained consultant (a free GSI Center service)
- Develop a statement of teaching philosophy
- Attend Workshops on Teaching (provided by the GSI Center) in areas you would like to improve
- Join the Tomorrow's Professor listserv
- Read up in the literature on teaching and learning that interests you
- Prepare and give a lecture; consider having it videotaped
- Learn how to design and use a grading rubric
- Learn how to use a learning management system (e.g., bCourses) to enhance student participation

For Advanced GSIs

- Diversify your teaching experience
- Take the GSI Center's workshop series on syllabus and course design
- Design a course you would like to teach

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- If the opportunity exists, teach a course you have created
- Take workshop on developing a teaching portfolio
- Create a teaching portfolio
- Look at job announcements in your field to determine teaching materials requested
- Attend Career Center workshops on applying for academic jobs
- Participate in the Graduate Division's Summer Institute for Preparing Future Faculty
- Other steps you can take?

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Make Your Plan

Identify three teaching competencies that you would like to develop between now and the time you complete your degree at Berkeley. Prioritize them according to how important each area is for the teaching you will do as a faculty member.

What steps will you take and what resources and opportunities will you draw on to develop these skills?

1. Teaching Competency:

   Steps you will take to develop this skill:

2. Teaching Competency:

   Steps you will take to develop this skill:

3. Teaching Competency:

   Steps you will take to develop this skill:

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Developing a Teaching Portfolio

A teaching portfolio documents your teaching activities and provides an excellent way to discuss your teaching with colleagues and with potential employers on the academic job market.

Materials to assist GSIs in developing a teaching portfolio are available in the online library.

You might also be interested in the workshops the GSI Center regularly offers on developing a statement of teaching philosophy and developing a teaching portfolio.

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Writing Letters of Recommendation

Many undergraduates ask their GSIs for letters of recommendation. Undergraduates sometimes feel more comfortable approaching a GSI than they would a faculty member. Furthermore, GSIs for large lecture courses often have more individual contact with undergraduates than faculty members do, and thus are often in a better position to write a detailed letter of recommendation. So, how do you write a good letter of recommendation?

Before You Write the Letter

Paragraph by Paragraph

Dos and Don'ts

Sample Letter of Recommendation

For More Information

Before You Write the Letter

First, decide if you are the best person to write the letter. A letter of recommendation from a faculty member will carry more weight than a letter from a GSI. However, GSIs often know students better than faculty members do and may be able to write a more detailed, and thus more useful, letter. One solution may be for the GSI to write the letter and have it co-signed by the faculty member.

Ask the student what motivated him or her to ask you. Also ask if there are others who might be asked. Sometimes a student may be shy to ask someone else, and you can reassure the student or encourage the student to ask a professor.

Also, decide whether you can honestly recommend the student. If not, suggest that he or she consider asking another person. For example, if you feel that you cannot honestly recommend the student, or you feel that you cannot do so wholeheartedly, you may wish to suggest to the student that someone else might be in a better position to write the recommendation letter.

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Discuss with the student the institution, program, or field of study to which he or she is applying. This will help you to decide whether you can recommend the student and give you a greater sense of what to include in or exclude from the letter. Your letter should point out how the student's particular strengths fit well with the chosen discipline.

Ask the student for a list of materials that must be completed by you, together with a list of the due dates and websites or addresses to which the materials must be submitted. If the student is applying to more than one institution, ask for all the relevant materials for different institutions in different envelopes or folders. Check that the student has signed any relevant waivers or other forms. In addition, if the materials are to be delivered through regular mail, check that the student has provided a stamped, addressed envelope in which to place each completed recommendation.

Request copies of papers or exams that the student has submitted in your course to help you recall the details of their work. It is extremely important to give specific examples to back up your more general claims. This is easier to do if you have copies of past work in front of you when you are writing the letter. It is also helpful to check the grade records, if they are available, for many recommendation forms ask you to state the student's position in the class (for example, in the top 5%, 10%, etc.).

Paragraph by Paragraph

Letters of recommendation differ; however, most good letters of recommendation need at least three paragraphs containing the following types of information. In many disciplines, the letter should spill over onto a second page, if possible. (However, it is a good idea to ask the student if there are conventions or application guidelines to be aware of; some programs may require a single page recommendation letter, for instance.)

Identify yourself and the student. Explain your affiliation, the capacity in which you have come to know the student, and for how long you have known him or her. Include course names as well as course numbers. State what grades the student

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earned in your course and mention how you would rank the student in relation to other students whom you have known in the past. For example, did the student submit the best paper on nuclear disarmament that you have read in the last ten years? Did she excel at a particular activity or fall in the top 2% of students that you have taught in some specific respect?

Discuss the student's strengths and weaknesses. Be sure to give concrete examples to back up more general statements. Specificity is very important in a letter of recommendation. Make detailed reference to specific projects or activities in which the student participated, or specific work that was produced. You should discuss some or all of the following:

- Intellectual ability (overall intelligence, analytical skills, creativity, academic record, retention of information)
- Knowledge of area of specialty (depth and breadth of knowledge, use and knowledge of methodology, experience)
- Communication skills (writing skills, oral articulateness)
- Personal qualities (industry, self-discipline, motivation, maturity, initiative, flexibility, leadership qualities, team working skills, perseverance, energy, competitiveness)
- Suitability for graduate study or profession
- Conclude by recommending the student based on his or her performance in your class and on personal strengths and weaknesses

Dos and Don'ts

When working on a letter of recommendation for a student, bear in mind both practices that are helpful and ones that are unhelpful.

Dos

- Do be specific. Mention examples of the student's work, projects completed, activities, and so forth. If your memory is not clear, either ask the student to give you some work samples or suggest the student ask someone else who knows him or her better to write the letter.

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- Do be objective. Report examples, events, and so forth, as much as possible. If you want to attest to a student's interpersonal skills, discuss how you observed the student's interactions with others, rather than merely state what a "nice person" she or he is.
- Do be both honest and positive. If you have negative things to say, ask the student to find another letter writer. Obviously, saying negative things about a student's performance will have serious consequences on the student's chances at the job, scholarship, or acceptance being sought. Remember that your experience with the student may not be typical, so the student should find only someone who can say positive things. In addition, writing negative things can potentially affect you as well, if there is ever any doubt about the reliability of your judgment with respect to the student.
- Do be neat, type the letter, and check spelling and grammar. A letter that contains spelling or grammatical errors, or is sloppily presented, may not carry as much weight as one that is professionally presented and well-written.
- Do sign the letter in ink (if applicable).
- Do supply contact information such as your name, title, institution, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.
- Do be aware of potential ambiguities and words with negative connotations. Also, be aware that what you omit to mention may be seen as just as important as what you do mention.

Don'ts
- Don't use bland words such as nice, fairly, satisfactory, good. If you cannot honestly recommend the student more strongly, suggest that she or he ask someone else to write the letter.
- Don't refer to characteristics such as race or nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, appearance, disability, marital status, etc., which could be construed as discriminatory. For example, don't say things such as, "John did very well in my class despite his obvious disabilities...."

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Sample Letter of Recommendation

The sample letter linked below is formatted for use on University letterhead. Some institutions to which your students apply now have online forms for recommendation letters. In that case, provide the information requested and paste your final letter into the letter area on the form.

Sample letter of recommendation (pdf)

For More Information

Guidelines for Writing Letters of Reference, published by the UC Berkeley Career Center, provides information on writing effective letters of recommendation. It provides guidelines for writing letters intended for academic graduate schools as well as for business, law, and health professional programs.

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Sample Letter of Recommendation

[University letterhead]

[sender's name]
[sender's departmental address - if not printed on letterhead]
[sender's departmental phone number, if available]
[sender's departmental fax number - if not printed on letterhead]
[sender's institutional email address]

[today's date]

[recipient's name]
[recipient's institutional address]

Dear [recipient's name]: *or* To Whom it May Concern:

It is my pleasure to recommend Jane Doe for admission to [name of program] at [name of university]. I am a fifth-year Ph.D. student at the University of California, Berkeley. I came to know Jane when I was her Graduate Student Instructor for Philosophy 111: Ethical Relativism, taught by Professor John Smith. The course comprised [short description of course]. Jane distinguished herself by submitting an exceptionally well researched and interesting project on ethical practices in ancient Greece. I would rank her in the top 2% of students that I have taught in the past five years in respect of her writing ability and research skills.

Overall, Jane is highly intelligent and has good analytical skills. Her project on ethical practices in ancient Greece demonstrated her ability to come to a detailed understanding of the ethical practices of another, very different, culture, and to analyze the consequences of those practices for contemporary ethical theories. She gave a particularly interesting discussion of the difficult practice of infanticide, and showed both sensitivity and detachment when discussing its ethical consequences. Her overall intelligence is also reflected in her grades for the course, which were by far the best in the class.

Jane has excellent communication skills. Her written work is both clear and concise, as well as interesting to read. She demonstrated her oral articulateness in the discussion sections that were an integral part of the course. Each discussion section focused on a particular ethical dilemma.

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Students were required to analyze morally problematic situations, and to develop and argue for their own ethical views with regard to the issue in question. Jane was highly proficient in applying the course material in analyzing the problem situations. She always explained her views very concisely and gave supporting arguments that were both clear and persuasive. Jane also demonstrated good teamwork skills in group assignments.

At a personal level, Jane is a well-disciplined, industrious student with a pleasant personality. She went well beyond the course requirements in the quantity and quality of her project, putting in a lot of extra research and attending office hours every week. Throughout the course, Jane demonstrated great perseverance and initiative. Not only was she interested in and motivated to learn the material, but she also put great work into assimilating it to her own experience and developing her own ideas about each ethical topic that we discussed.

Jane is unquestionably an exceptional candidate for graduate study in Ethics. Jane's work in Philosophy 111 suggests that she would greatly benefit from the opportunities for intellectual development provided by a sustained period of graduate study. She has proven herself to have the perseverance, initiative, and intellectual creativity necessary to complete an advanced graduate degree. I would therefore highly recommend Jane Doe. If her performance in my class is a good indication of how she would perform as a graduate student, she would be an extremely positive asset to your program.

If I can be of any further assistance, or provide you with any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

[sender's signature]

[sender's name and title]