

## Parameters, Guidelines, and Duties for Graduate Teaching Assistants (TA) in online English undergraduate courses.

- TAs must be active MA English students who have completed at least 6 credits of graduate work at Mercy College prior to the semester in which they assist in an online classroom.
- TAs must submit the proper employment forms to Mercy College, and any other required forms, and demonstrate through the forms that the applicant meets the criteria for assisting in a classroom and for being employed by Mercy College.
- TAs must complete online Blackboard training before starting to assist in a classroom. Basic training involving, usually, Blackboard 102, 201, and 202, must be completed, and, depending on how exactly the instructor of record intends to employ the TA, more advanced training might be required.
- TAs may not be employed in any way by the instructor of record as a substitute instructor, where the effect is to relieve the instructor of record of any of his or her teaching responsibilities. The TA is only to assist and supplement the instructor in select areas.
- TAs are not allowed to interact with students in a real-time synchronous environment in or outside of Blackboard without the presence of the instructor of record. All correspondence with students must be had within the Blackboard shell whether in discussions, in Blackboard email, or in documents exchanged within the shell; or through @mercy.edu email accounts.
- TAs will usually be employed for 45 hours overall for a 15 week fall or spring semester, and 30 hours overall for a 10 week summer semester. This translates to 3 hours per week, on average. TAs should keep a record (dates, times) of when they are tending to course responsibilities, whether within the Blackboard shell (for example, when reading + responding to discussions) or outside of the Blackboard shell (for example, when reading + generating feedback for student writing). TAs will need to complete weekly time-sheet reports for the college in order to get paid.
- Prior to entering the course the TA, instructor of record, and Program Director and/or Department Chair must converse through email (so that it is in writing) and agree upon the TA's duties and general scheduling of them for the semester ahead. Generally speaking, the instructor should begin by prioritizing the items from the list below (and can propose and prioritize different items than those listed below), and should devise a plan for how specifically they would like the TA to assist during the semester. TAs should be given *one* major duty to focus on throughout the semester, whichever one the instructor of record lists as the top priority for that semester. TAs must not be asked to do *all* of the things listed below. The TA and Director/Chair will review and as necessary propose changes to the instructor's proposal for the semester to ensure that it is reasonable, fair, and works within the guidelines listed on this form. All parties need to signal their agreement to the plan prior to the TA assisting in the class.

Possible/suggested duties include:

1. Mentoring students on sentence mechanics (e.g. grammar, punctuation, etc.)

For example: This might take the form of having the TA write up a grammar-critique of each student's weekly discussion post and sending that critique to the students privately in Blackboard email. Or, it might take the form of the instructor assigning the TA to create, administer, and provide feedback on a grammar worksheet, quiz, or other activity each week. Or, it might take the form of the TA doing nothing specific on a weekly basis and instead waiting for the instructor to send various students, at various times in the semester, to the TA for tutoring with any particular assignment. It might take any other form that the instructor imagines.

2. Mentoring students on essay mechanics (thesis statement, topic sentence, paragraph structure, development and flow of ideas, etc.).

This might be implemented in one or some of the same ways as suggested above for sentence-mechanic assistance, or in any other way the instructor might imagine.

3. Responding to student discussion posts, blog posts, or journal assignments.

Perhaps instead of having the TA tutor the students in writing, an instructor might have the TA take the lead each week in responding to and helping to develop the ideas students express in weekly discussion forums.

4. (For ENGL 112) Mentoring students on research activities and effective/accurate implementation of research elements in an essay.

An instructor might assign the TA to focus on a small group of students in the class, perhaps two or three each week (depending on class size), and provide those students with lessons on how to do research using online databases, how to weigh the quality of sources, how to select quotes and integrate them into a paper, how to cite. Perhaps the TA could repeat the same lesson each week with the next group of students. Or perhaps the instructor assigns the TA to lead the entire class each week in one research lesson or activity. Or perhaps the instructor just establishes the TA as the point person for fielding any questions about research throughout the semester. Or perhaps the instructor gives the TA a dedicated discussion thread to monitor on the subject each week.

5. Responding to drafts of student essays or of other writing assignments.

Perhaps the TA doesn't do any regular weekly activity inside of the class shell but instead does the first pass/critique of essay drafts, whenever they are due throughout the semester.

6. Other tasks that the instructor might propose.

Those are just some ideas for how an instructor might put a TA to work. Again, the idea is to assign each TA one major such duty to do during the semester, whatever duty each instructor determines is the one that could best help improve student success and learning.

TA Qualifications and Selection:

TAs will be awarded on a competitive basis to students who have completed at least 6 hours of graduate work at Mercy College. In order to be considered for a TA position applicants must submit to the Program Director (cloots@mercy.edu) the following:

1. Resume
2. A recommendation from any MA faculty. This does not have to be a formal letter. It can just be a brief email from the faculty member expressing their support. If the faculty member sends such an email of support to the applicant, the applicant can forward that email to the Program Director. Or the faculty member could send the email directly to the Program Director.
3. A short statement of purpose; just a paragraph or two (between 200 and 400 words) expressing why you are interested in being a TA in a Mercy classroom
4. A short statement of teaching philosophy; just a paragraph or two (between 200 and 400 words) expressing your conception of what teaching is, and/or of how to effectively teach/assist English composition students.
5. The completion of a essay-critique activity, to be provided.