



Teaching Assistant Guide for Remote Teaching

The MacPherson Institute is here to support you as you prepare for, and engage in, remote teaching in the fall 2021 term.

Fall 2021

Getting Started

The MacPherson Institute is here to support you as you prepare for, and engage in, remote teaching in the Fall 2021 term. The [Learning Remotely for Students Welcome Package](#) and the [Teaching Remotely Welcome Package for TAs](#), along with this Teaching Assistant Guide for Remote Teaching, are three key resources that you should consider reading as a starting point.

As always, when you receive notice of securing a Teaching Assistant (TA) position, your first step should be to reach out to your employment supervisor so you can discuss your position and fill out the TA Hours of Work Form – this virtual meeting should take place within five days of your start date as a TA. The Hours of Work Form not only specifies what duties you will perform, but also how many hours you will devote to each task. Your meeting with your employment supervisor should be included in your contract hours. A copy of the Hours of Work Form can be found online on [McMaster's Human Resources Services website](#). Some key questions you may want to ask at your first virtual meeting with your employment supervisor, include:

1. What will my TA duties entail?
2. How will my hours of work be distributed across my duties?
3. What technologies will I be expected to know how to use?
 - You may find the [Educational Technologies & Skills Development Checklist for Teaching Assistants \(TAs\)](#) helpful as you and your employment supervisor work to identify the technologies you should be able to use, and what you should be able to do with each. The checklist also includes links to instructional support videos for specific tasks, including how to mark in Avenue, how to set up Zoom sessions, and how to edit videos.
4. What training should I engage in to prepare for my work?
 - As of September 2021, TAs and RAs in Lieu at McMaster University must complete five hours of Mandatory Paid TA Training outside of their TA contract hours in topics related to pedagogy and anti-oppression. These five hours of training are separate from, and in addition to, other training that may already take place in the form of general Departmental TA orientations, institution-wide mandatory health and safety training, and assignment-specific health and safety training. You must complete these five hours of training within two weeks of starting your contract. For most TAs, this training will consist of online asynchronous workshops offered via Avenue to Learn. Information for registering will be on your Hours of Work Form. Check with your Faculty/Department/Program/School and/or supervisor for information on which workshops to complete.
 - Any other training that you are asked to complete by your employment supervisor outside of the above mentioned training should be accounted for in your hours of work.
 - Training deemed to be not mandatory (i.e., optional training) will not be accounted for in your hours of work (i.e., it will not be paid training).
5. What are the expectations regarding my online availability?
 - This may look for different for each TA depending on how a course is being offered in Fall 2021. Some courses have components (lectures, tutorials, seminars, or labs) that

are scheduled by the registrar's office and will be offered synchronously or face-to-face. These are noted in mosaic as virtual components and in-person components, respectively. Courses may also have online components (lectures, tutorials, seminars or labs) that are not scheduled by the registrar's office and are intended to be available to students asynchronously.

6. Will any of my duties require that I be recorded?
 - If the answer is “yes” and you feel comfortable being recorded, familiarize yourself with the recording technology that you will be using, as well as any guidelines regarding how to produce quality recordings (tips related to starting and stopping the recording, sound quality, accessibility, captioning, etc.).
 - If the answer is “yes” and you feel uncomfortable being recorded, discuss this with your employment supervisor so the two of you can come up with an alternate option that will work for both of you.
7. How frequently should I communicate with you, and what is the best way for me to do so?

Educational Technologies

Some commonly used technologies that are supported at McMaster include:

- Avenue to Learn
- MacVideo
- Echo360
- Zoom: Web Conferencing
- Microsoft Teams
- Online Proctoring: Respondus
- Camtasia Screen Recorder and Video Editing
- PowerPoint (Present Live)

A description of each of these technologies, as well as related resources, can be found on the [Supported Tools tab](#) of [MacPherson Institute’s Teaching Remotely website](#). Free online workshops on some of these educational technologies are also available via Mandatory Paid TA Training or [The MacPherson Institute -Teaching Remotely Resources channel](#) on the [MacVideo website](#).

If you are unfamiliar with teaching and learning in an online environment, take some time to familiarize yourself with [MacPherson Institute’s Teaching Remotely Guide](#). As an introduction to teaching remotely, the guide shares best practices, tips, and links to resources for teaching in virtual or online classrooms (please see the [Teaching Remotely tab](#) of MacPherson Institute’s Teaching Remotely website for definitions of these terms). If you have the opportunity to choose which educational technology you will use in your role as a TA, the guide includes a comprehensive overview of key features for each of the educational technologies noted above to help you make that decision. If you know that your supervisor or the program is already using a particular technology to engage with students, if possible, try to use that same technology when you engage with students, if possible, as this will help to streamline students’ learning experiences.

It is likely that you will need to know how to use Avenue to Learn, McMaster's Learning Management System. Avenue to Learn often serves as the course home where TAs and students will be able to find announcements from the course instructor, course content (e.g., the course syllabus, lesson materials), discussion forums, assignment submission folders (where you will access and provide feedback on students' assignments), the grade book, and much, much more. Great resources regarding how to use Avenue to Learn can be found on the [Support tab](#) on the [Avenue to Learn login website](#). Moreover, the [Avenue to Learn Knowledge Base](#) provides tutorials, FAQs, update notifications, and other helpful tools.

Netiquette and McMaster's Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities

Whether teaching in face-to-face or online settings, at McMaster the principles of mutual respect, responsibility, dignity, and consideration for the well-being of others must be upheld. For example, if teaching online, online etiquette known as netiquette should be followed. Netiquette is the standard for communicating and good behaviour on the internet, which applies to all online communication—from email to the online classroom to social media platforms. Individuals are encouraged to think before they type, treat others with respect, and to act online as they would in person. If a course requires an individual to connect with others via video or web-conferencing, they should ensure that they are dressed appropriately and that their background is free of any offensive materials.

A person's ability to understand and interpret what someone thinks, means, or feels is limited when communicating online. To facilitate effective communication online, here are some tips that you can follow and share with your students:

- Avoid writing in all capital letters - it is often perceived as aggression.
- Avoid using sarcasm or humour that could be misinterpreted.
- Ask for clarification if you would like help in understanding what an individual has written.
- Be respectful when you encounter an individual who has opposing viewpoints to your own. Don't insult them or make personal remarks. Take a break if you feel you need time to calm down, and respond at a later time, asking for clarification regarding intent.

Using technology to target, humiliate, harass, threaten or embarrass another person, commonly referred to as cyber-bullying, is unacceptable. These actions can include making insults, trolling, cyber-stalking, excluding others from discussions or posting images online without permission. Cyber-bullying may not only violate University policies, but it can even be against the law. To prevent cyber-bullying, individuals should simply treat others as they would want to be treated. In keeping with [McMaster's Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), all students share responsibility in maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, whether in person or online.

As a TA, your role goes beyond simply reminding students of expectations of netiquette and McMaster's Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities. You also need to be aware of the privacy and security settings of any virtual platform you plan to use in your teaching so you can work to prevent opportunities for unwanted, disruptive behaviour, and know how to take appropriate action if and when it occurs. For example, you should know how to mute the virtual class, mute an individual student, remove an individual student, and abruptly end the session for all students if need be.

If a student makes a problematic or inflammatory comment in your learning environment, consider the ACTION model (Souza, 2018) as a means of addressing it.

- **Ask** clarifying questions to help with understanding (e.g., “I want to ensure I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that...”)
- **Come** from a place of curiosity rather than judgment. Listen to their response. If they disagree with your paraphrase and clarify a different meaning, you may be able to end the conversation there. If not and they stand by their original comment, explore the intent behind their meaning to encourage learning (“Please tell me what you meant by that?”).
- **Tell** the student what you observed as problematic in a factual manner (e.g., “I noticed that...”).
- **Impact** exploration - Ask for, and/or state, the potential impact of such a comment on others (e.g., “How do you think other people feel when they hear a comment like this?”).
- **Own** your own thoughts and feelings regarding the impact (e.g., “When I hear a comment like this I tend to think/feel...”).
- **Next steps** – request that appropriate action be taken (e.g., “At McMaster the principles of mutual respect, responsibility, dignity, and consideration for the well-being of others must be upheld. In the future, please refrain from making comments that are disrespectful to others.”).

Regardless of whether you choose to use this model, if a student breaches netiquette or McMaster’s Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities guidelines, be sure to respond quickly to the situation, and let the instructor know immediately so you can document and follow-up on the incident. For disruptions that are particularly egregious, you may also want to consider emailing McMaster Student Support and Case Management at sscmo@mcmaster.ca for support. This will provide you with an opportunity to consult with a case manager who can address your concerns.

Teaching Resources and Supports

Beyond technology, you may have many other teaching- and learning-related questions as you prepare for, and engage in, your work as a TA this term. Some key resources and supports that you should be aware of include:

Online Teaching Development Events/Workshops/Courses

- **TA Drop-In Sessions with an Educational Developer:** At the beginning of each term, the MacPherson Institute hosts several virtual drop-in sessions where TAs can ask questions about various teaching and learning topics. This is also a great opportunity to ask about McMaster’s new Mandatory Paid TA training should you have any questions. The dates for Fall 2021 are included below. Please register [here](#).
 - Thursday, September 9 from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM
 - Friday, September 10 from 9:30 AM to 10:30 Am
 - Monday, September 13 from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM
 - Tuesday, September 14 from 2:30 to 3:30 PM
 - Thursday, September 16 from 9:00 to 10:00 AM

- **Professional Development in Teaching Hub:** The PD in Teaching offers a variety of workshops on topics in teaching and learning. You can self-enrol in Avenue to Learn via the Discover tab. Please remember that any training that you are asked to complete by your employment supervisor should be accounted for in your hours of work. Training deemed to be not mandatory (i.e., optional training) will not be accounted for in your hours of work (i.e., it will not be paid training).
- **Online Training Offered Broadly by the MacPherson Institute:** As a TA, you are also welcome to register for any upcoming online workshops noted on the [Training and Development Events tab](#) on MacPherson Institute's Teaching Remotely website.
- **MacPherson Institute's Five EDUCATN Courses:** The MacPherson Institute is proud to offer [Teaching and Learning Certificates of Completion](#) for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Throughout their studies, these individuals may earn one, or both, of two certificates of completion offered. The Teaching and Learning Foundations Certificate of Completion requires completion of EDUCATN 600: Essential Skills in Teaching and Learning I and EDUCATN 650: Peer-Evaluated Teaching Experience. The Teaching and Learning Scholar Certificate of Completion requires these two courses, in addition to three others, namely EDUCATN 700: Essential Skills in Teaching and Learning II, EDUCATN 751: Principles and Practices of University Teaching, and EDUCATN 760: Self-Directed Study. All courses are free, zero-unit, pass/fail, graduate-level courses. Graduate students register in Mosaic. Postdoctoral fellows register by emailing hynese@mcmaster.ca and requesting that their name be added to a class list. Registration generally opens one month before the beginning of each term (i.e., on August 1, December 1, and April 1 for the Fall, Winter, and Spring/Summer terms respectively). Registration is first come, first served. There are no waitlists maintained for the courses.

Online Teaching Guides and Asynchronous Content

- **[McMaster Teaching Assistant Guide](#):** This guide covers the basics, from TA roles and responsibilities at McMaster to how to teach in an accessible and inclusive manner, plan a lesson, engage students in active learning, assess and provide feedback on student learning, and document your teaching effectiveness. One section that TAs tend to find particularly helpful is the section on common TA-related questions and challenges.
- **[Teaching Remotely Welcome Package for TAs](#):** This welcome package provides an overview of resources available to help teaching assistants with the transition to remote teaching, including upcoming training sessions.
- **[Learning Remotely for Students Welcome Package](#):** This welcome package features a collection of resources intended to help instructors and teaching assistants support students as they transition to learning remotely. Consult these references for advice, tips, and strategies to help your students succeed in an online learning environment.
- **[McMaster's Inclusive Teaching and Learning Guide](#):** In this guide, you will be introduced to five broad principles for inclusive teaching and see concrete examples of how to put the principles into practice.
- **[Forward with FLEXibility: A Teaching and Learning Resource on Accessibility and Inclusion](#):** Modules 1, 2, 3, and 5 are particularly relevant to TAs. They will teach you about the foundational principles of inclusive instruction/accessible education and how to apply those principles in your teaching/TA duties.

- **[E-Learning Section of McMaster's Accessibility Hub](#)**: Here, TAs will find accessibility support in developing accessible content for digital media, including Word, PowerPoint, Email, and some presentation techniques for recording presentations accessibly. Additionally, there is accessibility-related information for McMaster's supported tools, and a remote teaching and captioning guide.
- **[Accessible Documents Webinar Series](#)**: In this series hosted on MacVideo, you will find how-to webinars dedicated to creating accessible documents (e.g., accessible PowerPoints, Word documents, PDFs, and Excel files), as well as good practices for using various technologies accessibly (e.g., accessible usage of Outlook and Microsoft Teams).
- **[McMaster Office for the Development of English-Language Learners \(MODEL\)](#)**: MODEL offers free services (e.g., workshops and one-on-one consultations) to both undergraduate and graduate students who may need support developing their English-language skills.
- **[The Library Remote Support Hub](#)**: Whether you're teaching, learning, or researching remotely, The Library Remote Support Hub has been designed to help you with your information needs. From accessing books online and connecting to electronic resources remotely, to requesting a research consultation and seeking media creation support, the Library Remote Support Hub can be of assistance.
- **[CUPE 3906 Unit 1 Website](#)**: The CUPE 3906 Unit 1 website has a wealth of resources that will be of value to you in your role as a TA (e.g., the current collective agreement).

Additional Supports

- As a member of CUPE, you are eligible to access to the Employee Family Assistance Program through [Homewood Health](#). If you have questions that you would like to ask the Union, email staff@cupe3906.org.
- Please remember that if you require [academic](#) and/or [workplace accommodations](#) as you work to fulfill your TA duties, support is available to you.
- Although courses are taking place in a remote teaching format, please remind students that most of the regular campus supports are still available to them, though possibly in an alternate format. For example, if your students are looking for extra attention to build their writing and study skills, The Student Success Centre's Academic Skills team is facilitating one on one appointments in the following areas: 1) The Writing Centre - offers writing assistance for both undergraduate and graduate students, and 2) Academic Coaching - mentorship is offered with respect to study, time management, and critical thinking skills for undergraduate students. The Student Success Centre also offers group workshops and customized sessions (by request) year-round. Students can book all services on OSCARplus. Questions can be emailed to: skills@mcmaster.ca.

To receive important updates, upcoming events, and useful resources right to your inbox, consider subscribing to MacPherson Institute's weekly e-newsletter, the [MacPherson Memo](#).