Head TA Evaluation Instructions:

Your role in this evaluation is to provide advice as an experienced peer. Your feedback about common problems will help new TAs become better instructors.

Before the Discussion
1. Choose a discussion that fits your schedule. If possible, choose a second or third discussion so the TA can feel more relaxed with the material.
2. Email the TA at least 3 days before the evaluation, and tell them which discussion you will be attending. Include the Teaching Checklist as an attachment, and ask the TA to print the page, check off three self-perceived strengths and three weaknesses, and give it to you at the end of the discussion.

During the Discussion
1. Arrive on time. If the discussion is full, sit in a chair rather than a desk.
2. You can choose to participate in small groups as an interested observer, or just sit quietly in the corner. The TA can choose to introduce you as "a visiting discussion leader" or not.
3. Take notes. Write down:
   a. The time each new activity or event occurs
   b. What the activity was
   c. What worked well for that activity and what can be improved
4. Avoid getting sidetracked with your laptop or cell phone. Be a courteous guest.
5. Collect the TA’s copy of the Teaching Checklist.
6. Thank the TA for letting you visit. Tell them you will be emailing the evaluation in the next week.

After the Discussion
1. If the TA does not already post the day’s activity for download, email them to ask for digital copies of the day’s quiz and/ or activity.
2. Use your notes to create an evaluation that summarizes what you saw, and offers specific suggestions. Find positive things to say before you make suggestions for improvement (see attached samples).
3. Compare the TA’s perceived strengths and weaknesses (on the Checklist) against your own evaluation. Tell the TA what category is a strength for them, and which category you recommend focusing on next.
4. Email the TA, thanking them for the opportunity for you to visit. Include your evaluation. In the email, ask them to address or apply at least one of your suggestions during the next week, and then reply back to you with feedback.
5. CC Adrienne and the Fellows instructor (Diane or Marcelo) on the email. After the TA emails you the feedback, forward that as well.
6. Include a digital copy of the class materials if possible with your evaluation.
Examples of common situations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Appropriate response</th>
<th>Inappropriate response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worksheet is too long and has too many easy questions</td>
<td>“You clearly put in a lot of effort to make a complete worksheet that covers all of the past three lectures. Since time in discussion is so tight, I suggest trimming off everything that is easy and doing just three hard problems.”</td>
<td>“Your worksheet is much too long and easy. Do a better job picking questions.”</td>
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<td>The TA explained something incorrectly</td>
<td>“You did a good job leaving enough time for student questions, and you were supportive when they were brave enough to ask. A student asked a question about meiosis, and you answered incorrectly. That happened to me a lot during my first quarter. Be sure to email everyone with a corrected response, perhaps with a link to a good online animation of the process.”</td>
<td>“For some reason, you think the change in ploidy in meiosis occurs during the second division. Send an email and admit your mistake to your students right away.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>The TA doesn’t make students get into groups</td>
<td>“I like that you assigned groups of just three students, which is the perfect size. I noticed some students didn’t join in. Many students find working in groups harder than working independently, but studies show that group problem-solving helps the majority of students learn. I get around this by cheerfully directing each “slow to join” student to turn and participate. You should only have to “force” them one or two times, then they will know you mean it.”</td>
<td>“You are too tentative when making students work in groups, and you let them get away with working independently. MAKE them work in groups.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA has many issues to fix</td>
<td>“I know I’ve indicated several areas where I see room for improvement. It is totally normal for new TAs to have lots to fix – I know I was particularly bad at managing time in discussion AND running student presentations. Since you already have a good rapport with the students, I suggest focusing your efforts on getting help making harder worksheets and practicing your explanations of concepts before class.”</td>
<td>“Re-read all of the things I have said are a concern and try to fix them.”</td>
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In general:
- Remember to compliment them on things done well
- Give a few examples of difficulties you had when you were new
A Sample Evaluation

Adrienne Williams  
HHMI-UCI Professor Program  
adrienne.williams@uci.edu

October 26, 2009

Dear XXX,

Thank you for letting me visit your class!
Below I’ve written out your activity, and added my comments in blue italics.

Outline of Discussion

11:00am:
- You started discussion by encouraging students to come to your office hours and giving examples of how nobody visits you and you really want them to come. You also point out that the survey is online and they can give input on the class and your quizzes.
- The quizzes you give are online, and you give them several days to answer the questions. You point out that the key for the last quiz is fully annotated and online, *(a fabulous key, by the way)* but you want to go over #3 in class. You draw out the diagram of the proton pumps and cell, and work through the problem, soliciting answers from the class. *You are very enthusiastic and encouraging, but when you asked questions you were pretty willing to answer them yourself. You went quite fast on this problem, and the students seemed pretty stunned. You may need to slow things way down for hard problems like this. But what a great wicked question it was!*
- Going over question 3 caused a student to ask about #4 as well. *I also notice students didn’t do as you asked by bringing the quiz key to discussion...*

11:10:
- You have students get into groups of three and start the worksheet, which students downloaded themselves. I like that the students are responsible for bringing the class materials. *I did notice that several students did not bother to turn their desks to face their group. I always had that problem when I taught as well. I found that if I addressed them directly: “Can you turn your desk and face your group?” they would willingly do so. Sometimes I make the front groups shift toward the board to give back groups more room.*
- You move among the groups to pass out small whiteboards and pens. *You do a great job of getting students to physically move into groups and encourage them to move all their chairs towards the front to make room in the back.*

11:18:
- You start a game with the worksheet after they have a few minutes to work on the first questions. You announce a question (based on additional info on the front white board), and students have a minute to answer and write on their white boards. You
count down from five, and they need to lift their boards with an answer. The half of the room with the most groups correct gets a point. *You do a great job creating off-the-cuff questions when you see students are unsure. There’s lots of student engagement. If there are lots of wrong boards you stop and lecture.*

- *I like your questions – they are new, difficult, but relevant. You slightly digress into starch vs. cellulose, but it was a useful digression.*
- *You kind of stopped giving points for all-right answers in the middle... but it affected both groups equally.*

11:47
- You end slightly early, and give candy to the winning team.

**The Teaching Checklist:**

- You indicated on your checklist that your perceived strengths were preparing new activities, clear explanations and drawing on the board. I would add that you are also very good at understanding student questions.
- You indicated on your checklist that you felt your weaknesses were legible handwriting, knowing what material to focus on, and spending time with all groups. These are common problems and I am sure that with a few more weeks of awareness and practice, you will be able to initiate group work with more confidence and learn how to move from group to group more quickly. I would also say that the best way to know what material to focus on is to take notes in lecture and make a special notation when you felt things were confusing. If you are a bit lost, it is a good bet that the students are completely lost.

**My General Comments:**

1. I’m glad you are doing interactive work with the students. Today’s activity was great.
2. You are doing a good job of encouraging students when they respond.
3. Some of your quiet students seem to get away with not participating. You may want to think about how you can get everyone to talk in their groups.

Keep up the good work! Thank you for making your discussion interactive for your students. If you want to meet one-on-one with me, email me and we’ll set up a time.

**RESPONSE Requested:**

Please respond to this evaluation as follows:
- Pick one suggestion in the evaluation and implement it in your next discussion
- Compare your perceived strengths and weaknesses to those indicated by the Head TA.
- Send me an email after your next discussion. Describe your experience with the change (good, bad or indifferent), and what you have learned about your strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

Best,

Adrienne
Helpful Hints from Past Head TAs:

Preparing for the Evaluation:
1. Read over the Teaching Checklist as a reminder of things to look for

Writing up the Evaluation:
1. Do the write-up as soon as possible, or all the TAs will blend into one
2. Some TAs are really awesome and the evaluation can feel nit-picky. If you feel you don’t have any good feedback to offer, think about telling the TA about a good online teaching resource you found, or suggest they pursue being a Head TA or Pedagogical Fellow.

Problem TAs:
1. The “I hate active learning” TA: We have had the occasional TA refuse to do anything but lecture or Q and A during discussion. Your evaluation will have to point out that teaching using activities is a requirement of this TAship and is considered the most effective teaching style. Head TAs should contact Adrienne and the course instructor if they feel continued resistance from the TA.