FAQs About the Role of a Teaching Assistant (TA)

How can I become a TA?
The best way to become a TA is to exhibit both of the following types of behaviors. The <u>first</u> is to perform exceptionally well in the class in which you would like to become a TA. This will demonstrate to your instructor that you have mastered the knowledge and skills that are the student learning outcomes of the class. However, the mere possession of these knowledge and skills does not guarantee that you can function as a successful TA. The <u>second</u> set of essential behaviors goes beyond your ability to perform well in the class. These behaviors center on your ability to help other students to perform well in the class and to assist the professor with important aspects of the class. Examples of these skills and characteristics are as follows.

1. the <u>interpersonal skills</u> necessary to interact successfully with your instructor and her/his students who will differ widely in their academic ability, motivational level, degree of preparedness, and demographic characteristics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, and gender)
2. the ability to <u>understand and follow the written and oral instructions</u> your instructor will give you and a <u>willingness to ask for clarification</u> of these instruction if they are unclear or if you do not fully comprehend them
3. the capability of <u>communicating</u> with students in a timely, positive, and effective manner
4. the <u>initiative and persistence</u> necessary to begin and complete your assigned tasks without having to be told to do so
5. a <u>positive attitude</u> about the class, the instructor, and the students you will be helping, especially when circumstances make this difficult
6. the ability to <u>manage your time</u> effectively so you come to class, come to class on time, and come to class prepared
7. genuine <u>enthusiasm</u> about the value of the material you are teaching
8. the willingness and ability to <u>serve as an academic role model</u> for the students in the class

What will I do if I become a TA?
A TA is just that—an assistant to a teacher. TAs perform many tasks, and these tasks depend solely on what their instructors want them to do. The following is a non-exhaustive list of these tasks grouped into seven basic categories.

1. <u>Modeling appropriate behavior for students</u>
   a. attend class regularly and on-time
   b. understand the course material sufficiently to explain it to students
   c. be positive and enthusiastic about the class, the instructor, and the students
   d. avoid behaviors that disrupt the teaching-learning process
2. <u>Keeping records</u>
   a. take attendance
   b. record grades
3. <u>Creating course materials and procedures</u>
   a. construct study guides
   b. suggest new learning activities to the instructor
   c. write exam questions
4. <u>Grading</u>
   a. collect, grade, and return homework
   b. grade quizzes and exams
   c. provide assistance with formal writing assignments (e.g., papers written in APA style)
5. <u>Teaching</u>
   a. conduct lab sessions
   b. schedule and coordinate guest speakers and field trips

    c. proctor exams

    d. act as a supplemental learning assistant

6. <u>Providing assistance to students</u>
   a. conduct review sessions
   b. contact students who are performing poorly in class to offer assistance/tutoring
   c. provide students with strategies to master course material
   d. meet with students outside class time
   e. answer e-mailed questions from students correctly, thoroughly, and promptly
   f. refer students to helpful campus resources (e.g., the Writing Center) when necessary
   g. provide encouragement and motivation to students who are performing poorly

7. <u>Providing feedback to the instructor</u>
   a. inform the instructor about how students are responding to exams and assignments
   b. provide the instructor with suggestions about how to improve student learning in the class
   c. alert the instructor to students who are struggling in the class
   d. notify the instructor of the existence of any academically dishonest behaviors

What are the benefits of being a TA?

1. The most important benefit of being a TA is the opportunity to develop the skills described in the preceding section. It is then possible to list these skills on your resume or curriculum vitae that you will send to potential employers or graduate school admissions committees.

2. Another very important benefit of being a TA is that you will have the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member. If you carry out your duties in a competent and faithful manner, it will be easy for your instructor to describe your performance in a letter of recommendation.

3. Another benefit of being a TA is that you will have an opportunity to develop an even deeper understanding of the information included in the course than when you took it as a student.

4. The final benefit of being a TA is that it satisfies the strong need to help others that the vast majority of psychology majors possess. The positive feedback that TAs receive from the students they help serves as a very powerful reinforcer.