

## Tips for Improving Evaluations

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Student evaluations are a powerful tool which help teaching assistants improve their teaching skills. These evaluations allow you to see which aspects of your teaching skills are strong, as well as the aspects that need improvement. However, your students may not always leave the most useful feedback when filling out their evaluations. This article will explore different methods to help TAs improve their evaluations.

*1. Work on building better rapport with your students.*

I believe building rapport with your students is one of the best ways to improve your evaluations. The idea is the more your

students are invested in your course, the more likely they are to give feedback. The secondary benefit is it is more difficult to give someone a poor review if you have a good relationship with him or her. This begins with your first impression and continues to build throughout the quarter. One suggestion is to start the quarter with an icebreaker; you can both learn your students' names and begin building rapport with your students. One I have used is to ask my students to say their name as well as name an animal that starts with the same letter as the first one in their name, with the only restriction being there can be no repeats. After everyone has taken a turn, I then try to repeat everyone's name and animal. There are many different variations on icebreakers, but they all provide a fun way to begin getting to know your students.

*2. Ask your students to write mid-quarter evaluations.*

Mid-quarter evaluations offer TAs a chance for instant feedback from students and the opportunity to use this information to see what aspects of their teaching style could be modified to better serve students. This allows TAs to improve before those students complete the official evaluations at the end of the quarter. While this method is subject to similar issues that affect the official evaluations (i.e. response rate and quality of responses), some students may appreciate your attempt to improve for them. The best way to implement this is to give a couple questions for students to answer, and, of course to keep it anonymous. When choosing questions you can try to expand on questions from the official review or focus on other topics you may find important. For example, when focusing on questions not on



the official evaluations, you may want to ask your students something like these:

What aspects of the course have been valuable for your learning so far?

What has the teacher done that has helped you learn?

What would you like the teacher to do that would facilitate your learning?

What suggestions do you have for improvement?

These mid-quarter evaluations demonstrate your appreciation for the educational process as well as for your students.

*3. Tell your students you take evaluations seriously and appreciate the feedback.*

One of the problems with evaluations is that it requires students to provide honest and insightful feedback, but sometimes students don't want to put in the effort required. Generally there are two types of students with regards to filling out evaluations, those with strong opinions and those with weak opinions. The former will likely respond regardless of outside influence, but the latter needs some coaxing. In an effort to improve response rates, UCR added the incentive to allow students to view grades earlier once their evaluations have been completed. An increased response rate improves the accuracy of the evaluations but this does not mean the quality of the responses have improved as well. In an effort to improve the responses from students, especially with regards to the comments section, I let my students know, before filling out the evaluation, I actually read the evaluations and use their feedback to improve as a

teacher. I think this is important, because if your students know that you take the process seriously then they may be more likely to do so as well.

Hopefully, these tips will aid your efforts to improve as a teacher. There is no one true path to becoming a great teacher, and everyone must choose the methods that work best for them. Just remember that getting a poor evaluation is not the end of the world. It's what you do with that evaluation and how you move forward that is the best way to evaluate yourself as a teacher.

