# Framework for Teaching Assistant (TA) Competency Development

*Developed by the Teaching Assistant Graduate Student Advancement (TAGSA) SIG of the Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE)*

**Goal:**

The goal of developing this framework is to encourage dialogue within and across institutions about providing standards to assist the support and improvement of teaching assistant (TA) knowledge, skills, and abilities. The framework is broad and general so that it is suitable within the whole institution.

The hope is that this framework will help set the foundation for TAs to strive for continuous teaching development that will add breadth to their experience. The contention is that if the foundation is strong, TAs will naturally engage in development throughout their work as a TA. The framework is applicable at every stage of a TAs' professional development.

**Background:**

The Teaching Assistant Graduate Student Advancement (TAGSA) special interest group of the Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) has been working on this framework for TA competency development since the fall of 2012. At this time, the executive committee is releasing the framework so that individuals/units at institutions can try it out, work with part or all of it, and/or expand it to suit TA programming and work.  It is intended to be a starting point to provoke conversations about the knowledge, skills, and abilities that TAs require within your respective units or broadly within the institution. It is not meant to be prescriptive but to be an ever changing organic framework that can adapt to the specific needs of the intended audience.
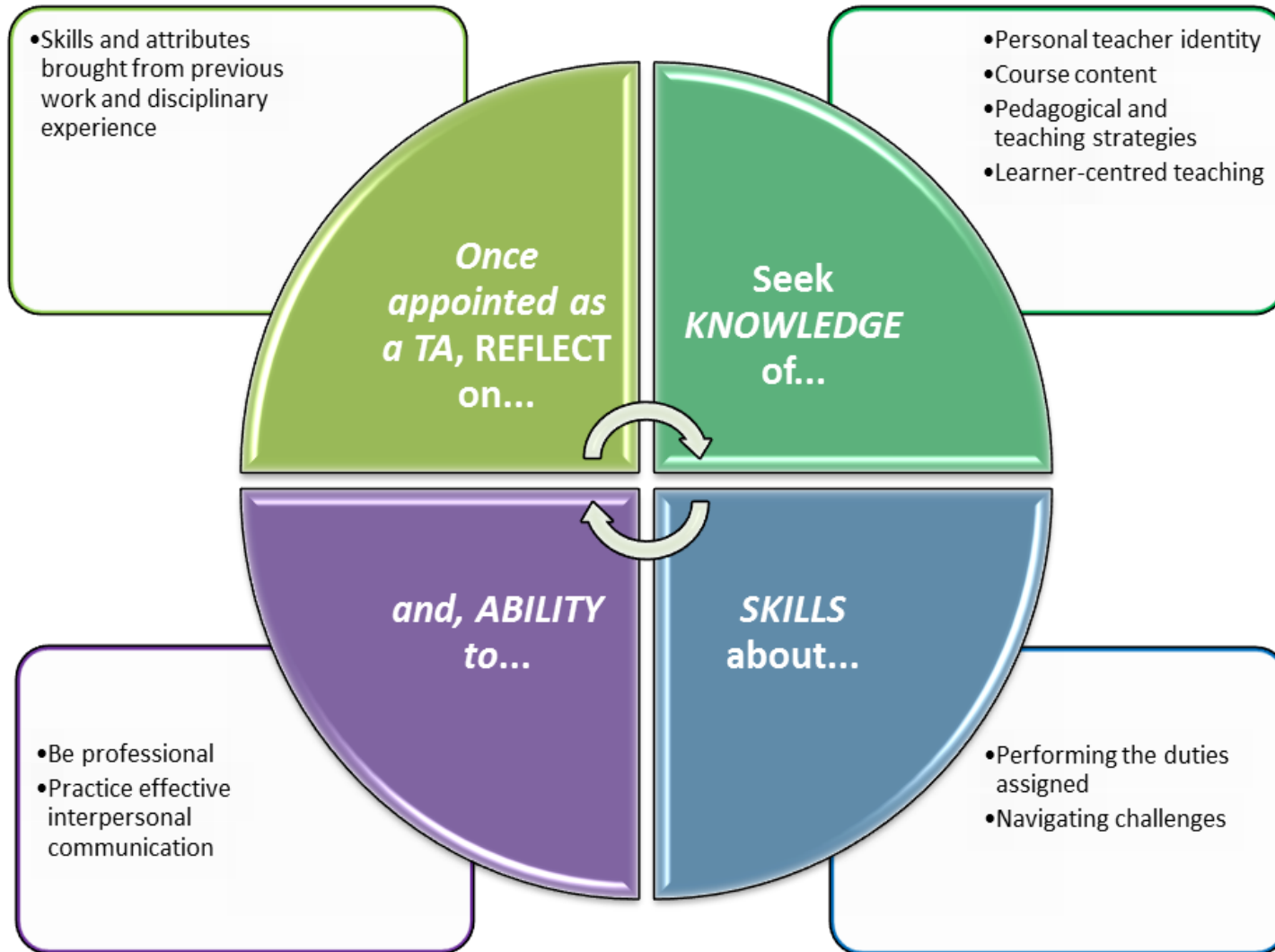
**Audience:**

The framework is meant to assist institutions, departments or schools, faculty, educational developers, teaching assistants, and anyone else responsible or interested in the teaching preparation of TAs.

For those responsible for providing guidance to TAs, the framework is a beginning point to help guide the development of competencies suitable for your respective unit(s).  Use part or the entire framework, and clearly define terms used (such as *professionalism*). TAs, please use the framework as a guide to the knowledge, skills, and abilities that you will seek to attain and continually develop in your role as a TA.

Feedback is encouraged at any time.
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# Framework for Teaching Assistant Competency Development

- Skills and attributes brought from previous work and disciplinary experience

- Personal teacher identity
- Course content
- Pedagogical and teaching strategies
- Learner-centred teaching

*Once appointed as a TA*, REFLECT on...

Seek *KNOWLEDGE* of...

*and, ABILITY to...*

*SKILLS* about...

- Be professional
- Practice effective interpersonal communication

- Performing the duties assigned
- Navigating challenges

*Once appointed as a TA, REFLECT on:*

1. *The skills and attributes brought from previous work and disciplinary experience*
   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Define the values and goals of your discipline and describe how these will inform your approach to TA work.
   - List your teaching related experience and the associated skills that you bring to the teaching assistant role (for example, from being a swimming instructor or tutor).
   - Recall successful teaching strategies that you encountered during your undergraduate degree and previous TA experience (if applicable).

*Seek the following:*
   *KNOWLEDGE of…*

2. *How to develop a personal teaching identity*
   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Investigate teaching philosophy statements or revisit your own, so that you can think about the values and goals you deem important in a teaching role.
   - Search out the rights and responsibilities associated with your TA role and reflect on your approach to fulfilling these duties.
   - Seek feedback early, mid- and end-of term through a combination of observation and/or written responses by professionals, peers, and students, about your teaching, facilitating, or other duties performed.
   - Be critically self-reflective about the strategies and methods you employ in your TA work in order to continually improve your ability to provide the best conditions for students' learning.

3. *Discipline specific content knowledge related to the course assigned*
   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Seek to be familiar with the content that is directly pertinent to the duties you will be performing.

4. *Pedagogical knowledge and teaching strategies suitable to duties assigned*
   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Find out the most appropriate pedagogical methods to successfully fulfill those duties. For example, if you have been assigned to lead discussion in tutorials, seek out strategies that you can use to encourage discussion, how to develop questions suitable for the content, and how to work with students of differing abilities and engagement. Through professional development opportunities, you will seek out knowledge about pedagogy and teaching strategies to enhance your TA work.

5. *What is meant by learning-centeredness*
   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Understand that your work is about the learner and find information about ways to accommodate the learning needs of students.

*SKILLS about…*

1. *What is required to perform duties assigned*

   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Learn the skills required to fulfill those duties. These skills may include, but are not limited to: learning how to prepare lesson plans, rubrics, class outlines, or student feedback forms; use classroom and online technology; work with a diverse student population; give clear, concise, and stimulating presentations; keep a focus on learner centered teaching; mentor students; actively listen; give and receive feedback; help students work effectively in groups; engage in effective communication; and ask effective questions.

2. *How to navigate challenges*

   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Manage your time efficiently, set priorities, manage the classroom, resolve conflict, and manage student expectations so that you do not encounter adverse challenges in your work.

*ABILITY to…*

1. *Demonstrate professionalism*

   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Aim to be professional, confident, sensitive, and resilient with your interactions with everyone you work with.
   - Ensure that you maintain integrity and confidentiality of student work at all times.
   - Actively balance your time between work and life, and plan future goals.
   - Develop lifelong learning habits and engage in reflective practice about your work and teaching.

2. *Develop strategies for effective interpersonal communication*

   Possible learning activities/goals/outcomes:
   - Actively seek answers from the course supervisor through appropriate communication channels about the questions you have about your TA role, while establishing and maintaining a professional relationship.
   - With colleagues, you will seek out support, resources, and engage in a collegial collaborative relationship by participating in professional development provided by your department and other units on campus.
   - With students, you will be available, approachable, inclusive, fair, and enthusiastic in all communication while maintaining professional boundaries.