

The 10 Biggest Mistakes



Start-up Teaching Assistants Make

**The Blackford Centre
for Teaching Assistants**

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1. Not Learning Student Names

You won't be able to remember everyone's name when you start out, especially when you have to deal with multiple classes. However, some teaching assistants do not even attempt to do so.

This is a mistake as it can make the students think that you do not care about them and they will respond in kind. Start by learning the names of the active students to show that you have been taking notice of their efforts.

2. Being Informal with Students

Some teaching assistants are friendly with their students so that they will like them. There is nothing wrong with this, but there is a line between being friendly and being too informal.

Avoid sharing too much personal information with students and maintain your professionalism if you want the students to take you seriously.

Also, in this modern age, pupils will look you up on social media sites. So keep your profile private if you don't want them seeing or reading anything personal about you.

3. Letting Students Know That You're New To Being a TA

As a teaching assistant, students will perceive you as an authority figure. But they also tend to take beginner teaching assistants less seriously. It's not necessarily that they do it on purpose just to disrespect you; it is generally a subconscious reaction.

Do your research so that you are well prepared to provide students with the support and information they need so that you come across as an experienced TA.

4. Not Volunteering

If you have limited experience, the most promising options available to you are part-time volunteer positions. It is true that there are no specific qualifications to work as an entry-level teaching assistant, but over the last few years competition has increased a great deal.

If you are unwilling to volunteer for your first role then you will have more difficulty in landing a job.

Most teaching assistant qualifications can be trained for whilst you are working – you don't need always need to be qualified to gain a teaching assistant role.

5. Not Knowing How to be Firm

TAs must approach their job with patience, sensitivity and understanding. However, people who naturally have these qualities are often the same people who find it difficult to be firm and put their foot down when they need to.

You must be firm when it is necessary and when you know it is for the good of the student's progress.

It is also important to know the appropriate level of firmness for the individual in question.

6. Not Giving Positive Feedback

When you have a student who is actively engaged in a lesson, who keeps giving good answers and is genuinely interested in what is being taught, make sure you acknowledge this. Everyone likes to feel appreciated.

By giving positive feedback you show students that their efforts have been noticed. It's a very efficient way to increase student participation. Conversely, if those students do not receive acknowledgment, it is likely that they will start being less involved in the classroom.

7. Underestimating the Time Involved

For teaching assistant roles that are available in schools, assistants often assume that their working hours will be the same as normal teaching hours. This is mainly true, but you should not forget that teachers often work extra hours, and this means you will have to also.

If your position is full-time then you should expect slightly longer working hours than this to make the necessary teaching preparations. Part-time positions are highly common.

The real hours involved with working part-time can be significantly higher than normally expected part-time hours.

8. Being Too Vague when Asking Questions

By asking a very broad question, you may think that you are encouraging students to use their imagination and that you are stimulating discussion in the classroom.

However, often it has the opposite effect. A vague question has no straight answer so many students will assume that they do not know the answer, even when they do. This will actually discourage them from being as active as they would normally be.

9. Thinking that the Students Are as Invested as You Are

As a teaching assistant, your work is the top priority. You devote a lot of time to it in order to prepare as best as possible and often you might have unrealistic expectations for the students to do the same.

What a teaching assistant needs to realise early on is that, in most cases, schoolwork is not as important to students as it is to you. Students will have other concerns in their lives such as friends, hobbies or family, and they have other classes that deserve their attention as much as yours does.

10. Not Respecting Students

There are many ways in which you can lose the respect and interest of students by acting in an unprofessional manner.

One way would be to use disparaging remarks when talking about them or even directly to them.

Another way would be to show a lack of interest by acting as though being a TA is nothing more than a job to you.

Are you thinking of becoming a Teaching Assistant? The best way to achieve that is with The Blackford Centre's Diploma course: www.inst.org/teaching-assistant-courses