



Teaching Assistants' Training Program Preparing for your TATP microteaching session

What is the purpose of microteaching?

Microteaching workshops provide a structured setting for exchanging feedback on teaching among a small group of peers. It's a collegial setting in which to practice teaching skills and try new strategies. It offers insight into how learners respond to your teaching style and develops a deeper understanding of effective teaching as you observe and give feedback to other teachers.

In *Microteaching I: Presentation Skills Builder*, you work within a tight time limit and feedback focuses on presentation style, interaction, and organization. In *Microteaching II: Polish Your Teaching Style*, you have slightly more time to work with, and observers' feedback is directed to a wider range of criteria, including how well you execute your lesson plan.

What happens in a microteaching session?

In brief: Participants take turns delivering a prepared lesson while being recorded on video. While one participant is teaching, the rest of the participants and the facilitators play the role of students. After each lesson, participants and facilitators fill out feedback forms and offer structured feedback to the instructor. As well, the teacher shares their own impressions before and after receiving feedback. In Microteaching I sessions, the video is played back immediately after each lesson. For Microteaching II, the video is reviewed in individual meetings with a facilitator, usually scheduled within two or three weeks of the session.

How do I prepare?

1. Know your time limit.

If you are in Microteaching I, you should prepare a **5-minute** lesson.

If you are in Microteaching II, you should prepare a **15-minute** lesson.

To keep the session running on time, facilitators enforce these time limits. A facilitator will hold up time cards to let you know how much time is left. If you do not wrap up when signaled, he or she will cut you off.

2. Choose a topic.

When choosing your lesson topic, keep two things in mind. It should be simple enough to be covered within the time limit, and it should be accessible to a non-specialist audience. For example, you might present a central concept of your discipline that would be covered in a first- or second-year undergraduate class. You could also prepare a lesson on a hobby or a personal interest.

3. Prepare your lesson.

The room is equipped with a laptop, data projector, speakers, and a large white board, which are all at your disposal. If you plan to use PowerPoint, **bring your presentation on a USB key**. A low-tech presentation is fine too.

Do a run-through. Delivering an effective lesson within the time limit is one of the biggest challenges.

Your lesson should be self-contained. Avoid doing an excerpt of a tutorial or lecture that leaves the lesson hanging. (One of the things observers will look for is how you wrap up.) Similarly, avoid "fast forwarding"—i.e., stepping out of the lesson by saying something like, "Here, I would give students a few more examples..." This makes it hard for observers to offer feedback on your presentation style.

See also the guidelines in the Lesson Plan Checklist below.

4. Write up a lesson plan (Microteaching II only).

For Microteaching II, you must **fill out a lesson plan form** and bring it to the session. This form is emailed to you by the TATP Program Assistant. It can also be downloaded here:

<http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/events/microteaching/microteaching2.htm>

5. Consider trying out a new teaching strategy.

Microteaching sessions are a good opportunity to try something new and get feedback on it. Look for ways to build in interactivity, if that's not something you're used to, or try a new kind of group work.

6. Come ready to give descriptive feedback, and be open to receiving feedback.

Being an observer in a microteaching means speaking from your experience as a learner, *not* correcting others' mistakes. **See the guide on giving and receiving feedback on the following page.**

As well, think about what aspects of your teaching you'd most like feedback on. You'll have a chance to let the group know what you'd like them to look for.

7. ARRIVE ON TIME.

Microteaching sessions start at their advertised time, not ten after the hour!

8. If you need to cancel, do so at least 3 business days in advance.

Due to the heavy demand for microteaching, a new cancellation policy has been introduced. Please see the attendance policy at <http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/gsta/events/attendance-policy.htm>. Cancelling late means you will be prevented from registering for microteaching sessions for one calendar year.

Follow-up meetings (Microteaching II only)

The TATP Program Assistant will send you a link to your microteaching video within about a week. Videos are uploaded to MyMedia, which is operated by the University of Toronto Libraries; they are private and accessible by UTORid login.

A TATP staff member will contact you within two or three weeks to set up a personal consultation. At this meeting, you will watch and discuss the video and receive more detailed feedback.



Teaching Assistants' Training Program

Giving and receiving feedback on teaching

When providing feedback on a colleague's teaching performance, it is important to remember that our role is not to judge or evaluate a person's approach to teaching or teaching style nor to demonstrate everything that we might know about teaching. Rather, the goal is to share strategies and perspectives that will help the teacher identify a plan for improving her or his teaching practice. As observers, we are reflecting back to the teacher what it is like to be a student learning in his or her class. As teachers, we are hearing, perhaps for the first time, honest feedback on how we communicate ideas and whether we create a successful learning environment.

| As an observer giving feedback... | As the teacher receiving feedback... |
|---|---|
| <p>Focus on behaviours, not the individual. Describe what you see and what you hear. What does the teacher say or do? Remember: you are providing feedback on the teaching performance, not the person.</p> | <p>Be sincerely open to all comments. As soon as you invite someone's opinion, you need to be prepared to hear it! If you hear what you perceive to be negative comments, separate the comments from yourself as a <i>person</i> and focus on what could be changed next time to improve your <i>teaching</i>.</p> |
| <p>Be specific. Identify a specific comment or behaviour and describe how it affected you. Link your comments to specific moments in the teacher's lesson. Whenever possible, offer concrete strategies for addressing particular concerns.</p> | <p>Avoid being defensive. Try to react positively to comments. The observers providing you with feedback will need positive reinforcement, too! Saying "That's great advice, I hadn't thought of it that way" opens up a dialogue with your observers.</p> |
| <p>Be positive and constructive...and honest! Always offer a positive observation first. However, try to avoid insincere praise. Follow up constructive comments with your ideas for improvement or things to try.</p> | <p>Specify the feedback you're looking for. If you would like feedback on your voice production or time management or clarity of examples or your introduction...say so! Be specific when asking for feedback.</p> |
| <p>Check your ego at the door. This process isn't about you, and showing off all you know about teaching. This process is about the teacher you are observing. Avoid grandstanding or one-upmanship.</p> | <p>Confirm your understanding of the feedback provided. If you need to ask for clarification of a particular comment, feel free to do so. Ask an observer to rephrase a comment or paraphrase back to the observer what you think she/he is saying.</p> |
| <p>Offer options and alternatives. Don't just point out areas of difficulty. Remember, you're not providing a summative evaluation of this person's teaching—you're helping the teacher identify what to try next time.</p> | <p>Share your reaction to the feedback. Once you've heard all the verbal feedback, reflect back on your self-assessment of your lesson and think how your own assessment of your teaching compares with the observations of your colleagues. What have you learned?</p> |
| <p>Avoid prescriptive language. Instead of saying "You should do this..." or "Don't do that...", phrase your suggestions as stemming from your own observations: "I'm wondering if you tried X, what might happen..."; "I'd like to see you try Y"; "I would have benefitted from a clearer explanation here, could you try this..."</p> | <p>Adapted in part from Verderber & Verderber, (1983), in Leptak, J. (1989). Giving and receiving constructive criticism. <i>Lifelong Learning</i> 12(5), pp. 25-26. Also from the "Giving and Receiving Constructive Criticism" handout from McGill University.</p> |
| <p>Don't demand unreasonable change. Avoid pointing out challenges the teacher cannot reasonably change or address.</p> | |
| <p>Be concise. Too many comments will overload the listener. Focus on one or two key points.</p> | |



Teaching Assistants' Training Program **Microteaching lesson plan checklist**

This is a partial list of things to consider when preparing your lesson. In a short microteaching lesson, you won't necessarily be able to hit all of the points. This is fine. You can, however, keep in mind the four fundamental elements of an effective lesson.

An instructional presentation should incorporate the following four key elements:

1) Preparation of the learner.

- a. The learner is oriented to the subject at hand.
- b. The learner's interest is piqued.
- c. The learner is informed of the lesson's goals.
- d. The learner is told what to expect from the lesson.

2) Presentation/demonstration of materials.

- a. Topics are presented in a logical order.
- b. Topics are presented in a sequence, e.g. moving from general to specific or from superficial to most important or from foundational to complex.
- c. Each topic is clearly introduced and there is a clear transition from topic to topic within the lesson.
- d. The instructor models a concept or activity for learners.

3) Involvement of the learner.

- a. Learners are asked questions to probe their understanding of the material.
- b. Clarification of key concepts is provided at regular intervals; learners are asked to explain key concepts back to the instructor.
- c. Learners have the opportunity to interact with each other.
- d. Learners have the opportunity to practice or use the material being taught.

4) Review and summary.

- a. Instructor recaps main ideas.
- b. Instructor invites learners to share what they've learned.
- c. Instructor points the way to further information on the subject of the lesson.

Adapted in part from the Graduate Student Enhancement Program's "Guide for Conducting Your Departmental Micro-Teaching Session" prepared by the staff of the BGSU Graduate Student Enhancement Program at Bowling Green State University.