

**CWRU Practical Guide to Teaching
for
International Graduate Teaching Assistants**

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Welcome

To Case Western Reserve University and the United States! This *CWRU Handbook for International Teaching Assistants* will help you understand an American university and specifically CWRU.

At the end of the book, you will also find a glossary (a short dictionary) of words specific to the American educational system. Any words in the main body of the text that can be found in the glossary have an asterisk next to them, like this*.

Also, much of the information given in this little *Handbook* can be found in much greater detail in the general guide, the *CWRU Practical Guide to Teaching for Graduate Teaching Assistants*. References will direct you to more information in the *Practical Guide*, which can be found at the ESS web site: [ess.case.edu /tatraining/](http://ess.case.edu/tatraining/). An asterisk (*) refers to a definition in the glossary on page 24.

I hope you find this *Handbook* helpful and that your experience at CWRU and in the US is everything you dreamed it would be.

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This is America: Adapting to US Culture

Before you came to CWRU, did you ever live or travel in the US? In your own country, did you have American teachers? Perhaps you saw American films or TV programs, listened to American music, or read some books by American authors. Based on all your experience, what are your expectations of Americans and life in the US?

Now that you're here in the US, what American customs have surprised you? Pleased you? Seemed odd? Confusing? Perhaps even amusing? What are the main differences between your culture and US culture? In particular, what differences have you noticed about US universities and academic life?

Many international students notice, for example, that when Americans ask "How are you?" they are not expecting a long or detailed answer. "How are you?" is like another way of saying "hello." When Americans want more detailed information---when they *really* want to know how you are, they will ask more detailed questions.

Noticing cultural differences and adjusting expectations and behavior in response will make it easier for you to survive and adapt to life in the US---and at Case.

Begin your journey into American culture by making friends with American students in your department and by seeking support through International Student Services and through your University 400C class if you are enrolled for that course.

Americans are eager to share their country and culture. Take a first step by being friendly. Smile!

Diversity in the US

Just as there are many differences between your culture and that of the United States, *within* the US there are also many cultural differences. One predominant cultural perspective in the US is a "white Anglo-Saxon Protestant" point of view, which is determined by Americans of northern European descent. However, there are many other diverse cultures in the US, such as African-American, Asian, and Hispanic. There are also socioeconomic differences: some Americans come from middle-class or professional backgrounds; others are from working class or "blue collar"* backgrounds.

Americans come from very different geographic and climatic locations with different regional dialects, cultures, and values. For example, growing up in New England a region located in the northeast US is very different in some ways from growing up in Texas in the Southwest. Likewise, growing up in a rural area (in the countryside) is very different from growing up in an urban or suburban setting.

Americans have a strong but diverse belief system and are also very accepting of other cultures and religions. As in any country, there is sexual diversity. Learning to understand and respect diversity in all its forms has become an important value in the United States and is especially valued at CWRU.

You may find it helpful to consider in particular:

- **Dialects.** Depending on where Americans live, they may pronounce words differently and use different expressions. For example, in the Eastern part of the US, Americans usually use the word *soda* while those in the Midwest are more likely to use the word *pop*.^{*} Depending on their dialect, some Americans also speak English at a faster or slower pace. Some international students find it more difficult to understand Americans who speak with dialects from New York City (usually fast-paced English) or the southern part of the US (usually slower paced or drawn out). Others may find the English sometimes spoken by some African-Americans, known as black vernacular, difficult to follow. Regardless, if you don't understand what someone is saying, don't hesitate to ask her or him to repeat and explain.
- **Ethnicity.** Americans tend to value and take pride in their ethnic background and culture, be it, African, Asian, European, or an ethnicity indigenous to the US, such as Native American. CWRU reflects the diversity of the larger United States with students and faculty from a range of backgrounds and cultures.
- **Religion.** As in the larger society, CWRU students can be Jewish, Christian, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or another religion---or they may not practice or identify with a particular religious faith. Since the University calendar is organized around Christian holidays (such as Christmas), some students, such as Moslems or Jews, may need to miss class or leave class early on certain holy or religious days. These absences should be respected.

For more information about the diversity of CWRU students and how to encourage mutual respect in the classroom, see *Handbook*.

- **Nationality.** Just as in the graduate school, the undergraduate population at CWRU includes students of many different nationalities. These students may need extra help in understanding the US educational system and/or American English.
- **Socioeconomic.** Private education in the US is very costly. Currently, estimated expenses for an undergraduate student at CWRU are over \$40,000 per year! But the University admits students based on their academic performance, rather than their ability to pay. As a result, while some students' expenses are fully covered by their families; others work either on campus or in the Cleveland community to help pay the tuition costs. Others may also partially depend on scholarship money, loans, or government financial aid. While all CWRU students must be held to the same high academic standards, students will have different demands on their time and varying pressures to succeed. Some students, for example, must maintain a certain GPA^{*} to maintain their scholarships. Other need to work 20 hours a week to help pay for college.
- **Sexual Orientation.** Not all the students, peers, or faculty you work with can be assumed to be *straight*.^{*} In fact, it is estimated that roughly ten percent of all people are lesbian, bisexual, or gay^{*}, and this diversity is equally found in the CWRU community. Just as sensitivity is expected for ethnic minorities^{*} in the US, sexual orientation is also respected.

- **Gender.** Like most universities in the US today, CWRU is co-ed.* Women are considered equal to men--in rights and abilities--and should be treated as such. Be sure to include women in class discussions, and give them an equal amount of your time and attention. Even in the US, where effort has been made toward achieving equality, women are still under-represented in "non-traditional fields" such as computers, technology, science, or engineering. If you are teaching one of these subjects, it is important to create a classroom atmosphere that encourages both male and female students to participate.

Overall, make sure that you respect the rights of all groups protected by CWRU's Nondiscrimination Policy:

"Case Western Reserve University does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, age, sex, color, handicap, sexual orientation, or national or ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, scholarship or loan programs, or athletic or other University-administered programs." *General Bulletin 2008-2009*

US Classroom Culture

Before you enter the American classroom, you should be well aware of differences between the classroom culture in your country and in the US. The following questions should help you:

- How do students address professors in your country?
- Is it acceptable to use a professor's first name, or must you use a special title of respect?
- In your country, are students expected simply to listen and take notes during class?
- Or is it acceptable for students to ask questions of the professor or even challenge her or his opinion on certain issues and themes?
- How do students go about learning, and how are they graded?
- Are students expected simply to learn and memorize information and facts or to analyze them and to have a personal opinion or to do both?
- And is there a difference between undergraduate and graduate student expectations?

Based on the academic culture in your own country, you may be surprised by what is expected and acceptable in the US. Reflecting American culture in general, US education is relatively casual and informal. It also highly values individual experience, effort, and opinion.

In particular, you will find the following:

- **Casual dress.** In the US, students can come to class in jeans, shorts, t-shirts, sneakers, and baseball caps. You will probably never see a student coming to class in a suit!
- **Late arrival/Early departure.** Some students may arrive late or leave class or lab early. If you find this generally unacceptable in your class, you may wish to make this clear to students at the start of term.

- **Eating and drinking during class.** Americans often eat on the run, which means that they don't take time to sit down for a meal. They may bring a drink, snack, or even the rest of their lunch to class. While eating in class is generally all right in the US, it is not acceptable to distract others. Eating and drinking are usually done quietly and discreetly.
- **Class discussion.** In the US, most educators feel that students learn best when they are actually involved in the learning process. Therefore, professors have to rely less on lectures and more on class discussions and small group activities. Students are expected to participate by asking and answering questions every class session. American students will volunteer to answer questions even if they are not completely sure of the correctness of their answer.
- **Informal address to the instructor.** Some undergraduate students will use the formal title "professor" when addressing their instructors, regardless of the instructor's actual standing in the university. It is also common to use other titles, such as Ms. or Mr. or even sometimes the instructor's first name. Yet sometimes, American students will not even address their teachers with a name—they may simply seek their attention, such as by saying "excuse me." This informality does not suggest disrespect. To put everyone at ease, instructors often tell students at the start of the term how they would like to be addressed, especially if they prefer a first-name basis. You should do the same with your students. Let them know what they should call you, and be sure they can pronounce your name. Write your name on the board twice: as it is spelled and then how it is pronounced. American students also expect that their instructors will know their first and last names.
- **Grading.** In the US, a letter grade system is used, with *A* being the highest grade (excellent) and *F* the lowest grade (failure). In many countries, the highest grade possible (such as an *A*) is almost never given; it is reserved for truly exceptional performance. In the US, however, *A*'s are relatively common, and many students are quite disappointed to receive any grade less than a *B* (good). Such expectations are the result of grade inflation* as well as other pressures, such as the need for high grades to go on to medical school or other graduate studies. Also, as previously mentioned, some students need a certain grade point average* (GPA) to maintain their scholarship or participate in the Greek system* or athletics. As such, if students are not happy with a grade, they may discuss it with you—perhaps quite assertively.
- **Your responsibility as a grader.** As a TA, your responsibility is to be fair when grading. While being sympathetic to the student's situation, academic standards must be maintained. Usually the only reasons for changing a grade is if there has been some error on your part or if the student has a reasonable explanation for turning a final in late. For example, a problem may have been incorrectly marked or a student was unable to complete the final on time because of health reasons. If you have any questions or problems concerning a student's grade, you should discuss it with your course instructor or advisor. It is also a good idea to discuss the departmental grading policy before you begin the semester. Your grading policy should be clearly stated in the syllabus that you distribute at the beginning of the semester if you are teaching. You may also want to read more about grading in the *Guide*.

- **Other informality.** In the US, students will come to an instructor's office hours without an appointment. If they have a question or need extra help, they might e-mail or even phone you at home. At the start of term, you should tell students how they can reach you. Typically, students contact their instructors through "walk-in" office hours, email, department mailbox messages, or phoning. You need to decide whether you'll accept phone calls at home. Most instructors prefer that students contact them at the office. You do not need to give your students your cell number or home number.

Some American students will email you in the middle of the night and expect that you will answer them early in the morning. While all TA's should respond in a timely manner to students' emails and phone calls, you should respond within one business day - if possible or on Monday morning if they contact you over the weekend. In other words, while you should be as approachable and flexible as possible in responding to students, you also have a schedule to maintain for your own classes.

- **Active student participation.** In the US, students are expected to participate in class by asking questions, making comments, giving presentations, etc. In fact, in many classes, the students' level of classroom participation is part of their final course grade. Students are also invited to give their instructors feedback. Students may also be encouraged to challenge them, especially if they don't understand a point or if they disagree with the course content. Again, this behavior is (usually) not a sign of disrespect. If a student challenges you, you can respond to her or him during class or, if you think it more appropriate, suggest that the student see you after class or during your office hours.

For more information about teaching methods used in the US, such as discussion and active learning see *Guide*.

Academic Expectations of US Undergraduates

Many countries have a **national curriculum**. Students in every school use the same textbooks, study the same material, and take the same national exam to go to college.

Undergraduates in the US, however, come with an unevenness of preparation. From one US high school to another, and often even within the same school system, textbooks, curriculum, and the expected level of achievement can vary. Also, students at CWRU may have attended public or private high schools. Public schools usually have more students in each class and may not have the same resources, such as the newest computers or lab equipment. While public schools are free to students, students attending private schools must pay tuition, unless they have a scholarship. Regardless if the school is public or private, some students have had more rigorous college preparatory courses including AP (advanced placement courses*). Other students may not have had these types of classes.

Furthermore, some groups of people, for example African-Americans and Latinos, have historically been excluded from educational opportunities and remain under-represented in US higher education.

Some undergraduates are "non-traditional students"—older students returning to complete their education or entering college for the first time, or commuters—students living off campus,* or transfer* students—students who have completed one or two years of their degree at a community college or other institution.

Finally, while the vast majority of CWRU undergraduates (approximately 98%) live on campus, a small percentage for students around 60 first-year students begin CWRU as commuters. Most of these students live at home with their families. As you plan out-of-class review sessions for your students, be sure to select a time that works for both residents and commuters.

As a result of the differences mentioned above, programs and policies are in place at CWRU to help students meet the academic and social demands of university life. What could you do if one of your students started to miss classes on a regular basis? Or seemed visibly depressed or different? Or repeatedly mentioned problems in the residence hall? As a teaching assistant, you're on the *front line*, meaning that you have direct contact with undergraduate students; in fact, they often have more contact with you than faculty members and might feel more comfortable telling you, rather than the professor, about some difficulty they are having. Of course, you should alert your faculty advisor of any real or potential problems. But often you are in the best position to help—recommending tutoring, for example, before a student actually fails an exam or recommending the student seek help at University Counseling Services in Sears Building, Second Floor, if this student seems anxious or depressed.

Before you start teaching, try to find out as much as you can about your students' background and academic abilities by asking experienced faculty, teaching assistants and the students themselves. You can also ask students for their reasons for taking your course. Moreover, communicate with other teaching assistants – they are always eager to help. Do not be afraid to ask questions if you are not sure whether a student's behavior is appropriate or not. Also, feel free to discuss any of the challenges or problems you encounter in your class – someone may give you a good idea how to solve it, as they might have encountered it before.

To further undergraduate education in the US, briefly review the *CWRU Handbook from Undergraduates* at <http://www.case.edu/provost/ugstudies/handbook2006.pdf>

- **The First Year Grading Policy.** To help first-time students succeed, CWRU has policies of first year grading. See the *Guide* for more information or contact the Office of Undergraduate Studies at 368-2928.
- **Students with disabilities.** Students with any disability including physical and orthopedic, sensory deficits, learning disabilities, and psychological or psychiatric conditions are assisted by Disability Resources, a part of Educational Services for Students. See p. 90 of the *Guide* for more information about these students, their needs, and how instructors are expected to help them. You can also contact Susan Sampson, ESS Associate Director for Disability Resources, or Lesley Brown, ESS Disability Resources Coordinator, at 368-5230.
- **Counseling.** University life can sometimes be stressful. For undergraduates, college is usually the first time they are living on their own with adult responsibilities. Many students face issues

with time management, substance abuse,* and relationships. University Counseling Services provides free and confidential counseling, as well as workshops on stress management and adjusting to college life for both undergraduate and graduate students. As TA, if you are concerned about a student and are wondering what to do, you can also phone University Counseling Services, Sears Library, Second Floor, 368-5872, for advice. You may also seek support for yourself.

- **Academic Support.** Educational Services for Students (ESS), offers undergraduates free tutoring and special study sessions. ESS staff will also work with students individually on study skills and time management. Call 368-5230 to set up an appointment with an ESS staff member. Undergraduates who need help with writing papers or essays can get help at the Writing Center in Bellflower 100 or by calling 368-3798. Arrange an appointment with a graduate student at the Writing Center or with an undergraduate peer tutor by making an appointment at this website www.casewconline.com
- **Academic Advising.** Undergraduates who need guidance in choosing courses, designing their course of study, or fulfilling university requirements, can see their academic advisor or seek advice in Undergraduate Studies in Sears or by calling 368-2928.
- **Career Center.** If both undergraduate and graduate students are having trouble deciding on a major and/or what kind of career they wish to prepare for, they may wish to make an appointment with a counselor in the Career Center in Sears, Room 206, or by calling 368-4446. This office also helps students find work after college by helping them with their resumes,* arranging interviews, and practicing their interview skills.
- **Other types of support.** Other support programs, including the Multicultural Affairs Office (to assist under-represented student populations on campus), Commuter Assistants (to help those students living off campus), and the Greek Life office (which assists undergraduates involved in fraternities* or sororities*) also serve students. Residence Life oversees the undergraduate residence halls.

For more information about these and other university programs and offices, see *Handbook*.

How to Be a Successful TA

In the 2003 spring semester, over 200 CWRU undergraduates completed a survey about their experiences with Teaching Assistants. Here are attributes that they appreciated about their TAs:

- They were well-prepared for class and the lab.
- They were easy to talk with; they wanted to help.
- They were well-read, knowledgeable, and friendly.

The formula for success when working with undergraduates is simple—be friendly, caring, knowledgeable, and well-prepared. While speaking clearly in English is important, what seems to be

more important is that you show that you enjoy working with undergraduates and that you know the course material. Students will be less concerned with an accent if they feel that this person is interested in their academic progress. A friendly smile and attitude goes a long way!

Students will perform better if they know exactly what is expected from them.

- While giving assignments, outline in writing exactly what you expect your students to do.
- Be clear about course standards, requirements, and grading systems.
- Give students a clear syllabus and a description of your course on the first day of class.
- Make consistent, clear demands of students so they can keep up with the work of the course. If possible, give students regular assignments, so they can learn how to manage their time sufficiently and learn a habit of steady efficient work.
- Show students how particular assignments and topics fit with the overall goals of the course and how they are related to previous and future topics.
- Provide students with many opportunities for feedback on assignments.
- Provide students with study questions for readings, so they can focus on particular aspects of the readings and prepare for the discussion in class.
- Encourage students to take an active part in the learning process: ask them to write short response papers, prepare discussion questions etc.
- Be polite and patient with your students. Never appear to criticize students with a sense of superiority, harshness, or sarcasm.

Many international TAs and professors have noticed that American students have closer and less formal relationships with their teachers. **Try to show their students that you are really concerned with their learning and level of achievement:**

- Try to learn their first names early in the semester and address them by their first names. At the beginning of your class, you can give your students name tags or simply ask them to write their names on pieces of paper and keep them on their desks, so other students can also learn their names. If you are the instructor of record for the class, you can access a class roster at the Registrar's website, or you can ask the professor teaching the course for a roster.
- Try to create a sense of community in your class. Arrive a little early to class or lab each day to chat informally with students.
- Encourage small work groups in class and encourage students to study in groups outside of class.
- Invite students to meet with you during your office hours. These invitations can be offered as a class announcement as well as a written request to individual students on the graded work that you are returning. In some cases it is advisable to schedule compulsory office hours or conferences to get to know your students better and encourage them to contact you more often.

Be well prepared for all your classes and have extra material just in case. Whenever you make a mistake, admit it – you are also a human being and you are allowed to make mistakes. Use humor in your classes – it is the best icebreaker and also helps you in many difficult situations!

How Well Do I Speak American English?

As an ITA, English may not be your first language. Even if you have studied English for many years or attended an English-speaking school, you may have focused more on reading and writing than listening or speaking, studied British English. Furthermore, you may speak a dialect of English that Americans may not easily understand.

Since communicating well with undergraduate students is the most important part of your job as an ITA, all ITAs are required to take the SPEAK TEST, a test to assess your spoken English. Those students who do not score high enough on this test are required to take UNIV 400 C, a professional communication skills and accent reduction course. For more information about the SPEAK TEST, registering for UNIV 400 C, contact Judith Olson-Fallon at 368-5230.

If you need help with your written English, the Department of English offers a reading and writing course (Graduate ESL 148) specifically for graduate students and research assistants. The Cleveland Public Schools also offer free English classes for anyone living in the city. Finally, English Language Services (ELS), located in Stone Commons offers fee-based classes. You can contact ELS center at 368-2716.

How much time per week are you speaking English?

Many ITAs share apartments and also office space at the University with students from their home country. In their free time, they read papers and magazines in their first language and even watch videos and TV in their first language. Speaking a foreign language can be tiring; it's natural to want to take a break and speak your first language. But a little effort towards improving your English can go a long way. Here are some suggestions:

- **Spend at least 15 minutes each day reading in English** outside your academic subject area. Choose a good quality paper, such as *The New York Times*, or a magazine or novel that interests you. Vary week to week what you read. If you have time, write down new vocabulary words and idioms, and then find out their meaning.
- **Listen to or watch American radio or television.** Close captioned TV, designed for the hearing impaired, can be helpful. If you don't understand everything being said, you can read the subtitles. When you walk to campus, listen to the radio or English language music on a cassette. Even if you're not paying complete attention, you're still being exposed to the sound and stress patterns of American English.
- **Tell the English speakers you know that you want their help.** Tell them that you appreciate it when they help you with pronunciation or word choice. Some people are afraid of being rude. Let them know that you appreciate their help. And if you don't want to ask, at the very minimum use every opportunity where help is offered. If colleagues, friends, or roommates try to correct you, please try to appreciate for efforts.

- **Expand your circle of friends.** If you come from a different country – especially from collectivist societies - it's natural to be drawn to the familiar cultural, ethnic, and religious background. But you should be aware about your surrounding and include Americans into your circle of friends. In general Americans are very appreciative to get to know different cultures and you get to know the American culture and language a little better.

Cultural Communication

Regardless of your level of English, practice effective communication skills.

- **Listen.** Give speakers your full attention.
- **Maintain consistent eye contact.** In the US, people look one another in the eye when speaking and use eye contact to check if the other person is following the conversation or not. Maintaining eye contact also expresses interest. If someone you are speaking to looks down or away, you may want to ask them if they understand what you're saying.
- **Check comprehension.** After speaking, ask if those listening have understood what you said. "Am I speaking too quickly?" "Is that clear?" "Do you have any questions?" Especially when tutoring or teaching, you may want to ask students to paraphrase (repeat back in their own words) what you have said. If they can't, then they didn't follow everything you said.
- **Be approachable.** Make it clear to students that you want to talk to them. Office hours, allowing time after class for questions, and your general demeanor---such as eye contact and having a friendly, open expression---also communicate approachability and willingness to help.
- **Disagree politely.** You can be firm and clear without raising your voice. Say it with a smile.

Whether communicating with students as a group or individually in tutoring sessions, labs, or conferences, try the following strategies:

- **Make expectations clear.**
- **Give constructive criticism.** Recognize and acknowledge strengths and achievement as well as areas to improve.
- **Use a variety of teaching styles** to appeal to a diversity of students' learning styles. For more information about teaching and learning styles, see *Handbook*.
- **Ask questions** to foster active thinking; encourage students to problem solve or to figure out mistakes and problems on their own with your supervision and input.

Consultations during office hours are an important part of a undergraduate's education. Be sure to do the following:

- **Stress the importance of students using office hours.**
- **Keep your hours consistently.**
- **Encourage students to use office hours** by scheduling mandatory "get-acquainted" conferences early in the semester.
- Being punctual and enthusiastic also communicates your commitment and interest in your students.

Regardless of your language ability in English, your general communication skills can make a big difference in how students receive and respond to you.

Some Useful Phrases

(Adapted from Ellen Sarkisian. *Teaching American Students: A Guide for International Faculty and Teaching Assistants in Colleges and Universities.*)

American students are used to specific words and phrases that serve as cues for them for how lectures are organized, what is important to remember, the accuracy of their responses to questions, and so on. Below are some standard phrases that you can use for either presenting in class to your students or within your department to your faculty and fellow TAs during your own classes and presentations. Americans like to know that you know their names. In your classes, students will expect you to use their first names, especially when responding to them in class.

When you are in discussions with your students, whether in class or in your office, it's important to demonstrate that you are actively listening. You can also observe how your students are seated and determine their interest level. In America, actively engaged listeners lean slightly forward, they nod their heads as they receive the information. Americans generally would not expect a speaker to touch them on the arm, for instance, when having a conversation unless they are good friends. And if someone does accidentally bump into a person or get too close, that person will generally say "excuse me" or "pardon me."

Americans expect a confident teacher that expresses this confidence through their attitudes and voice level. Move around a little when you speak; Americans prefer a more animated speaker than one that just stands behind a podium. Even if you are not completely comfortable with speaking English, speak with confidence. Encourage students to ask questions or to let you know if they don't understand you.

When you want to ask students to rephrase in order to clarify or ask for a specific example, you can say:

- Sorry, I didn't understand the question. Would/Could you please rephrase it?
- Could you say it in different words?
- What do you mean by?

- What would that look like?
- What would be an example of ?

When you want to restate a question or statement for clarification:

- Let me try to answer what I think you are asking...
- If I understood you correctly...
- What you are saying is..... Is that right?
- If I read you right...
- Do you mean that....
- You seem to be saying...
- In other words...

Suggesting a specific example:

- Do you mean that if...
- Would this [specify] be an example of what you are asking?

When you want to tell a student that an answer is unrelated or wrong:

- Yes, that applies to such and such, but in this case that won't work...
- Yes, but what's going on here?
- Well, how can that be true if x and y are the cause?
- That's what people thought for a long time. But remember And now we know that's not true.

When you are not sure how to respond to a question:

- Hmm, I am not sure. Let me think about it and get back with you next class.
- I am not sure how to answer that question. Let's come back to this issue at the end of class.
- That's an interesting question. What do the rest of you think about this issue?
- I also wonder about that issue.

How American Expectations of Written Work May Differ

(by Magdalena Lewandowska, Graduate Student in the Case English Department)

As a TA and graduate student you will have to write research papers and articles. It is good to be aware that Anglo-American style of writing is usually **more formulaic** and **more pragmatic**. It means that the purpose of the article is overtly stated at the beginning of a paper/article and that the body of the paper is very logical, with almost no digressions. The main idea for each paragraph is expressed somewhere at the beginning of each paragraph.

Different cultures have different rhetorical tendencies and that the linguistic patterns and rhetorical conventions of the first language often transferred to writing in ESL and thus may cause confusion for the reader. In his pioneering study, Kaplan identified the following types of paragraph development:

- Anglo-European expository essays follow a linear development.
- Paragraph development in Semitic languages is based on a series of parallel coordinate clauses.
- Essays written in Asian languages use an indirect approach and come to the point only at the end.
- In Romance languages and in Russian (and other Slavic languages), essays are permitted a degree of digressiveness and extraneous material that would seem excessive to a writer of English.

In many cases just being aware of the basic findings of contrastive rhetoric would help international students structure their essays in more native-like style. Furthermore, American style of teaching and writing is in many cases much more pragmatic than writing and teaching in their native countries.

The Responsibility between Readers and Writers

The responsibility between the writer and the reader to assure accurate transmission of ideas through uniting varies with different cultures. For instance, in Japanese texts, the reader is responsible for making sense of a piece of writing, while American writers are responsible for providing detailed explanations and using adequate transitions. In other words, Americans expect that the writer will make every effort to show how ideas are related to one another through the use of clear organizational structures, transitional devices, and adequate explanations. *This idea of the reader's responsibility is crucial in understanding the differences in rhetoric across cultures, as different rhetorical styles cannot be easily classified as less logical or less effective as it is the reader who sees them as consistent and persuasive.*

Following this line of reasoning, Connor found out that reader expectations determine what is perceived as coherent, straightforward writing. It seems that the reader's responsibility to understand the text seems to be one of the biggest issues in writing.

Anglo-American writing is **more writer-responsible**, i.e. American readers have explicit expectations about the organization of the text.

- **English-speaking readers expect that the main point of a given paper will be stated early and will be clear and precise as is the writer's role to tell the reader what to expect from the text and how to make transitions from one clear point to another clear point.**
- **ESL students should be aware that English-speaking readers are convinced by facts, statistics, and illustrations in arguments.**
- **English-speaking readers also expect explicit links between main topics and subtopics and they value originality.**
- **There should not be any discontinuity of argument, i.e. new argument should not begin before a previous one is fully developed.**
- **English papers have "advance organizers" such as phrases "first of all", "furthermore" to clarify the organization of the paper.**

Writing as a Process

Unlike in Europe and Asia, writing in the U.S. universities is not considered to be a solitary act: **It involves teachers, peers and other readers.** Therefore you should start scheduling appointments in the Writing Center and feel free to join study groups and writing seminars as well as startasking your peers to edit your papers nor discussing orally the purpose and content of my papers.

Moreover, in the American way of teaching writing, **the emphasis is put on writing as a process, rather than focusing primarily on the final product.** Consequently, each stage of the process: prewriting (and presenting the teacher with the first draft), composing, and editing are equally important. In the US, graduate students are often expected to provide frequent updates about their work or to communicate with their advisor about work in progress. Graduate student advisors expect to help guide and support you while you are both studying and doing research.

For a free online writing guide, check out *Beyond Typing: The Student's Guide to Writing* at ess.case.edu/sagesguide. This guide was developed by successful Case undergraduates who are excellent writers. The guide provides helpful information about how to organize, edit, and proofread papers.

Remember that the Anglo-American way of teaching writing puts much emphasis on writing as a **conscious process**. You should be able to justify the significance of each paragraph and each sentence. A good writing consists of 1% of inspiration and 99% of perspiration.

Departmental Communication

It is appropriate and expected that you will discuss student issues with the faculty supervising the course.

Also talk with your faculty advisor about the most appropriate way of communicating with him or her. Faculty at CWRU will expect you to be candid and frank. Communication should occur on a regular basis--at the very least weekly. It could happen in a number of ways!

- **Informal conversation** after each class, lab, quiz, or exam.
- **Informal notes**---delivered either to your advisor's office or department mail box.
- **E-mail.**
- **Formal written reports.**
- **Formal appointments.**
- **Phone messages.** You might want to check with your advisor if it is ok to contact her or him at home or just at the office.

Finally, don't forget to check your mail box and any departmental notice boards. Important information, both for you as a graduate student and a TA, is often posted there. For important dates and events in your department, you may also want to ask the departmental assistants. And when you receive e-mails about departmental events, try to attend them. These events are there to provide you with important information about your program and assistance on your way to graduation.

University Policies Particular to the United States: Privacy, Sexual Harassment, and Academic Honesty

Privacy

In some countries, a teacher will state a student's grade publicly, discussing, for the whole class' benefit, the relative faults and merits of that particular student's paper or exam. Test results may also be publicly posted by students' names.

However, In the United States, and specifically at Case, such methods are unacceptable and even potentially illegal, since the US has laws to protect individual rights to privacy. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 guarantees the rights of individual students to access educational records. Unless a student has waived (signed away or released) her or his rights, even letters of recommendations in a student's file can be accessed and read by the student. Confidentiality is another right protected under the law.

To maintain students' rights:

- **Be discreet.** Never talk about undergraduates with other undergraduates. A student's performance should never be discussed in a public setting. If you have a concern about a student, discuss it with your advisor or an academic dean in a closed office.
- **Protect confidential information.** Never post students' names together with their social security numbers. Don't leave graded assignments or exams out in a public place; don't return papers in such a way that other students can see or discover another student's grade.
- **Be sensitive.** If you have a problem to discuss with a student, such as a low test score, wait until the other students have left the room or until you can meet with the student during office hours.
- **Be respectful.** Most undergraduates at CWRU are over the age of 18 and legal adults. If a student is "of age" (over 18), you should always get her or his written permission before discussing grades or other information with their parents.

Sexual Harassment

Around the world, cultures vary widely regarding acceptable sexual behavior.

In the United States, especially in the workplace, there are very clear expectations about what is considered inappropriate sexual behavior. The US government Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment as any unwelcome sexual advance, requests for sexual favors, or other physical conduct of a sexual nature, when

- **Submission** to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or student status.
- **Submission** to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for decisions affecting that individual with regard to employment or student status.

- **Such** conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or educational experience, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work and/or educational environment.

Be aware that what is acceptable conduct in your own culture may be perceived as inappropriate or even threatening to people of other cultures. For instance, a joke with an implicit or explicit sexual connotation could be seen as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment may involve the behavior of a person of either gender against a person of the opposite or same gender. Any situation where there is an imbalance of power---where one person, for example, is giving a grade or advising another should be conducted with respectful, professional behavior.

To make sure that those you supervise feel comfortable in the learning environment,

- **Meet your students--of both genders--in a public place.**
- **Keep the door open** during conferences in your office.
- **Be aware that people of different cultures view touching differently.** For example, patting someone on the back may not be interpreted as reassuring but as inappropriate.

While supervising students, **a good rule** is to use the same language and conduct that you would use for a presentation at a formal meeting or conference with your professional colleagues.

Because of the imbalance of the power relationship and the possibility of prejudicial treatment, we advise you not to become sexually or romantically involved with those you supervise or teach, even if the interest seems mutual. It also is advised that you not get involved with those who supervise you, such as advisors, faculty, staff, or administrators.

If someone tells you about an incident involving sexual harassment and gives specific names of those involved, you are required to report the incident to the University. If they do not give you specific details, you can refer them to the Office of Student Affairs or University Counseling for help. Report allegations of sexual harassment to the office of Student Affairs, 368-2020.

If you encounter sexual harassment or have any questions or concerns regarding sexual harassment, contact Sue Nickel-Schindewolf, Associate Vice President in Student Affairs at 368-2020, or to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity at 368-8877.

Academic Honesty

An American English teacher was very surprised the first time she gave a test to a group of international students. During the test, some students openly looked at each other's papers; this practice especially occurred between family members (or friends who came at the same time from a different cultural background to the U.S.) who happened to be taking the course together. The teacher was annoyed. How dare the students cheat so openly! But when s/he talked to the students about it, they seemed quite surprised that this was a problem. The main point of a test is to get the right answers—and why wouldn't a wife help her husband (or a friend help a friend)?

What is considered acceptable behavior regarding tests, research, and the completion of assignments in your culture?

In the US, intellectual property rights and individual initiative are valued very highly. According to these values, using someone else's work or ideas and presenting them as your own is a kind of theft and considered morally and legally wrong. Such "stealing" can include cheating on a test or not acknowledging that another person assisted you with a research project.

Within the university, these values are referred to as **academic integrity**. They include guidelines regarding plagiarism, research conduct, copyright law, electronic property rights, and computing and network ethics. As a TA, you have a role in seeing that academic integrity is maintained.

Finally, it is never acceptable to sign for another person, even if that person is the professor you work for. If you or an undergraduate need a particular signature, get the actual person to sign!

For more information about how academic dishonesty occurs, how to prevent it, and what to do if you suspect student of cheating, *Guide*.

Self-Evaluation

After your first few weeks of teaching and again at the end of term, you may wish to evaluate how you're doing by asking yourself the following questions:

1. When talking to students, do I maintain consistent eye contact?
2. Do I check to see if students have understood me? Do I ask them to paraphrase important information back to me?
3. Are all students equally included in my classes? Do I make sure, for example, that women are participating an equal amount as men?
4. Have I made the University's policies regarding academic honesty, in particular plagiarism, clear to my students?
5. How have I made an effort to be aware of any students with special needs and to assist them?
6. What teaching methods am I using? Do I vary teaching techniques? Use discussion, active learning, or visual aids?
7. How well am I communicating with my advisor and/or other TAs involved in teaching the course?
8. Am I working to improve my American English?
9. Are my office hours clearly posted and consistent? Are students making use of my office hours?

10. Am I am aware of any students who could benefit from university services---be it tutoring at ESS, counseling, or academic advising? And if so, have I made the appropriate referral.

Most importantly, ARE YOU HAVING FUN? Teaching is a creative, challenging, and inspiring activity!

Trouble Shooting: University Resources

The following CWRU departments and services for students are mentioned in this handbook. To help you use these services better, problems or concerns are noted on the left side of the page and the student service that can help with this situation is noted on the right.

For a more complete list of student services, see *Guide*.

SITUATION:	CONTACT:
you or a student is troubled, sad, stressed, or depressed	University Counseling Jes Sellers, Director 368-5872
a student in your class is disabled or has special needs	Educational Support Services for Students Susan Sampson, Lesley Brown Disability Resources 368-5230
you suspect a student of academic dishonesty	Undergraduate Studies Joseph Pieri, Assistant Dean 368-2928
a student stops coming to class or is missing too many classes	Undergraduate Studies 368-2928
a student needs tutoring/ extra help in a course	Educational Support Services for Students James Eller, Associate Director for Academic Resources 368-5230
a student needs help with writing skills	Writing Center/SAGES Crew www.casewconline.com
you need a VCR, TV, over-head projector or other audio-visual device classroom use	Audio-Visual Services 368-3777
you have a problem with your computer and want to use your free yearly walk-in.	Perceptis: 368-4357

International Student Services (ISS) is a division of Student Affairs of Case Western Reserve University. This office is responsible for providing support services to international students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The key role of the Office of International Student Services is to educate and inform the international student population, the University community, and local, state, and federal entities of the regulations governing the enrollment of international students. The ISS advocates on behalf of international students and provides programs that help them adjust to a new university, community, country, and culture.

The Office of International Student Services promotes international educational exchange by partnering with other offices, departments and divisions at Case Western Reserve University to nurture the growth of an international community and to help develop a campus environment that is responsive to their needs.

International Student Services supports the University's goal to internationalize. The office is the primary source for timely and effective information of importance to the international community at CWRU. Please be aware that certain visa statuses require a signature which needs to be re-newed each year with ISS before leaving the country.

Whenever you have a question regarding an international student, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us. We're here to help.

Elise Lindsay, Director (exl4@case.edu)
Sears Building, Room 210
Phone: 368-2517
Fax: 368-4889

Glossary of Terms: The American Educational System (and some useful expressions)

(Adapted from *A Dictionary of American Idioms and Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second Edition.*)

all nighter (to pull): to stay up very late/all night studying

AP/ Advanced Placement course: A college level course that students can take in high school to earn college credit.

audit: to take a course not for credit

Blackboard: internet offering the possibility to post class readings, discussion questions, assignments, and notes and to send out e-mail to the class

blow-off: to not do

blow-off course: easy course, not requiring much work or attention

blue collar: working class

bummed out: (slang) discouraged, disappointed, or annoyed

class of: students identify themselves as belonging to the "class" of a particular year, referring to the date of their anticipated graduation from college. Students entering college in the fall of 2007 belong to the class of 2011, usually expressed as '11.

class roster: a list of all students officially enrolled in a course.

coed: including both sexes; male and female

computer geek: see "geek"*

coop education: alternating work and study in completing a degree

copy sets: prepared (copied and bound) readings for a course

core requirement: basic courses required of all students for a particular major or program

cramming: studying at the last minute

credit hours: the number of points towards one's degree earned by completing a particular course

CWRU net: the university wide computer network

curriculum: materials and topics covered in a course or major*

curve: grading based on how well students do in relation to each other, not how well they do on actual assignments or tests

dorm: dormitory or residence hall as it is called at Case is the on-campus buildings where students live.

drop/add: time during which students can change courses without penalty or affecting their permanent record or transcript

elective: course not required by university or major program

field trip: out of class trip taken for educational purposes

final: exam given at the end of term

first year student: at CWRU, students in their first year are called first year students rather than freshman/freshmen

fraternity: a college social organization for men

freshman: first year undergraduate student but at CWRU, these students are called first years students

freshman forgiveness: CWRU policy of "forgiving"---not showing grades of Failure (F) or Withdrawal (W)---on the transcripts of non-transfer freshman students

gay: (slang) homosexual; someone attracted to those of same sex

geek: very intelligent but socially maladjusted person

grades: letter measurement (with numerical equivalent) of how well a student has performed in a particular course, ranging from "A" excellent(4.0), to "B" good (3.0), "C" average (2.0), "D" below average (1.0), to "F" failure.

grade inflation: the pressure and tendency to give students higher grades than they have earned

Grade Point Average (GPA): a numerical reference on a 4.0 scale (based on the averaged worth of letter grades for courses taken) that indicates a student's overall college performance

grader: TA responsible for grading only, not class room teaching

Greek: a member of a fraternity* or sorority*

Greek system: all the fraternities and sororities on campus and the activities they organize

hands-on learning: active participation in learning; learning by doing

junior: a third year undergraduate student

lab: place for experimentation/hands-on learning*

major: primary, specialized area of study

midterm: test given about half way through the term

minority students: students who belong to an ethnic/racial/ cultural group that is under represented in the US and historically discriminated against (such as African-American or Hispanic)

non-majors: students not majoring or specializing in a subject

off campus: buildings or events not part of university; a student not living in university housing, commuting

on reserve: books held at the library for a particular course

overload: when a student is registered for more than the usual 18 credit hour* course load

pass/no pass: a course not taken for a letter grade but simply credit or no credit ("pass/no pass")

peer teaching: students teaching each other

pop: soft drink; carbonated beverage

pop quiz: unexpected, surprise quiz

prerequisite: a course that must be taken before another

reading days: free days for study between last day of classes and first day of final exams*.

recitation leaders: TAs who teach smaller subsections of large, lecture courses to go over the material with students in more detail

office hours: the set time you schedule each week to be in your office to meet with students

registrar: office where students register for courses

resume: brief (usually 1-2 page) description of education and experience submitted to potential employers when seeking a job

schedule (class): courses being taken in a particular term by a student, including meeting times and days

scholarship: financial support for a student; intellectual/ academic achievement

section: smaller part of a larger lecture course

senior: fourth or final year undergraduate student

sophomore: second year undergraduate student; CWRU refers to these students as second year students

sorority: a college social organization for women

straight: (slang) heterosexual; someone attracted to opposite sex

substance abuse: excessive and/or irresponsible use of alcohol and/or (illegal) drugs

sucks: stinks, awful, terrible

syllabus: a description of what will be included and required for a course, including assignments, test dates, books required, and grading and other university policies

teacher's pet: a favorite student

teaching assignment: course/s an instructor assigned to teach for a particular term

tenure: a permanent teaching position

transcript: student's official record (administered by the registrar) of courses taken and grades received

tutor: someone who gives individual, extra help to students; not, as in UK universities, an advisor or recitation leader

under classman: undergraduate in first two years of study

upper classman: undergraduate in last two years of study

override forms: paper that is needed in case your class has reached a set limit of students.

withdraw: grade given when a course is dropped after the official drop/add period; a "W" appears on the transcript*.