

Leading Successful (and Popular!) Office Hours

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Session Outline

1. Introduction
2. Teaching Strategies
3. Coordinating with the Instructional Team
4. Logistics
5. Next Steps



Learning Outcomes

- By the end of this session, you will be able to:
 - Practice effective teaching strategies for office hours
 - Coordinate office hour content with your instructional team
 - Maximize office hour attendance with clear planning



The goal of office hours

- Two main goals:
 - To provide guidance and support for learning the course material
 - To create a space where students can ask questions to discover and address areas of weakness

The image features a central blue speech bubble with the text "Teaching Strategies" in white. The background is white with several thin, light gray concentric circles and dashed lines, creating a subtle pattern. The speech bubble has a small triangular tail pointing downwards.

Teaching Strategies



Possible Office Hour Situations

Situation 1: The homework is due tomorrow. You expect nearly everyone in class to attend. What do you do?

Situation 2: A student comes in with broken code and has no idea how to debug it. What do you do?

Situation 3: People tend to come into office hours sporadically. The most recent group comes in and asks a question you just finished answering for the second time. What do you do?



Effective teaching strategies

- **Scaffolding** – using aids to build a framework for understanding
- **Asking questions** – push students to think outside the box and connect ideas to solve problems
- **Transparency** – clarify for students why their problem solving strategies do or don't work
- **Self-assessment** – use tools like surveys, quizzes, or questions to help students to assess their own progress
- **Peer teaching** – get the students who know the material to teach those who may be struggling and check in on the progress
- **Assessing prior knowledge** – figure out what the students know so it can be built off of



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The background features several concentric circles of varying radii, some solid and some dashed, creating a ripple effect. A bright blue callout box is centered on the page, containing the text.

Coordinating with the Instructional Team



Tips for better coordination

- Ask the lecturer about their expectation for office hours.
- Consistently update/give feedback to the lecturer/team.
- Attend lectures if you are unfamiliar with the lecture materials.
- Keep your notation consistent with the lecture notes.
- Solve the HW problems in advance.

Example Roles as a TA

Situation 1: You find the lecture materials and homework difficult for most students. Students struggle on almost every question and you spend more than 16+ hours a week on TA work. What would you do to improve this situation?

Situation 2: The professor has assigned homework problems that have little to do with the material covered in lecture, leaving the students lost. How do you structure your OH to help guide students?

Situation 3: The professor has assigned a very open ended homework problem, with many possible solutions depending on which assumptions are made. This professor also has not provided you, the TA, with any solutions or guidance. How do you run your office hours to help structure your students approach?



Logistics

Logistics

Time

- Consider the schedules of the TAs, students, and the HW due dates. It can help to create a poll in the first week (Doodle Poll, Piazza, etc). Personal appointments can be scheduled by email.

Increase Attendance

- Advertise your OH in the lecture and in graded feedback.
- Return graded work during your office hours or take a session to go over the answer key if that is allowed.
- Consider holding a “mini recitation” to cover key concepts and announcing it during lecture.
- Hold review sessions before exams

Next Steps

- Please visit <https://teach.caltech.edu> for more resources on teaching remotely
- Visit <https://learn.caltech.edu> for more resources on learning remotely
- Watch our other teaching conference sessions available online
- Complete the Online Policies module
- Attend the Teaching Conference in-person (synchronous) sessions on September 23 with an opportunity for you to ask your questions to current Caltech TAs!