

Tips for First-time Teachers

Murali Haran, Penn State University

1. Follow the previous teacher's notes

- A. First time: best to understand the course content and audience
- B. Make only minor changes
- C. Make bigger changes the second time you teach, once you know the course!
- D. Avoid time consuming changes that may not have much payoff (converting powerpoint slides to LaTeX)
- E. Focus on what will help your students learn. E.g. nice, easy-to-follow examples

Get help regularly

- Discuss issues that come up. Don't do things alone!
- Talk to fellow grad students
- Talk to professors. When necessary, grad chair (Ephraim Hanks) or department head (Murali Haran)
- Get help early. Do not wait until you are lost or problems become bigger

Organization and clear expectations

- Put careful thought into grading policies, late homework policies, makeup exam policies etc.
- Write these policies clearly in your syllabus. Avoid changing them. But if you have to, write the change in policy clearly by an email announcement + make a change to the syllabus and announce it
- Formulate these policies based on conversations with previous teachers
- Organize course content at the start: change as needed but good to start with a good idea of week-by-week topics

Be respectful

- Be respectful to your teaching assistant
- Be respectful to *all* your students. Students are quick to notice if you are not humble, and if you do not treat them respectfully
- Remember: you will occasionally have to deal with student issues. But these can be sorted out (get help for this!). Don't let troubles with a few students get in the way of teaching and enjoying interactions with the majority of students in the class
- Teaching is part of your job, so be as professional as possible. Fortunately, teaching is among the most rewarding aspects of academia, so it is mostly a very enjoyable job!