

Communicating Effectively with Your International TA

Having a TA who is international or who comes from a different language background can be a rewarding yet challenging experience. If you have never had a teacher from a different cultural or language background, you may fear that you won't understand your TA or that your TA won't understand you.

While your concerns are natural and legitimate, most students and international TAs find that working together they can minimize most communication problems and create an enriching learning environment, in which students master the course concepts and learn valuable cross-cultural communication skills.

This brochure is intended to introduce you to some simple, effective communication strategies that you can use when interacting with your international TA in class and during office hours. We encourage you to try them out and see which ones work best for you and your TA.

When speaking to your TA ...

- Speak more slowly (but still naturally) and articulate your words clearly.
- Ask direct statements and questions and avoid complicated sentence structures.
- Avoid a lot of slang and idiomatic expression or other vocabulary that your TA may not know.
- Write down key words if your TA doesn't seem to understand you.
- Use nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and nodding to help convey meaning.
- If your TA doesn't seem to understand you, repeat what you said more slowly. If that still doesn't work, repeat what you said in a slightly different way. Work with the TA until you understand each other.
- Give your TA time to understand what you've said before expecting a response. Don't immediately start repeating what you just said.

When listening to your TA...

- Focus on what your TA is saying instead of on the difference in accent and pronunciation or grammatical errors.
- Look at your TA and pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues, which help convey meaning.
- Ask your TA to write down words that you don't understand.
- Tell your TA when you don't understand, but try to be specific about what you don't understand instead of saying, "I don't understand you at all."

- Ask your TA to repeat what he or she said if you don't understand.
- Paraphrase what you think the TA said if you are unsure that you understood the TA. You can say something like, "So you want us to..." or "Let me see if I understood you. You said that..."

Be persistent and patient. Don't just walk away or "tune out" your TA when you experience communication problems. Give your TA a chance!

Additional Suggestions for Communicating with Your TA

- Get to know your TA and help your TA get to know you. Learn to pronounce each other's names and share where you're from and about your cultures.
- Learn from your TA's expertise. Your TA is an expert in the area you are studying and has likely experienced and overcome the same problems you may have in the course. Trust that your TA can help you.
- Prepare for class and learn the course materials. If you don't prepare for class and learn the course materials, you will likely have problems understanding your TA, regardless of his or her language or cultural background.
- Seek help from your TA and other Campus Services. Visit your TA during office hours or e-mail or call your TA if you need additional help. If you need more help than your TA can give, visit Student Educational Services for individual or group tutoring.

For further information or for a list of ESL courses offered at Marquette, please contact:

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