



OFFICE *of* THE PROVOST AND  
VICE-PRESIDENT (ACADEMIC)

FACULTY AND ACADEMIC STAFF RELATIONS

# Guide to Performance Evaluations

TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND GRADUATE SERVICE ASSISTANTS (CUPE 3913, UNIT 1)

IMPROVE LIFE.

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## INTRODUCTION

Performance evaluations provide a valuable opportunity for supervisors to discuss an employee's work performance in a constructive manner and to guide the employee's professional development.

The purpose of the performance evaluation process is threefold:

- to emphasize areas of strength in the employee's work performance;
- to provide formative feedback to improve areas of weakness and future work performance; and,
- to determine whether work performance is satisfactory.

At the University of Guelph, performance evaluations of Teaching Assistants and Graduate Service Assistants<sup>1</sup> (TAs & GSAs) are especially important because these employees are also our students. The University sees these opportunities as integral to their development as scholars and professionals. Formative feedback during their employment is a vital part of this overall development.

## COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT PROVISIONS

TAs & GSAs are covered by the Collective Agreement between the University of Guelph and the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3913 (Unit 1). The full text of the relevant article is found in Appendix B. In short, the Agreement outlines the following regulations governing performance evaluations for this group:

- A strong performance evaluation process starts by outlining the TA/GSA's duties in the 'Assignment of Work Agreement' as agreed to by the employee and the supervisor *at the beginning of the semester*.
- The TA/GSA must be given at least five (5) days' notice that a performance evaluation will be conducted and the evaluation needs to take place at a mutually agreeable time. Prior to the performance evaluation, the TA/GSA may submit documentation they feel is relevant to their evaluation. Self-evaluation cannot be used to discipline or deny work to an employee.
- Evaluations provide the TA/GSA with an overall rating of either "Satisfactory", "Improvement Required" or "Unsatisfactory". Where an evaluation is not conducted, it is understood that performance has been "Satisfactory".
- Student evaluations cannot be the sole consideration for issuing a rating of "Improvement Required" or "Unsatisfactory". Unsigned student evaluations will not be used unless agreed to by the TA/GSA.
- If the TA/GSA is given an overall rating of "Improvement Required" or "Unsatisfactory", constructive feedback will be provided for correcting the concerns. A timeline for improvement will also be provided.
- The TA/GSA's work performance is separate and distinct from their academic pursuits as a student and will not be included in the academic file.

Although our TAs & GSAs are students, their academic and employee records are separate. Performance as an employee cannot be used in academic decision making and vice versa.

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<sup>1</sup> This guide applies only to Graduate Service Assistant 1s who are members of CUPE 3913 (GSAs whose work is primarily in support of the academic enterprise).

## FREQUENCY OF EVALUATIONS

It is important to provide regular *informal* feedback to TAs & GSAs about performance during each of their work assignments. Departments should also establish a regular schedule for *formal* performance evaluations. While the frequency of *formal* performance evaluations is at the discretion of individual Departments, the University encourages faculty and staff supervising TAs & GSAs to conduct a written performance evaluation following the first work assignment greater than or equal to 0.5 (70 hours). Subsequent performance evaluations are at the discretion of the Department.

In all cases where a TA/GSA has received a rating of less than “Satisfactory”, performance evaluations should be performed for each subsequent work assignment held until evidence of sustained successful performance is established.

TAs & GSAs can submit a self-evaluation of their performance. This is their opportunity to put performance into context – especially if they are unable to meet in person.

## TIMING OF EVALUATIONS

Performance evaluations may be conducted at any time during or shortly after a work assignment ends. It is common for a performance evaluation to occur following the end of the semester, once student evaluations are available.

Holding the performance evaluation after the end of the semester may mean that the TA/GSA is not able to participate in person.

This is acceptable provided the TA/GSA is given reasonable opportunity to submit documentation and comment on the evaluation before it is finalized.

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## FEELING SAFE

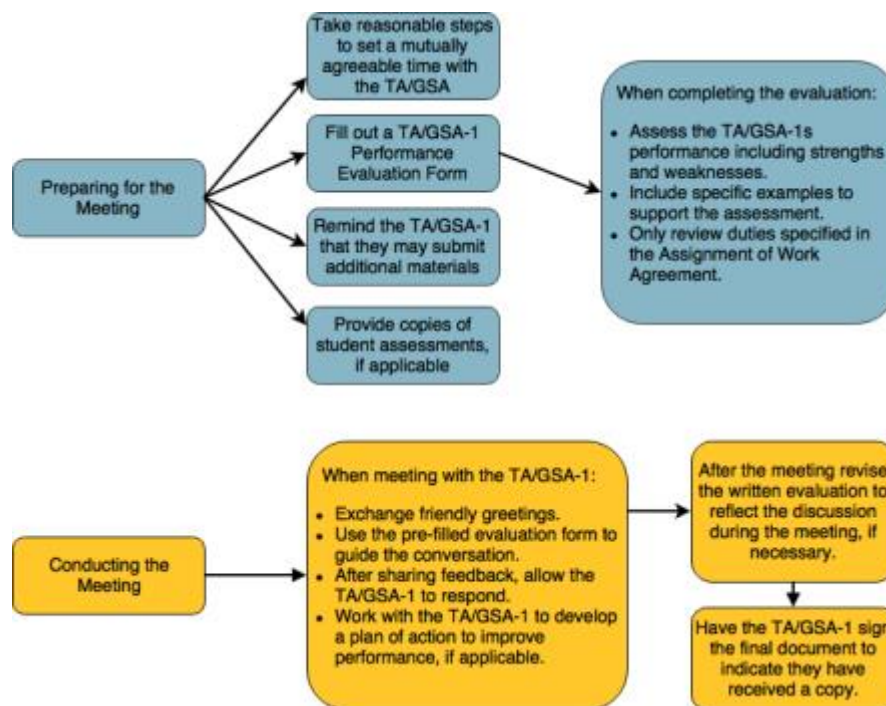
Performance evaluations, particularly where the supervisor and employee disagree on outcomes, can result in conflict. These conflicts should be handled in a respectful manner. However, either party has the right to adjourn the meeting if they begin to feel unsafe.

Employees are entitled to bring a support person (a friend, colleague or union representative) to performance evaluation meetings. The support person is an observer and should not interfere with the process.

**If you require immediate assistance on campus, call x2000 or 519-840-5000 or 911.**

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## CONDUCTING THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION



### Preparing for the Meeting

Before the meeting, review the 'Assignment of Work Agreement' completed at the beginning of the semester, take time to reflect on the employee's overall performance, and begin filling out the TA/GSA Performance Evaluation template (see Appendix C) or other similar form approved by your Academic Unit. This form will guide the discussion with the TA/GSA. It is important to ensure that you:

- Review only the duties specified in the Assignment of Work Agreement. If a duty is not specified, then mark it as 'N/A' on the evaluation.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in each area of assigned duties.
- Include specific examples of observed behaviour to support your assessment.
- Remind the TA/GSA that they may submit additional materials to inform the evaluation.
- Schedule sufficient time after the meeting to write summary notes and complete the performance evaluation.

### Conducting the Meeting

- Create an open atmosphere:
  - Exchange friendly greetings.
  - Frame the evaluation as *conversation* about the TA/GSA's performance over the course of the semester.
- Take notes.
- Provide the TA/GSA an opportunity to assess their performance from their perspective before making your observations and giving feedback.

Performance evaluations should *empower* and *encourage*. Focus on the positive and acknowledge where the TA/GSA is meeting or exceeding your expectations.

- Don't interrupt while the TA/GSA, other than to ask questions for clarification. Rephrase and summarize to ensure you understand.
- Provide constructive feedback focusing on the TA/GSA's specific behaviours (strengths & weaknesses) as evidence of performance.
- Provide the TA/GSA an opportunity to respond or ask questions.
- Use key phrases such as "*Is this your understanding as well?*"
- Develop a plan of action (and timelines, as necessary) to address any areas requiring improvement. This could include professional development opportunities (such as those offered by OpenEd).
- Summarize the discussion and outcome (rating) of the evaluation:
  - Reiterate the purpose of the evaluation as a professional development opportunity.
  - Review the plan of action discussed during the meeting.
  - Thank the TA/GSA for their participation and explain the next steps

The TA/GSA does not need to agree with the outcome of the assessment. Signing the form signifies that the TA/GSA has received a copy of the evaluation.

The goal is for the TA/GSA to understand how the final rating was determined and what, if anything, they should focus on improving for the future.

### After the Meeting

- Provided a copy of the evaluation to the TA/GSA within ten (10) days of the evaluation.
- The TA/GSA should sign the finalized document to confirm that they have received a copy of the evaluation. An email confirming receipt is also acceptable. *Signing the evaluation does not mean that the employee agrees with the assessment.*
- Performance evaluations must not be kept in the student's academic file.

Contact **Faculty and Academic Staff Relations** if you have any questions or concerns about next steps related to a TA/GSA's performance.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

The remainder of this guide includes general tips and tricks for Supervisors on how to improve active listening skills, giving effective feedback and communicating effectively. Learning and Professional Development in Human Resources also provides regular training in each of these areas. For more information, please visit <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/staff-faculty/learning-and-professional-development>.

### Active Listening

A successful performance evaluation requires active engagement of both parties. Active listening on the part of the Supervisor is key to active engagement. Active listening demonstrates genuine interest in, and concern for, the TA/GSA's point of view.

Tips for effective active listening:

- Location: Choose a location that is quiet with few distractions (e.g., a private office or a meeting room).
- Eye contact: Keep your focus on the TA/GSA and try to avoid letting your attention wander. Make regular eye contact with the TA/GSA to show that you are paying attention.
- Body language: Show the TA/GSA that you are being attentive by sitting upright, smiling, nodding at relevant points. Keep fidgeting and unnecessary movement to a minimum.
- Responding: Keep your emotional reactions in check. Avoid interrupting or focusing too much on what you want to say next. Ask follow-up questions.

### Giving Effective Formative Feedback

- Plan your feedback in advance of the meeting.
- Provide the TA/GSA the opportunity to reflect on their own performance. Individuals are more likely to accept constructive criticism when they are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Focus on behaviours and the specific responsibilities and duties as outlined in the TA Work Agreement.
- Avoid bias, personal perceptions or judgements of the TA/GSA's personality.
- Remember that individuals react to criticism in different ways. Anticipate possible reactions and to be prepared to diffuse situations that may arise.
- Focus on the future. Talk about ways to improve areas of lesser strength and/or weaker performance. Let the TA/GSA know that you think they are capable of improvement.
- Criticism should be specific and should include examples of what the TA/GSA has previously said or done.
- Highlight the effect of the TA/GSA's actions on others (colleagues, students, the department). Impacts can be both positive and negative. Positive impacts are just as, if not more, important to note and encourage.
- Try the 'sandwich' technique where feedback that could be perceived as negative is 'sandwiched' between positive feedback:
  1. *Identify what worked well.*
  2. *Focus on what could have been done differently (constructive criticism) and suggest ways to improve.*
  3. *Give a reminder of the positive (or another positive).*

## Navigating Difficult Conversations

### Defensiveness

- Describe the situation as a problem to be solved and from the perspective of curiosity rather than criticizing the employee for poor performance (e.g., “Help me understand ...”). People are less likely to feel personally attacked when they are engaged in a joint problem-solving discussion.
- Ask open-ended questions and allow the employee to explain their point of view.
- Utilize active listening. Paraphrase their comments to ensure understanding.
- Stay calm, keep emotions in check, and maintain an appropriate level of eye contact.
- Let the individual ‘vent’ emotions (within reason).
- Be empathetic and ensure you have fully understood the situation by asking the employee about their reasons for disagreeing.

### Unresponsiveness/Withdrawal/Apathy

- Refrain from pressuring the TA/GSA into answering. Be patient and allow them time to give a response.
- Remind them of the value of the conversation as a tool for professional development.

## Formative Feedback Examples

The way in which formative feedback is presented will impact how it is received.

- Provide *specific* examples to ensure the TA/GSA understands how you have come to your assessment.
- Use “I” statements, rather than “you” statements.
- Avoid words like “always” and “never”.
- Express the belief that the TA/GSA is capable of improvement, as needed.
- Focus on specific strategies and action plans to improve performance, as needed.

For example:

<b>Instead of saying/writing:</b>	<b>Say/write:</b>
<b>Re: Grading (Timeliness)</b> You always submitted your portion of the grading late and never seem to complete your tasks within the deadlines.	It caused significant frustration among your students when you returned their midterms 3 days late, and after the other students had already received their grades. What time management strategies might be effective on the go-forward?
<b>Re: Punctuality</b> You were constantly late.	You were 25 minutes late for our introductory meeting on September 4, and arrived after the midterm started on Oct 15. Students reported that you were late for seminars in units 4 and 6.  On the go forward, [plan of action, provide a timeline].
<b>Re: Communication (Written)</b>	I found spelling and grammar mistakes in your weekly discussion posts when



<b>Instead of saying/writing:</b>	<b>Say/write:</b>
Your writing skills are poor.	responding to students. Taking time to review your work prior to posting would provide a better example for our students.
You did a good job.	The feedback you provided students on the final project was excellent and demonstrated your understanding of the material.  You consistently uploaded grades before the deadline. This demonstrates how effective you are at time management.

## APPENDIX A - DEFINITIONS

**CUPE 3913:** Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3913, the union that represents Sessional Lecturers, Teaching Assistants and Graduate Service Assistant-1s at the University.

**Department:** An Academic Department, School, or Interdepartmental Program at the University of Guelph and Program at the University of Guelph-Humber.

**Employee:** A Teaching Assistant or Graduate Service Assistant-1 employed by the University who is a member of CUPE 3913, Unit 1.

**Faculty and Academic Staff Relations (FASR):** Reporting to the Provost and Vice President (Academic), FASR is responsible for advising members of the University community on the terms and conditions of employment for faculty and academic staff, including members of CUPE 3913.

**Graduate Service Assistant-1 (GSA-1):** A graduate student employed in work *related to the academic enterprise* that is not a Teaching Assistant and is paid from regular University funding.

**Invigilator:** An employee whose sole duty is to monitor/proctor students while they write examinations.

**Sessional Lecturer:** An individual who is employed by the University on a per-course basis to teach a degree-credit course. Sessional Lecturers are members of CUPE 3913, Unit 2.

**Supervisor:** The person directly responsible for the assignment and direction of an employee's work (usually the course instructor).

**Teaching Assistant (TA, GTA or UTA):** A graduate or undergraduate student who is employed by the University to perform duties such as conducting labs/seminars, grading, student consultation, invigilation and supervising field trips.

## APPENDIX B – ARTICLE 13 (PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS)

Excerpt from University of Guelph-CUPE 3913, Unit 1 Collective Agreement. For the full text of the agreement, visit our website: [uoguelph.ca/vpacademic/facultyrelations/agreements.php](http://uoguelph.ca/vpacademic/facultyrelations/agreements.php).

### 13.01

- (a) The performance evaluation of any employee shall be conducted in accordance with established University Policy and treated as confidential information between the employee and the University unless the employee chooses to share it with the Union. The results of such an evaluation shall not be used for the purpose of denying continuation in the academic program in which they are currently registered. Employees shall be provided with a copy of the evaluation within ten (10) days of such evaluation. The performance evaluation shall not be included in the employee's academic file. Where no evaluation has been carried out it shall be understood that the performance has been satisfactory.
- (b) An employee's work performance shall not be applied in any form against their academic pursuits at the University except with the written request of that employee. An employee's academic record shall not impact upon an employee's employment at the University except how such record may affect any decision under 11.04 (c).

### 13.02

- (a) A performance evaluation shall not be included in an employee's academic record.
- (b) Evaluations will provide the employee with an overall rating of either "Satisfactory", "Improvement Required" or "Unsatisfactory".
- (c) Once per semester an employee may request that their work performance be evaluated in accordance with this Article.
- (d) Prior to the performance evaluation, an employee may submit documentation they feel is relevant to their evaluation.
- (e) Self-evaluation cannot be used to discipline or deny work to an employee.
- (f) The primary purpose of evaluations is intended to be constructive and developmental in nature.
- (g) Student evaluations will not be the sole consideration for issuing an overall rating of "Improvement Required" or "Unsatisfactory".

13.03 There shall be no electronic monitoring of employees by any member of the University, for any purpose, without the written consent of the employee. Such consent may be withdrawn at any time in writing.

13.04 Employees shall be given at least five (5) days' notice that a performance evaluation is to be conducted. Such evaluation shall take place at a mutually agreeable time.

13.05 All evaluations shall be in writing and based solely on the performance of those duties specified in the 'Assignment of Work Agreement' (Appendix C) as completed and signed by the employee and the supervisor. Evaluations will state whether the employee has

performed satisfactorily in the duties associated with their work assignment. Where an employee is given an overall rating of “Improvement Required” or “Unsatisfactory”, constructive feedback will be provided for correcting the concerns. A timeline for correcting the concerns will also be provided. Should the employee fail to improve their performance within the timeline provided to the employee, the University may choose to initiate constructive actions and/or a disciplinary process.

13.06

- (a) Student evaluations of Teaching Assistants may form only one part of the information considered in the evaluation of employee performance.
- (b) In the event that student evaluations do form part of an employee evaluation, those student evaluations will not be the sole purpose for denying a work assignment to an employee.
- (c) Unsigned comments from student evaluations will not be used unless agreed to by the employee.
- (d) Student response rate in the evaluation of teaching will be an important consideration in the employee evaluation process.

13.07 Where an employee challenges their performance evaluation, through the grievance procedure, the employee and/or Union, prior to the first meeting as specified in the Grievance Procedure, may request in writing (and shall receive within five (5) days of such request), any records and/or documentation that were used as a basis for the evaluation.

## APPENDIX C – SAMPLE TA/GSA PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The following is a sample template Departments can use to evaluate the performance of TAs/GSA-1s. Departments are also free to design their own templates. This template is also available in fillable formats on the TA/SL hiring website.



### TEACHING ASSISTANT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

BASIC INFORMATION				
Date:		Employee Name:		
Academic Unit:		Supervisor/Instructor:		
Course:		Semester:		
Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> GTA	<input type="checkbox"/> UTA	<input type="checkbox"/> GSA-1	
INSTRUCTIONS				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance assessments are based on the duties outlined in the TA's Assignment of Work Agreement.</li> <li>• The listed skills and duties are <i>examples</i> and should be amended to reflect the duties as outlined in the work agreement and the skills required for the specific position.</li> <li>• Evaluations are conducted in accordance with University policy and treated as confidential information between the employee and the University.</li> <li>• Student evaluations or other correspondence that support the assessment should be attached.</li> <li>• A rating of "Improvement required" or "Unsatisfactory" requires constructive feedback and a timeline for correcting the concerns.</li> </ul>				
EVALUATION				
Assessment Criteria	N/A	Satisfactory	Improvement Required	Unsatisfactory
Preparation:				
Attending Lectures:				
Conducting Labs/Seminars:				
Grading (punctuality):				
Grading (accuracy):				
Attending Lectures:				
Student Consultation:				
Invigilating Exams:				
Supervising Field Trips:				
Other Duties (Specify):				

Demonstrates Required Theoretical Skills and Knowledge:				
Demonstrates Required Applied (e.g., lab) Skills and Knowledge:				
Competence as a discussion leader or laboratory instructor:				
Punctual (meetings, tutorials labs, etc.):				
Communication Skills (spoken):				
Communication Skills (written):				
Ability to take direction:				
Time Management:				
<b>Overall Assessment:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Improvement Required <input type="checkbox"/> Unsatisfactory			
<b>Provide specific feedback related to the TA's strengths:</b>				
<b>Provide specific feedback related to how the TA performance can improve (including timelines as necessary):</b>				
Supervisor's Signature: _____		Date: _____		
Employee's Signature: _____		Date: _____		

## APPENDIX D – FURTHER READING

- “How to Conduct a Performance Review.” Thunder Bay: Lakehead University. Retrieved from: <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/forms-db/human-resources/node/39394>.
- Korpan, Cynthia. 2012. “Formative Feedback for Teaching Assistants (TAs) at UVic.” Victoria: University of Victoria. Retrieved from: <https://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/faculty/resources/tas/index.php>
- Rudman, Richard S. 2003. *Performance planning and review: making employee appraisals work, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- TDTSA. 2008. “Providing Feedback and Addressing Performance Concerns.” Retrieved from: [https://www.skills.sa.gov.au/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?Command=Core\\_Download&EntryId=1838&PortalId=6&TabId=1936](https://www.skills.sa.gov.au/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?Command=Core_Download&EntryId=1838&PortalId=6&TabId=1936).