1. **Introduction**
   - How TA/TO assignments are made
   - Teaching/Research balance
   - Resources: Linguistics profs, Center for Teaching

2. **Materials and curriculum**
   *Extensive teaching materials, advice, problem sets, syllabuses can be found at:*

   **A. Course/Section Website**
   - Moodle: request course site through Spire
   - Box or Apps (Google Drive):
     Log in at [http://www.it.umass.edu/online-storage-collaboration](http://www.it.umass.edu/online-storage-collaboration)

   Request a class email list from Spire. (Faculty Home, class email lists)

   **B. Syllabus** - See example syllabi on 201 materials website

   Syllabus should include:
   - contact information
   - grading policies
   - topics to be covered, preferable with calendar and all exam and assignment due dates.
   - statement of policy on late assignments
   - **statement of policy on academic honesty.**

   **C. Topics and materials**
   - 201 must cover enough phonology and syntax to prepare students for 401 and 402.
   - *Avoid reinventing everything.* The 201 materials website and/or existing textbooks include reading, assignments and exam questions.
   - But also avoid re-using previous assignments and exam questions verbatim. Alter them enough to avoid cheating.
3. How to Teach (These tips come from ideas compiled by John McCarthy, Wendell Kimper and Kathryn Pruitt)

A. General
- Dress a little better than usual (See McCarthy's "What (not) to Wear" below)
- Plan how you're going to use the board, overheads.
- Impersonate a non-nervous person, or else Kyle.
- Make frequent eye contact and also call on specific people sometimes.
- Homework should usually be simpler than in-class work.
- Handouts can hinder participation.

B. Classroom management and decorum
- Tell students at the first meeting that they are expected to participate in class for the full 50 minutes, and also that you respect their schedules and will be sure to start and finish on time.
- Start and finish on time! Try to get to the classroom early. If you're using AV equipment, make sure it's set up and operating correctly. Adhere carefully to the clock: They have very little time to get to the next class, and making sure they know you won't overtime keeps them from fidgeting and noisily packing their stuff during the last 5 minutes of class.
- Speak up. All of the students, even those in the back of the room, need to hear you very clearly. This also helps to keep their attention. You don't need to shout, but you all need to speak more loudly. Be confident -- you're in charge and they're generally predisposed to accept your authority in the classroom.
- Have strict rules and enforce them leniently. For example, your policy on late assignments should be that you do not accept them, but if a student should have exceptional circumstances, they may consult with you about a possible waiver.
- Be alert to incivility between students. Students shouldn't laugh at, disparage, or insult other students. Discourage interruptions, particularly men interrupting women. If you need to introduce a raise-your-hand-to-talk policy, do so. Try not to let one or two students dominate.
- When discussing controversial topics, don’t make assumptions about what students will believe, and be respectful of students who hold views that linguists consider to be misconceptions. If you are discussing a dialect of which you are not a native speaker, make it clear where you got your information.

C. Class Participation
- Let them know at the beginning of each class what's going to happen.
- When you ask a question, try not to ever answer it yourself. Allow more than ample time for them to answer. If necessary, re-phrase the question.
- Ask questions that have multiple possible answers. Examples: “What are some examples of derivational morphemes in English” "Let's list the voiced consonants. Jennifer, can you think of one? Jayden?" "Suppose I left you a note saying "Please feed the baby dog biscuits. What
would you do?"

• Break down problem sets into pieces. So, instead of "Here's some data on Tzotzil. Solve the problem" walk them through examining the data, relating the data to something they've seen before, finding regularities, explaining regularities.

• When a student asks a question or makes a comment, repeat it for the whole class. Students, particularly those in the front, tend to direct their speech to you, and they're inaudible to everyone else. You need to repeat the student's statement or question loudly. Also, when answering a question from a student in the front, keep your voice up.

• When you transition from one topic to the next, make the demarcation line clear. Have some bit of stage business for the transition -- erasing the board, writing a new topic on the board, etc.

• Getting their attention back after group activities is hard. Make them move their chairs back into normal position to signal that the group activity is over and normal classroom behavior has resumed.

• Be alert to drifting attention, people talking, newspaper-reading. Get their attention back by speaking up, asking for attention, or even flipping the lights off and on.

• With undergrads, don't bother putting anything on the handout unless you plan to go over it in some detail in class. Often, undergrads learn better from stuff written on the blackboard or an overhead slide. This allows you to point to things and explain them as you are pointing to them. You can even make an overhead of your handout (but use a bigger font for the overhead -- letters that are smaller than about 1/3 inch (1 cm.) won't make a big enough image when they are projected).

• Use the blackboard or the overhead projector as well as your voice. You need to give them important stuff through multiple input channels. Avoid powerpoints and presentation-type handouts.

D. Grading and Timely feedback

• Criteria for American students grades are laxer than European and Asian grades. In general, A = excellent, B = decent, C = problematic. Check with a 201 or 101 prof. if you aren't sure.

• Make sure students know when to expect graded assignments to be returned.

• Make it a priority to return assignments promptly.

• You may want to read over some of the assignments to get a sense for the range of performance before beginning to grade in earnest. Sometimes you can catch this way whether everyone made the same mistake in understanding and keep this in mind when assigning points.

• Don't agonize over every comment. If there are mistakes that lots of students make, explain it in class with a handout rather than writing the same comment on lots of students' papers.

• Students have a right to go over tests or assignments with you so that you can explain what they got wrong and help them do better next time.
- Make it clear at the beginning exactly what can count as “extra credit” (participating in an experiment, for example).

E. Students with disabilities
- Students with disabilities have a right to “reasonable accommodations” in their classes. At UMass, the Disability Services office decides what those accommodations are, and they inform us in writing of what we are required to do for each student. This comes to us as a form delivered by the student. The syllabus tells students to bring the form to the Professor for the course. If you're a TA, students will often bring the form to you, in which case it should be passed along to the Prof.
- Usually the accommodation is either extra time on tests or a quiet place to take tests. Students can take tests at Disability Services.
- Some students are permitted extra time on homework.
- Some students can have note-takers through Disability Services.

E. Athletes
- The athletic department requests (requires?) progress reports on student athletes several times per semester. TAs usually don’t have to deal with these, but you may be asked by the Prof. about particular students’ grades so far. TOs will get lists of athletes in their classes and instructions to go to a website to fill in a form reporting current progress.
- Occasionally we’ll get requests for tutors. Our policy is that tutors are not appropriate for this course, since coming to class and/or going to see the instructor are the only ways to do well.

MORE HELPFUL HINTS FROM PREVIOUS TO'S

Organization (Written by Katherine Pruitt)

1.1. Keeping organized

Teaching requires the juggling of time, energy, and paper. Do not underestimate the difficulty of the paper-juggling part. Your duties will be a great deal easier than your predecessors in this regard because the homework essays are being submitted electronically. However, there will still be various times when students give you things you need to keep track of. An example is extra credit receipts (from participating in experiments). These miniscule pieces of paper are really easy to lose, and students will try to give them to you when you are busy doing eight other things. You should work out a system for being organized and keeping track of such things (e.g., put everything you receive in a designated folder with secure edges). And if you are sure you’ll lose something if the student gives it to you at that moment, tell them to wait.
1.2. Keeping track of student communication

I find it a challenge to keep track of student communication when they catch me before or after class with a complaint/concern/request/etc. I think I'll remember, and then occasionally the next week (or worse, the end of the semester), it turns out I've forgotten the encounter and whatever I've told them. The best advice is usually to just tell them to email you with their question. This way you have a written record of what they asked and what you told them. A lot of the time such queries will come in the form of email anyway, and though it's inherently easier to keep track of, it can be hard to deal with if you don't keep your email organized. Put all your 101 correspondence in a subfolder of your inbox so that you have it all in one place when you need to review it. (Don't bother with sub-subfolders or any other sorting system; the volume of email and the need to consult it later aren't sufficient to justify the extra effort.)

Sometimes whatever they ask before or after class seems easy enough to deal with in person at that moment, but keep in mind that students often treat what you say in these impromptu “meetings” as official, so you should keep track of them. I recommend writing down in the same place each time: who you talked to, what they asked, and what you told them. This doesn't have to be very formal, but it will save you the trouble and embarrassment of a student complaining that you took points off for a late assignment when you told them you wouldn't. (“But you said…!”). (This may also apply to office hours, by the way — it’s probably a good idea to keep a brief written record of just about any in-person discussion you have with a student.)

If a student's request seems complicated or is a question about a grade, tell them to come to your office hours or set up an appointment at another time. Don't try to deal with complex requests or questions about grades in the moments before and after class, and don't waste your time writing long complicated email replies for something that could be cleared up in five minutes during your office hours.

1.3. Learning students’ names

You should make every effort to learn your students names. This can seem like a daunting task, but there are some things you can do to make it easier.

- Look at photo rosters on Spire.
- I find an old-fashioned approach works very well too… You should be calling roll at least at the first few meetings, and you can try to use this as a chance to learn a few students’ names at a time. Be aware that people will be late in the first week due to difficulty finding classrooms, and new students may come in during the first two weeks, up until the end of drop/add.
- Another thing I like to do is use groupwork time during the first few class meetings to learn names. You should walk from group to group during groupwork, and as you go around you can check your memory of students’ names, and ask the ones you don’t remember. (Since you have more time in this situation you can also fill in your list of distinguishing characteristics or write other notes that help you remember.)
- In the end, I have found that remembering names is easier than I thought it would be, but it did take a bit of work to be thorough. The trick is always the handful of
students who never talk and don’t particularly stand out to you. However, you should try to learn everyone’s names within the first few weeks – it’s better to have to ask a student what their name is during this time than halfway through the semester.

1.3.1 Should you use handouts? (by Katherine Pruitt)

Many TAs like having a handout for each discussion section, and I suspect this urge derives from the ubiquity of handouts in our field. Although you’ll have to see for yourself whether you get along better with or without a handout, here are some things to keep in mind:

- A handout is not required; students probably don’t get handouts in their other courses, and they certainly don’t expect them for every class.
- Although linguists think of handouts as souvenirs from talks they’ve attended, students will not think of your handouts this way. In fact, they probably won’t look at them ever again. For this reason, if you do make a handout, don’t bother putting things on it that you don’t plan to go over in class.
- A handout in front of a student can encourage passiveness. Without the handout, they may be more likely to be actively listening to what you say and to be writing things down for themselves. (For some students it won’t matter… they don’t even bring writing implements to class. But you can’t reach everyone.)
- A handout can be time-consuming to construct. I find I spend a lot more time preparing for a discussion when making a handout, with only a negligible difference in the quality of that discussion section (surprising, but true). Instead of spending your time formatting a handout, consider using it instead to think of a useful group activity students could do that week, or a strategy for helping students improve their writing.

Situations which might warrant a handout:

- A handout can be really useful when you are planning to have students answer questions, e.g., in groupwork. And I have used handouts for beginning-of-class “quizzes” where students take five minutes to see if they can answer a few questions that test their retention of important concepts from lecture or a reading, for example. (I still call it a handout because the students keep it for themselves rather than turning it in. We discuss it as a class after the five-minute quiz time.)
- Anything that would benefit from visual presentation is a candidate for presentation via handout. (And given different learning styles, almost everything could fall into this category). However, also consider whether the blackboard and/or the overhead might do the trick (more on these below). If you have a diagram that you’re filling in, for example, you might want to put a blank version of the diagram on a handout to distribute, and fill out yours on an overhead.

If you want to use a handout, check out some of the examples from previous courses on the 201 materials website. And finally, if you do use handouts, make them just one part
of your repertoire for a given class. Thus, regardless of whether there’s a handout, make use of the blackboard and/or overhead projector for displaying information.

1.3.2 If you use them, what should they be like? (by Wendell Kimper)

- Only use a handout when there’s good reason to. In addition to the many reasons why you probably don't need a handout all the time, students are more likely to pay attention to the handout if receiving one is a rarity rather than the status quo.
- The obvious: your handout should be formatted well. It doesn't have to be a masterpiece of graphic design, but it should look clean and polished. Just like your attire, a properly-formatted handout shows the students that you respect them enough to bother.
  - Avoid: inconsistent font face/size, erratic indentation or line breaks, obvious errors (occasional typos are inevitable, but too many and you look bad), etc. Good things: plenty of white space, appropriate font size, sparing but effective use of boldface and italics.
  - Headers and/or Footers: include the class, your name/email/office hours, and the date. A prominent title related to the purpose of the handout is also useful. Students are even less likely to look at a handout again if they can’t immediately identify what it’s for.
- The purpose of a handout is not to convey information or content (that's your purpose). But a handout can be useful for structuring that information, and as such can be used to encourage note-taking. The students will probably not read their notes later, but the act of writing things down in a structured way will help some students learn.
- Additionally, handouts can include small amounts of content you want them to be able to reference, like tips for writing essays. Use this kind of content very carefully -- what is the minimal amount you want them to be able to reference later (even if they probably won’t)? How can you get them to write down for themselves as much of what you want to convey as possible?
- Handout should be interactive. Include questions and spaces for answering them, diagrams with blank spaces to be filled in, sample outlines with blank lines for section headings, or instructions and space for doing a class activity. Interactive handouts are useful because they give the students a framework in which to take notes, and they give you some amount of control over those notes.
  - Clearly structure the blank spaces: lines, boxes, whatever it takes. Make sure it's abundantly clear that the students are supposed to write something there, and make sure you leave enough space for them to actually write (remember that many of your students' handwriting will be typical of adolescent girls' --- big and round and loopy).
  - In discussion, give students suggestions about what to write and where. The less structure they have to figure out on their own, the more likely they are to take notes. Some of them still won't, and that's fine.
- Avoid putting visuals on handouts unless they are interactive. Those are better for overheads or projectors, because you want the students to be looking up at you
instead of down at their desks. Interactive visuals should be done both in handouts (what they write down) and on the overhead (what you write down).

- Remember that a handout is just one tool, and use it only when it's the right one. If you make a handout because you think you're supposed to or because you don't know what else to do, it probably won't be very effective.

1.4. Blackboard and overhead projector (by Katherine Pruitt)

These are two important and useful tools for presenting information visually and controlling the flow of the discussion. Here are some reasons to use them and tips for doing so successfully:

- Students will very often copy down whatever you write on the blackboard or overhead, and it requires their attention to you at the front of the room, unlike a handout (as you know from experience in linguistics talks in which you never make eye contact with the speaker).
- The blackboard can be used to slow the pace of the discussion. The time it takes you to write something on the board is time they can be absorbing information. But don't be laborious about writing every detail on the board or writing out really long examples – plan ahead and consider using the overhead for such cases, since they can be made in advance.
- An overhead can often replace material that is too cumbersome to reproduce on the blackboard and thus would often otherwise end up in a handout. There are several advantages to the overhead: you get to point/draw/circle/add, etc. to the transparency, and it requires students’ attention on you, making it more interactive. Plus they are really simple and quick to make, and require much less fiddling with formatting (just make sure you use a big font). Every classroom is equipped with an overhead projector and our dept office has transparencies you can print on. This requires only moderate expertise with the copier; ask Kathy to show you how. The dept has some overhead pens available (they are “wet erase”), or you could buy your own for a few dollars.
- Another benefit of an overhead over a handout is the controlled release of information (without the need to write it all out on the blackboard). The students can’t see what comes next, so if you stop and ask for their input, they won’t have anywhere else to search for the answer (and they’ll already be looking at you because you haven’t been given something to stare at).
- I generally post a pdf of my overheads, or some equivalent, to my discussion website after class so students can have a copy if they really want to retain something from it and so absent students can see what we did in class.
- Obviously, it won’t be a very interesting class if you stand at the overhead the whole time or write everything you say on the blackboard. Mix it up and include a couple of different modes of teaching in the same class period.
9. What (Not) To Wear

**John McCarthy said (in 2008):** Until about four years ago, I [JJM] wore the same kind of clothes teaching as I wore in college: sneakers, t-shirts and jeans, always clean but often faded and frayed (by the world, not by a designer). Then, at the instigation and with the assistance of Michael Becker, Kathryn Flack, and Matt Wolf, I started wearing real shoes, pressed pants, and shirts with collars. Before long, I bought some neckties and even started wearing suits on the days when I taught Ling 101.

This made a huge positive difference in my relationship with the students. They liked me better. They complimented me on what I was wearing, to my face, in the teaching evaluations, and on RateMyProfessors. My teaching evaluations got better, and I started getting nominated (by students) for the Distinguished Teaching Award. [This is maybe even more true for women –ps]

Why? I’ve discussed this with Alex Deschamps, a Women’s Studies professor who also dresses quite well (and is occasionally challenged to explain why a Women’s Studies professor has any business dressing well). We decided that students perceive our dressing well as a sign of respect for them. Our clothes convey the idea that we take our responsibilities seriously and that we see teaching as something special and important. Students don’t want us to dress like them; they want us to dress better.

For TAs, there’s another consideration as well: dressing better enhances your authority in the classroom. You are not one of their peers, so you should try not to look like one. You can’t do anything about how old you look, and you probably don’t want to change your hair, so clothing is the best device available for accentuating your difference.

Remarkably, there is actual research showing the positive effect that well-dressed TAs have on student performance; see Roach, K. David (1997) Effects of graduate teaching assistant attire on student learning, misbehaviors, and ratings of instruction. *Communication Quarterly* 45(3), 125-141. (You can access this online through the library.)

What should you do? On days when you are teaching, you should try to dress a bit better than the average student of your gender in the classroom. Very likely, the average student is wearing a t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. So you should wear: a shirt with buttons and/or a collar; khakis, chinos, or other slacks; and proper shoes. Alternatively, a tailored jacket will spruce up any outfit, even a t-shirt and jeans. A necktie, skirt, or nice blouse will do the same.

It would be nice if you also dressed like this on other occasions when you are like to encounter students (lectures, office hours), but that’s less important than dressing well on the days when you have to stand in front of the class.