

TIP SHEET: Time Management and Setting Boundaries while Teaching

Graduate school can feel like a demanding competition between your time, your mental health, and your scholarly obligations. In fact, the most consistently cited source of anxiety for new AIs is not having enough time for teaching and research. Time management is a crucial part of balancing your work as a graduate student with the responsibilities of being a preceptor.

Setting boundaries consistent with your goals and priorities can help keep your workload consistent throughout the academic year, which may save you time and energy for doing other things, like your research and writing. Making your expectations and capacity clear also allows your students to plan for things like deadlines and accessing your help while maintaining fairness. In this way, understanding your own boundaries and communicating what you and your students can mutually expect from one another benefits everyone.

If you're having trouble with setting boundaries, consider these tips:

- Talk with your students about what turnaround time and communication etiquette you might share. For example, maybe as a class you will not expect email responses on the weekends, or maybe you will all consider a 48-hour turnaround time (or whatever you agree is acceptable) to be expected.
 - AIs have successfully set the tone and mutual understanding of their precepts by creating a precept syllabus. For example, you can talk with your students about what they need and would prefer in terms of classroom conduct and office hour availability, and then create a document together (called a precept syllabus) that you can all refer back to as the semester progresses. Such a syllabus could also be mutually amended, if student or AI needs change throughout the semester.
 - To manage the time commitment of office hours, consider sending out a mandatory sign-up sheet for students to commit to office hours that you have offered when they work for your schedule. You might accomplish this using Google Forms or [WASE](#).
 - Consider how you will manage the time spent grading and lesson planning in a way that is most effective for you and the students. Aim to achieve a balance between what the students find most helpful for their scholarly development and how long it takes you to plan, prepare, and grade.
 - You may find it helpful to use a grading rubric that identifies what you will value and reward in your students' work (and sharing such a rubric in advance, if appropriate in your course, might help your students succeed). You could also try grading with a timer, challenging yourself to give meaningful feedback and move on within the time boundary you've set for yourself.
 - In lesson planning, you might prepare some key concepts or discussion questions ahead of time to make sure you cover the most important points. Planning with attention to takeaways for students and activities to allow them to engage can help your class and prep time become both more efficient and more effective.
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However you imagine addressing time management and boundaries, thinking about these techniques ahead of time can help you manage stress and avoid difficult situations later on in the semester. Consider talking through shared expectations with fellow AIs and the professor so that everyone is on the same page. You can find [more tips here](#) on time management. The McGraw Center also offers [consultations](#) where you can talk about the challenges of time management and competing priorities with an expert. Please reach out for support as needed.