

The Role of an Instructor in Higher Education

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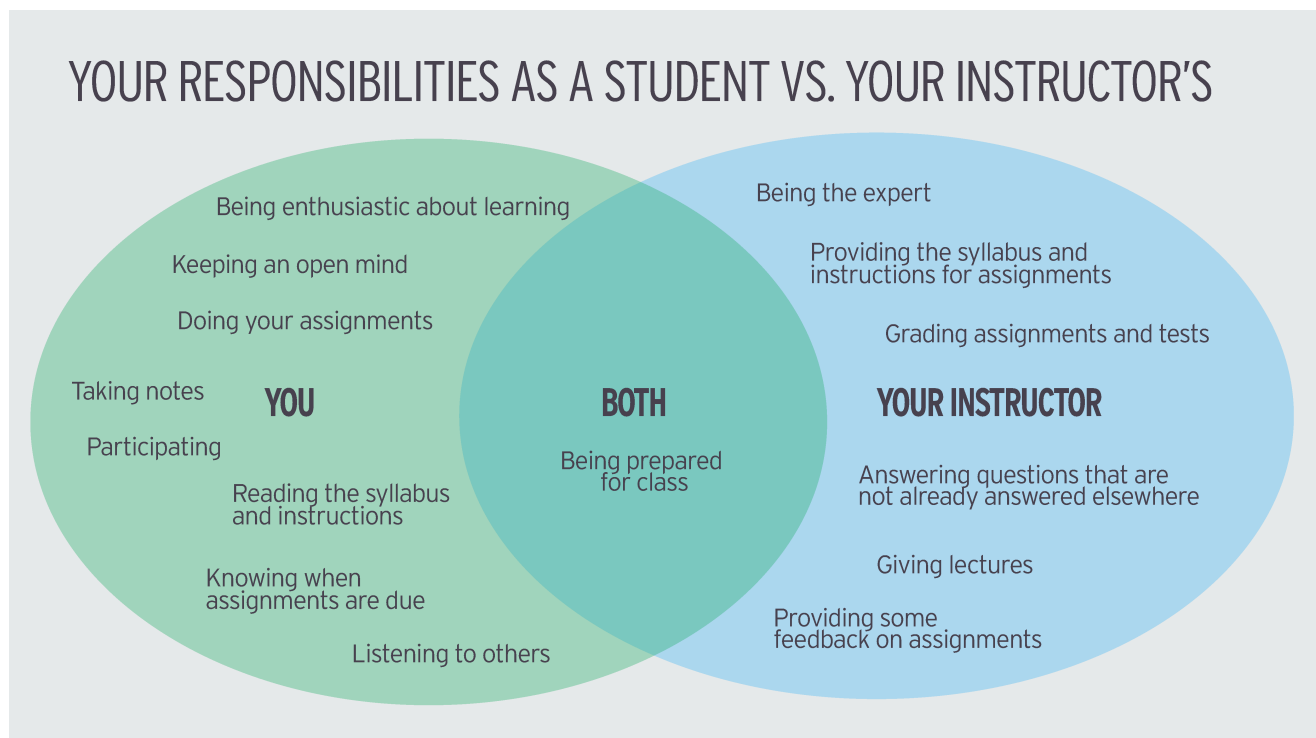
WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to prepare for your relationship with your instructors and their assistants by considering the scope of their job and their experience. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Role of the Instructor of Higher Learning

Your instructors at this level are different from your teachers in high school in a couple of significant ways. First, though you may have had some brilliant and accomplished teachers in high school, all instructors of higher learning are experts in a specialized field. They will likely have or be working toward an advanced degree in the subject they teach.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A STUDENT VS. YOUR INSTRUCTOR'S



Be aware that there are other distinctions between what a high school teacher does and what an instructor does. Your high school teachers may have kept track of your progress and reminded you when assignments

are due, but at the college level that responsibility rests solely with you.

Higher education entails being a more independent student; you are in charge of your destiny. Taking an active role in forming a relationship with your instructor is a part of that responsibility.



THINK ABOUT IT

In some online courses, you may have little or no interaction with an instructor or an instructor's assistant. At the same time, it's important for you to understand what the norms are for other types of higher education courses in the likely event that you will continue your education in a traditional classroom or instructor-led online course. This tutorial will help you prepare for those types of experiences.

2. The Role of the Instructor's Assistant

Some instructors may be supported by an instructor's assistant. An instructor's assistant or teacher's assistant, often called a "T.A." for short, is a bridge between the instructor and the student. Their job is to work more closely and directly with the students than the instructor is able to, so they can be a great resource for you when it comes to clarifying instructions or answering questions you might have about assignments or policies. Assistants usually perform much of the grading and evaluation of your coursework.

While your instructor's assistant is not your instructor, they are not your peer either. Take advantage of your instructor's assistant's approachability and availability, but be respectful of their role and the work it took for them to arrive at their position.

3. The Instructor's Expertise

In addition to teaching classes, your instructor's job may entail working professionally in their field, publishing academic books and articles, or speaking at conferences nationally and internationally. They have spent years focusing on the topics covered in your course. Even if these topics are not the same ones that interest you, you can appreciate their commitment to knowledge. In addition to letting that knowledge facilitate your success in the course, let their expertise inspire you as you make your own path through higher learning.



THINK ABOUT IT

You can think of your instructor as a sort of "native" to the classroom environment. You are just starting out in higher education and getting acclimated to the ways of this new world.

Your instructor has been a student too, of course, and at one point they were new to it all just like you. Then they advanced toward their major and their degree and then probably on to graduate school. Now they work in a classroom; they have chosen this environment as the setting for their professional life, and they have accrued terms, years, and even decades of experience designing courses like the one you are taking and teaching students like you. Who better to help you get oriented in a new place than a local?



SUMMARY

Your **instructor in higher education** is recognized as an expert in their field. As a student in higher education, you own the responsibility to keep track of assignments and turn them in on time and

prepare yourself for class. If your **instructor has an assistant**, or T.A., they are typically your primary resource for questions about the course. Your **instructor brings a level of expertise** that you can benefit from and appreciate.