

Leading Successful (and Popular!) Office Hours

Dr. J. Elliott Robinson, BBE, Post-doc

Harrison Parker, GPS, G4

Objectives: Session participants will learn how to...

- Practice effective teaching strategies for office hours
 - Coordinate office hour content with the professor
 - Maximize office hour attendance with clear planning
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Introduction

Goals of Office Hours (5-7 min)

- Provide guidance and support to help students understand course material and solve homework problems
- Create a welcoming environment where students feel comfortable asking questions

Activity 1: Memorable experiences (~5 min)

In groups of 3-4, first introduce yourselves quickly. Then, share your best or the most difficult experiences with office hours (e.g., OH were helpful, intimidating, waste of time, etc.).

Teaching Strategies

Activity 2: Group think share (7 min w/ 2 min discussion)

In a group of 3-4 people, select the person whose first name comes first alphabetically. They will choose one of the four provided example situations and discuss how they would organize the office hours and report back to the group.

Situation 1: The homework is due tomorrow. You expect nearly everyone in class to attend. What do you do?

Situation 2: A student comes in with broken code and has no idea how to debug it. What do you do?

Situation 3: People tend to come into office hours sporadically. The most recent group comes in and asks a question you just finished answering for the second time. What do you do?

Activity 3: Making a sandwich (6 min)

The group will tell the instructor how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The instructor will take all the instructions as literally as possible.

For example if a person says “get the peanut butter,” the instructor can ask “which one is the peanut butter?” This illustrates assuming prior knowledge.
Or if a person says “put the peanut butter on the bread”, the instructor would then put the jar of peanut butter on the slice or bag of bread. This shows the importance of clear instructions and transparency of goals.

Examples of ineffective teaching strategies (2 min)

“This is trivial!”, “The answer is 0. Figure out the process.”, “Use Eq. (2), (5), and (15) to solve this problem.”

Effective Teaching Strategies (5-7 min)

- **Peer teaching**

Ask the students who know the material to teach those who may not and check in on the progress.

- **Scaffolding**

Graphic organizers, connect to background knowledge, intentional small group/partner work, sentence structures/starters (I know ____ because ____), think aloud, hints, explanations.

Ex: How might you break the problem into small steps?

Ex: Please tell me how you got from step one to step two?

- **Ask questions**- remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create.

Ex: “Can you think of another way to write this equation?”

Ex: “What assumptions are you making for this?”

Ex: What are some possible ways you might go about solving this problem?

- **Transparency**

Students should know why they are learning the material and what they are expected to know/do.

Ex: In this instance, we apply theory “A” instead of theory “B” because ____.

Ex: For the exam, you will need to do ____, so we are practicing in the homework.

- **Self-Assessment** – students’ facial expressions, hw/exam results, questions asked by students, survey questions asked by you, course evaluation from at the end of the term

Coordinating with Professors

Activity 4: Brainstorming (7–10 min)

In groups of 3-4 read through one of the example situations and brainstorm ways to address the problem. Afterwards we will come together as a larger group to discuss.

- Situation I
You find the homework and midterm are simpler than the lecture, and no one attends the office hour. What would you do to improve this situation?
- Situation II

You find the lecture materials and homework difficult for most students. Students struggle on almost every question and you spend more than 16+ hours a week on TA work. What would you do to improve this situation?

- Situation III
The professor has assigned homework problems that have little to do with the material covered in lecture, leaving the students lost. How do you structure your OH to help guide students?
- Situation IV
The professor has assigned a very open-ended homework problem, with many possible solutions depending on which assumptions are made. This professor also has not provided you, the TA, with any solutions or guidance. How do you run your office hours to help structure your students' approach?

Coordinating with professors (5-8 min)

- TAs generally understand their roles in relation to lesson objectives but have poor communication with professors. In general, teachers receive little feedback on the students' needs/learning within or after their lessons.
- **Advantages of Proper Coordination**
 - TAs are equipped with the skills to support learning for pupils across the attainment range, consistent with teacher's intention.
 - TAs' skills are understood and maximized by the lecturer.
 - Improves the consistency of lecture materials and homework.
 - Lecturers get timely response and feedback about teaching.
- **Tips**
 - Ask the lecturer about their expectation for OH
 - Consistently update/give feedback to the lecturer
 - Attend lectures if you are unfamiliar with the lecture materials.
 - Keep your notation consistent with the lecture notes
 - Solve the HW problems in advance

Logistics (5 min)

- **Time** – Consider the schedules of the TAs, students, and the HW due dates. You may create a poll in the first week. Personal appointments can be scheduled by email.
- **Location** – your office, courtyard, group study room in the library, or the classroom
- **Increase Attendance**
 - Advertise your OH in the lecture.
 - Return graded work during your office hours.
 - Consider holding a “mini recitation” to cover key concepts.
 - Hold review sessions before exams