

GUOLONG: That is Friday in one of the classrooms of Building 26, 11:00 AM.

MARZIEH: So I was quite nervous.

SHAWN: The first day is a little bit nervous for me.

CARLA: I was nervous.

I'm not going to deny it.

NARRATOR: Facing your students for the first time can be a little scary, but it's also an opportunity to establish that your class will be user-friendly.

BILLY: I think the first day of class really sets the tone for the rest of the semester.

NARRATOR: How can you set the right tone?

As they make their way to your classroom on the first day, what qualities are your students hoping for?

BILLY: Being knowledgeable and understanding the concept.

ADRIAN: And you need to feel that you can approach them.

CHANDLER: Have just an air of confidence.

ADRIAN: Being easy to understand.

BILLY: And being enthusiastic.

CHANDLER: Being there, having a presence, having a lesson plan ready.

CAROL: They're well-organized.

NARRATOR: That may sound like a lot.

Let's start with approachability.

ADRIAN: That is important that you feel accepted and welcomed in the environment.

NARRATOR: Being approachable can be as simple as facing the class and smiling-- even if you feel like

hiding behind your papers.

And making eye contact.

BILLY: Making eye contact just is a personal connection to the person you are talking to-- the audience in general.

So students feel like the explanation you are making is for them.

CAROL: It is an important form of communication for them to do that.

It definitely holds the students' attention.

BILLY: In terms of international TAs, in general, there may be some misunderstanding here and there, but I think it's important to make the students comfortable asking for the TA to repeat any word or any sentence.

CAROL: I think at the beginning of the semester, they should maybe say that it's OK for the students to ask for clarifications if something isn't clear.

I think that's generally a good thing for all TAs to welcome any questions.

ADRIAN: Show that you are open and you care about the success of the students that you are trying to teach.

NARRATOR: Enthusiasm is another way to show your students your class will be friendly.

BILLY: Being enthusiastic and showing that you're actually passionate about the material you are teaching-- that also gives a little more comfortable atmosphere during recitation.

CAROL: I think TAs who are excited about what they're teaching-- or if what they're teaching is very specific to their research-- you can tell that they want to teach it and they want you to learn it because they're very excited about it.

Then the student is probably going to be more engaged.

NARRATOR: And before any other quality, students say they want knowledge, but they're also confident you'll have it.

CAROL: I think I personally trust that MIT has selected fine TAs to teach us the material.

NARRATOR: So on the first day, rather than trying to impress the students, stick with the simple explanation of why you are a good fit to teach the class.

GUOLONG: I'm a third-year grad student in the department of [INAUDIBLE].
I'm working with Professor Oppenheim, who is also the lecturer of this class.

NARRATOR: Students also want TAs to show self-confidence.

CAROL: When I think of confidence in a TA, I think of someone who is very-- they come off as, OK, I know this material better than you, and I'm going to teach it to you.

So often, I think TAs who speak not super fast and just pretty articulate and slower, so that their point gets across, usually I feel more sure that they're pretty good at explaining things.

BILLY: The speed you have when you talk in a conversation, just divide that by two.

And just because you're nervous in front of people, the speed will increase either way.

So, speaking a little bit more slowly helps a lot because you can also have the time to think about what you're saying, and the audience and the students you're speaking to will have a better time understanding, especially if pronunciation or if you have a certain accent.

NARRATOR: So, speed makes a difference in how students see you.

What about volume?

SHAWN: In a big classroom, I definitely have to remind myself that I have to raise my voice a little bit louder.

NARRATOR: Speaking too quietly can also give the impression of nervousness.

GUOLONG: This week's lecture focuses on sampling rate conversion.

NARRATOR: A stronger voice projects confidence and commands attention.

GUOLONG: This week's lecture focuses on sampling rate conversion.

NARRATOR: Getting to the classroom early can also help you to feel more confident, because you can get to know the students before you start teaching.

And planning ahead not only makes you feel more confident, it also makes students confident in you.

CAROL: So, I think one TA that I had-- when I think of a user-friendly class, I think of his class, because every day he had his recitation planned to the minute-- which is pretty ridiculous-- but it actually was very logical in a way that helped the students learn.

So he would pretty much write the agenda on the blackboard.

Like from minute zero to minute five, we're going to take a quiz.

And from minute five to minute 10, we're going to talk about the quiz.

If they seem like they're well-organized-- they have their papers in a nice, little folder-- I definitely look at that.

CHANDLER: Having a real lesson plan and showing that there's going to be productivity in the recitations is important.

Having someone prepared shows that they were thinking about us when we weren't in class.

NARRATOR: Finally, international teaching assistants also stress preparation and planning in their advice for a successful first day.

SHAWN: As an international teaching assistant, we have some disadvantages probably compared to native speakers.

But if we are prepared, if we show our enthusiasm towards the subject, I think the students will feel them as well.

CARLA: Just be prepared.

That's what speaks for you-- if you're very prepared.

MARZIEH: I went through all the notes, all the books that are related to the course.

And I tried to prepare some good examples.

GUOLONG: I think for that class, I did over-preparation that if I discussed everything on my notebook, it would take two hours instead of one hour.

So I think never running out of materials seems another source of my confidence.

CARLA: I should be confident enough just by the sake of being the TA.

You shouldn't be nervous because you do know more about the topic than they do.

MARZIEH: It was challenging, but in a good way.

SHAWN: Get everything prepared.

Do your best.