

Helping the international TA identify language difficulties and improve communication in the lab.

Students and international TAs need to work together to communicate effectively. In fact, they may experience similar problems in understanding one another. Some points that may help the TA improve his/her communication are :

- Understanding Students
 - Restate the question, ask the student if this is what he/she meant. Some common phrases you can use are : "Are you asking...?", "What I think you are saying is...?"
 - Tell them at the beginning that you will not be upset if they interrupt you if something is unclear. Doing so can help develop a rapport with the students.
- Checking Student Understanding
 - Check whether your response to the student is understood correctly. One way that this can be done is by asking a question about the material. Allow 5-10 seconds wait time for a response.
 - If a verbal response to a question is not working, try writing out the answer.
- Communicating Effectively
 - A common communication problem is speaking too quickly. Slow down so that students can have extra time to 'translate' mispronounced words or words that are spoken with an unfamiliar accent.
 - Speak with sufficient volume so that you can be heard by everyone in the room.
 - Avoid facing the white board or overhead screen when you speak. Your message will be better received if you make eye contact and talk directly to your students.
 - At the start of your lab, list all the presentation items for the lab session. This will orient everyone to the schedule of events.
 - Wait until you are finished writing on the white board to elaborate, your students will have a chance to read the information and then listen.
 - Use visual aids: draw diagrams, work through an example on the board.
 - Rephrase or use different words to state a point.
 - Use several short sentences instead of one longer sentence in your reply to a question.
 - Students may be unable to differentiate between the TA mispronouncing a word or using a word unfamiliar to the student. When helping students individually, use simple, more commonly used words.
 - With very weak students, you may have to break down the problem to a very detailed level, whereas with the average student a more high level explanation would suffice. Again this would apply to situations when you are helping students individually.