



CUPE 3902 Unit 1 Pandemic Teaching Guidelines for Teaching Assistants

CUPE3902 Unit 1 is committed to working with Teaching Assistants to ease the transition to teaching during the COVID-19 health emergency. We want this document to remind you of your rights as workers and empower you to negotiate new Description of Duties and Allocation of Hours (DDAH) forms with supervisors and departments. It's imperative that TAs receive clear guidance on how work will differ from teaching under normal circumstances, that they be prepared to protect their health and safety, and that they demand fair compensation.

Whenever in doubt: log your hours, and reach out for help sooner rather than later. During this period of tremendous stress and uncertainty, we hope that this document will encourage you to make contact with departmental stewards and Union staff and executives whenever you may be in need of support and advice. Even if your query isn't carried forward as a formal complaint, your Union reps are happy to register the challenges that grad students are being forced to face: this is how we learn to serve you better and how we formulate demands to make UofT a better employer.

Please click on the anchor links below and get in touch with the Union for support if:

- [Your on-campus workplace is unsafe \(p. 2\)](#)
- [Your DDAH as it's currently formulated would compel you to do unpaid labour \(pp. 3-9\)](#)
- [You require training and the employer is unwilling to pay you for it \(p.8\)](#)
- [You'd like to review the Workload Review and Grievance Process \(pp. 8-9\)](#)
- [Your work is being impacted by illness, disability, or family status and you might benefit from accommodation \(p. 9-10\)](#)

[Click here for a summary of the resources listed throughout the document, including links to relevant forms and contact information. \(p.11\)](#)

Be assured that no complaint or formal request can ever move forward without your explicit consent!

I. You have the right to refuse unsafe work

In collaboration with other UofT workers' unions and the Faculty Association¹, CUPE 3902 has called on the University to minimize on-campus teaching. If you deem the work you are tasked to do as a Teaching Assistant to be unsafe, you have the right to demand that working conditions be revised. However, it bears emphasizing that you can't refuse work simply because COVID-19 exists. There must be a link between COVID-19 and your reasonable belief that you are at risk of injury or illness in the workplace. In the case of COVID-19, you would attest that a risk of exposure is not being properly managed: the employer might be failing to provide you with appropriate personal protective equipment or the training to use it, or the space designated for work might be inadequate for proper physical distancing. Refuse unsafe work by delivering a written refusal to your supervisor (i.e., the Course Instructor) and ceasing work immediately. A refusal of unsafe work may occur at any point during the term, while you still have outstanding duties.

Delivering this written refusal will oblige the supervisor to investigate the unsafe conditions in the presence of a Joint Health & Safety representative. Following this review, it will be incumbent upon the university to provide satisfactory working conditions. If this step proves unproductive, a government health and safety inspector will be called upon to provide a written decision, and you will be expected to return to work once the recommendations that this third party makes are followed. The CUPE Health and Safety Fact Sheet (linked below) offers further advice regarding unsafe work at this stage:

If an inspector rules that there is no danger, then legally you must return to work and there may be discipline if you don't. But remember: no job is worth your life. If you truly feel that there is a danger to your life or risk of injury, continue to refuse to work and seek help from your local.

Email grievance.inquiries@cupe3902 for more information on this process. A more thorough definition of the right to refusal and outline of what to expect is available on the CUPE webpage:

"COVID-19 and the right to refuse unsafe work" (April 20, 2020)

<https://cupe.ca/covid-19-and-right-refuse-unsafe-work>

"Refusing Unsafe Work: Health and Safety Fact Sheet"

https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/hs_refusing_unsafe_work_final_2_1.pdf

¹Change.org "Petition · UofT's Reopening Plan is NOT Safe Enough. We Need to Take Fall 2020 Online."

https://www.change.org/p/meric-gertler-u-of-t-s-reopening-plan-is-not-safe-enough-we-need-to-take-fall-2020-online?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=cf0658a0-cdd1-11ea-b7dc-15331f2f06f5

II. You have the right to fair compensation

Written TA agreements will likely underestimate the many additional hours required to work online: you may be required to learn to use new hardware and software, take on unexpected duties, and perform the online equivalent of former duties that took far less time in-person. You should be paid for this extra work. The easiest way of ensuring that this happens is by proactively renegotiating your DDAH to anticipate new and adjusted duties, instead of struggling to review hours after the fact.

When in doubt, keep in mind the following:

- ***Log your hours!***

Be prepared to offer a spreadsheet as evidence of how course-related tasks are taking up more time than anticipated. For each log entry, include date and time stamps, as well as a description of duties performed.

Although Quercus has its own built-in time tracker, it has very limited functionality and you'll want to keep logs on your own. One option is Clockify (<https://clockify.me>), free software with exportable spreadsheets, with standalone apps on Windows, Mac, Linux, Android, and iPhone, as well as browser apps, that all sync to a single account. An alternative is aTimeLogger (<http://www.atimelogger.com>), a simple mobile tracker that also exports to CSV and HTML files.

- *Communicate with your TA supervisor as soon as possible if things aren't going as planned.*

There's a good chance that someone else in the department is facing a similar problem, and speaking up early will give other TAs access to more support. For instance, forwarding emails from students requesting tech support to the Course Instructor instead of trying to resolve the issue on your own will help to loop in other TAs, and flag that revisions or additional labour are required in this area.

Supervisors will be more amenable to requests to revise the DDAH when asked sooner rather than later, as it gives them time to reschedule the rest of the course as needed. For instance, a message to the CI along the lines of "I'm spending more hours than expected on email. If this continues, do you want me to forward email to you or reduce the number of hours I have budgeted for grading?" provides more options to revise the course than suddenly stopping work before the end-of-term grading period.

DDAH Revision: from Offline to Online Teaching

Unrevised Mock DDAH Form



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Description of Duties and Allocation of Hours Form

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--|----|
| Department: | Department of Cultural Studies | Supervising Professor: | |
| Course Code: | CST100 | Est. Enrolment / TA: | 45 |
| Course Title: | Methods of Cultural Critique | Expected Enrolment: | 45 |
| Tutorial Category: | Discussion-Based Tutorial | Requires Training for Scaling Learning Activities to Size of Tutorial <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="radio"/> Optional <input checked="" type="radio"/> Mandatory | | | |

Allocation of Hours Worksheet

| # of Unit(s) | Type of Unit <small>(e.g. assignments, tutorials, meetings, etc.)</small> | Time/Task <small>(minutes)</small> | Total Time <small>(hours)</small> | Revised <small>(As necessary, e.g. following a mid-course review)</small> |
|--------------|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Meeting with Course Supervisor | 60 | 1.00 | |
| | Reading Course Texts | | 18 | |
| 45 | Grading Assignment 1 | 30 | 22.5 | |
| 45 | Grading Assignment 2 | 45 | 33.75 | |
| 1 | Guest Lecture | 300 | 5.00 | |
| 45 | Discussion Board Responses (3m each x3) | 9 | 6.75 | |
| 22 | Conducting Tutorials | 60 | 22 | |
| 11 | Tutorial Prep | 120 | 22 | |
| | Email | 300 | 5.00 | |
| | 2 Office Hours x 2 Assignments | 240 | 4.00 | |
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| Total | | | 140 | |

DDAH Revision Breakdown

The mock DDAH form above refers to a course in the humanities that has undergone mid-course review (before and after review). The size of the contract grew by 33% in order to compensate the TA for successfully taking the course online, after the nature of the work became better-understood over the term and unanticipated tasks were added to the budget:

- Time required to prepare a guest lecture increased to account for producing video: revised from 5 hours to 9 hours.
- More streamlined visual aids are required to conduct online tutorials than anticipated when using the offline version of the course: revised from 2 to 3 hours per week.
- Responding to online discussion posts is more demanding than expected, to account for the lack of synchronous contact: revised from 3 minutes to 10 minutes each (3 posts each for 45 students)
- Students send a higher volume of emails per week than usual, as a result of having fewer contact hours with the CI than in the in-person version of the course. Many of these students arrive with tech-related questions: revised from 5 hours in total to 13 hours (1 hour per week).
- The TA learned how to use online teaching tools via online documentation and dedicated training sessions early in the term: added 4 hours of training and 2 hours of reading.
- The TA was required to tweak the course webpage to include tutorial groups and has the task of producing an FAQs section for students: added 2 hours.

Receiving a DDAH for the first time can feel morally-binding, i.e., it can give the impression that you *must* work within the budget for every task or else you'll look inefficient compared to more experienced TAs. But emergency teaching is uncharted territory for everyone, and every session and group of students is a bit different. We urge you to take accurate logs of how long work is *actually* taking, and seek help from your department and Union reps, so that you can be compensated fairly, and so that the University can budget adequately for future sessions. It could even help your development as a teacher to receive practical advice from your supervisor on how to avoid unnecessary tasks and grade or prep on a schedule.

Questions to Anticipate Emergency Teaching

We encourage Teaching Assistants to avoid doing unexpected work (and incurring the costs themselves) by asking their supervisors the following questions:

- Instructional hardware and software
 - What computer hardware and software will be required to administer the course, and where is the documentation for it? Could the department provide compensation for learning to use new software, either via an official training

session, or on one's own? What technical support at the University is available for last-minute problems?

- Will TAs be expected to troubleshoot technical issues with students, or should they forward all technical queries to the course instructor?
- Contact with students
 - How quickly are TAs expected to respond to student emails? There are going to be more queries via email if lectures are delivered asynchronously. In an in-person class, instructors can field questions that are delivered to the whole class at once. It might save time and emails for the teaching team to collaborate and provide a Frequently Asked Questions document for students and put it online.
 - Should TAs respond to requests for more feedback on written work via email?
 - Will TAs be required to hold videoconferences with students, either as replacement office hours or by appointment? When will these appointments occur?
 - Remember that your personal boundaries as a TA working from home, interacting with students, and communicating online, may differ from others'. This is normal and healthy. Think carefully about how responsive you are comfortable with being over email, and what hours during the week are absolutely off-limits, then adhere to these limits—even right before an assignment is due. *Do not be obliged to be on call all the time!* You'll find that students' requests for help will correspondingly expand to fill all your time.
- Written feedback
 - Note that marking up work for grammatical or technical issues, and providing feedback that's more intelligible in visual form, is typically more difficult when work and feedback are both digitized. Could individualized feedback be replaced by answer keys?
 - Will TAs be expected to elaborate on grades/feedback to students over email, upon request, or field requests that grades be changed?
- In-person learning spaces and materials
 - Will clean-up and preparation for in-person sessions take longer if social distancing protocols are followed? Will classes require buffer time in addition to the session budgeted to allow for masking and physical spacing?
- Late and missing assignments
 - Will TAs determine which late assignments will be graded? Will students who plan to submit assignments late still have access to instructional support over email? What is the final end-of-term schedule for processing late work?
- Plagiarism on digital assignments
 - In courses that aren't typically centred on writing skills, how will penalties be assigned for plagiarism?
 - Will TAs detect plagiarism? Will plagiarism software be required to submit assignments?

Paid TA Training

As a TA contracted for 30 hours of work or more, either you are entitled to 4 hours of paid training or you may request 4 additional paid hours per contract. Either way, you are entitled to payment for any hours of training or preparation the department requires you to attend or undertake. If you are a first-time TA, this training is mandatory, organized by department, and will usually appear on the DDAH form for your first assignment. TAs leading tutorials for the first time are also required to receive specialized training corresponding to the type of tutorial.

In subsequent appointments of more than 30 hours, you may access up to 4 hours of paid training per contract by requesting approval from your supervisor for the training sought via the Training Request Form, then submitting the form to the department (<https://www.cupe3902.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fillable-Training-Request-Form.pdf>). If your department will not approve the training, you can consult the Unit 1 Vice-Chair (vc1@cupe3902.org), who can help you discuss your options with a Staff Representative.

Keep in mind that these paid hours are available before you do a lot of background reading on your own in order to set up and troubleshoot software, and consult the TA supervisor if learning how to use new software is taking longer than expected. As an alternative to learning on your own, is there an equivalent training plan you can follow, perhaps via your hiring department or the TATP, that will allow you to claim the hours using the form above? Otherwise, can you put the hours you spend learning into the DDAH?

III. Workload Review and Grievance Process

Note that your supervisor is required to schedule a mid-course review session to help ensure that the hours budgeted by the DDAH are not exceeded. This meeting should occur by November 15th for F courses during the F/W session and January 31st for Y courses. Of course, you can raise concerns about hours at any time during the course. In fact, the sooner, the better.

If there are serious discrepancies between the budget provided by the DDAH and the hours actually required to teach the course, you can initiate a formal process to review this (as per 16:12 of the Collective Agreement) by completing the Workload Review Form (<https://www.cupe3902.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Workload-Review-Form.pdf>) and submitting it to your supervisor and/or TA coordinator, who is required to respond within five working days by returning the form to you.

Once the supervisor has returned the form, you are required to have a meeting within five working days of that date to discuss the response. As per section 16:10 of the Collective Agreement, any reallocation or hours or revision of duties must be done “without changing the total number of hours or significantly altering the nature of the duties,” i.e., you have a right to argue that a proposed revision changes the nature of your intervention as a teacher in a manner that is unacceptable to you. If no agreement can be reached here, you have the option of filing a grievance, beginning by sending an email to grievanceinquiries@cupe3902.org. Writing to this email address may be done at any stage of workload review and does not officially initiate the grievance process, which cannot be done without your explicit consent. If you decide to file a grievance, the grievance will be sent via a Union staff rep to UofT’s labour relations department. More information on the grievance process is available at https://www.cupe3902.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Guide-to-Grievances-2018-19_FINAL.pdf.

Feel free to reach out to the Union with questions or concerns at any time. Your departmental stewards, the staff reps and Grievance Officer, and the Chair and Vice-Chair on the Union executive, would all be happy to field questions, and might be willing to be looped into an email thread or attend a meeting with a TA supervisor in the process of workload review, if you feel this would be helpful. Another resource available to help you articulate the difficulties you are facing as a TA is the Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre (<https://gradcrc.utoronto.ca>), which offers phone and Skype appointments.

IV. Accommodations based on Illness, Disability, and Family Status

If you are working this fall and:

- Have a disability or illness,
- live with a family member or loved one who has a disability, or
- will be without access to childcare or have reduced access to childcare,

you have a right to accommodations in the workplace and should know how to request them.

Workplace accommodations are reasonable changes to the way an employee performs their work that empower the employee to work without disadvantage due to disability, family status, or membership in another group protected from discrimination by the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

Examples of Workplace Accommodations

The following are examples of accommodations the employer might make to address barriers in the workplace:

| Workplace Barriers | Possible Accommodations |
|---|--|
| Some of the teaching materials are difficult to process due to my visual impairment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employer provides or reimburses the costs of adaptive technologies ● Revisions are made to course delivery platforms or assignment formats ● Deadlines for more difficult tasks are extended |
| The course schedule conflicts with extra childcare responsibilities I've taken on due to COVID-19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Changes in scheduling of hours |
| Travel to campus is unsafe for me because I am immunocompromised and/or I live with or care for someone who is immunocompromised | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employer ensures all work is remote and no travel to campus is required |
| The home office setup I am using does not have ergonomic equipment and this causes physical distress or exacerbates my extant physical disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employer provides or reimburses the costs of ergonomic office equipment ● Employer provides access to an ergonomic workspace on campus |

If you think you may need or benefit from workplace accommodations, you should contact one of the CUPE 3902 staff representatives for assistance by writing to grievance.inquiries@cupe3902.org. The CUPE 3902 staff representatives can help you determine which accommodations would empower you to perform your work and guide you through the application process. Often it is as simple as identifying the supports you need and requesting them from your direct supervisor, such as your course instructor, department chair, or principal investigator. In other cases, you may need to take the more formal route of meeting with Health and Wellbeing (<https://hrandequity.utoronto.ca/inclusion/accessibility/accommodation/accommodation-guidelines-for-employees-with-disabilities>). Your staff representatives can help you identify which application process would be best for you.

Your communications with CUPE 3902 staff are confidential and staff will never share your personal information without your permission. Nothing moves ahead without your express consent. CUPE 3902 is here to support you in securing the tools you need to work safely. Please be aware that there are legal limits to an employer's duty to accommodate. Your Union will do its best to secure the best possible accommodation for you given your unique circumstances.

V. Summary: Links, Forms, and Contacts

Your Right to Refuse Unsafe Work ([link](#))

- Email grievance.inquiries@cupe3902.org or call 416-593-7057
- CUPE: “COVID-19 and the right to refuse unsafe work” (April 20, 2020) <https://cupe.ca/covid-19-and-right-refuse-unsafe-work>
- CUPE: “Refusing Unsafe Work: Health and Safety Fact Sheet” https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/hs_refusing_unsafe_work_final_2_1.pdf

Paid Training ([link](#))

- Email Vice-Chair, Unit 1 Kyle Shaw-Müller: vc1@cupe3902.org
- TATP Info for Teaching Assistants <https://tatp.utoronto.ca/job-training/ta-info>
- TA training request form <https://www.cupe3902.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Fillable-Training-Request-Form.pdf>

Workload Review and Grievances ([link](#))

- Email grievanceinquiries@cupe3902.org
- Workload review form (to be filled out by TAs and supervisors) <https://www.cupe3902.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Workload-Review-Form.pdf>
- CUPE3902 “Guide to Grievances” https://www.cupe3902.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Guide-to-Grievances-2018-19_FINAL.pdf

Accommodations ([link](#))

- HR & Equity “Accommodation Guidelines for Employees with Disabilities” (includes information on accommodations for illness) <https://hrandequity.utoronto.ca/inclusion/accessibility/accommodation/accommodation-guidelines-for-employees-with-disabilities>
- Accessibility Services <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services>

Other Resources

- Unit 1 documents (Collective Agreement, grievance process, TA/CI training form) <https://www.cupe3902.org/unit-1/documents>
- Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre <https://gradcrc.utoronto.ca>
- Change.org “Petition · UofT’s Reopening Plan is NOT Safe Enough. We Need to Take Fall 2020 Online.” https://www.change.org/p/meric-gertler-u-of-t-s-reopening-plan-is-not-safe-enough-we-need-to-take-fall-2020-online?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=cf0658a0-cdd1-11ea-b7dc-15331f2f06f5
- Clockify Time-Tracking Software <https://clockify.me>
- aTimeLogger Mobile Time-Tracking <http://www.atimelogger.com>