TAing Without Tears: How to Run an Office Hour

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What to Know Before You Start:

• **Your Audience**: Their prior knowledge and course goals

• **The Course Material**: Intuitive and technical explanations

• **Logistics**: Plans for small or large office hours
Your Audience:
What will happen with probability 1

1. Most students will ask good questions, have positive energy, and be respectful of your time.

2. Someone will be a nuisance.

3. Someone will not like you or your teaching style.

4. Someone will be manipulative.
Your Audience: How to Deal

• Be nice and smile!

• Positively reinforce good questions.

• If the office hour ends at 1:15, leave the room at 1:15.

• Address complaints quickly; move on to more productive issues.

• Michelle’s policy: 3 emails and you’re out!
Logistics: Applying the Theory

- Small office hours: Handle questions one-on-one.
- Large office hours: Go to the board/overhead!
  - First come, first served
  - Write questions on board, answer in order of popularity
  - A combination of the above
The Course Material: What’s so hard about it?

• Good TA ⊆ Empathetic TA

• Acknowledge what is difficult and why

• Prepare an explanation that would have helped you
Remember the best things about TAing:

• Nice to see the light bulb go on

• You feel like you know something (good for when you’re taking 771-2!)

• You learn more

• Good practice for orals, consulting, etc.