doesn’t offer training, read up on teaching techniques and philosophies, he says. Students can also tap teaching materials and sample syllabi through APA’s Div. 2 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology) and its Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology. Meyers recommends attending teaching workshops at regional psychology meetings or APA’s Annual Convention. The University of California, Santa Barbara, also offers a list of teaching tips for TAs, with suggestions on how to encourage student discussion and combat student apathy.

Seasoned TAs can also be a great resource, says Korrha. She sought advice from the students who taught her class the previous year and used their teaching materials as a guide. “I worked with these for a semester or two before making my own,” she says.

• Get it in writing. Whether you are taking on a departmental teaching assistantship or helping out a professor informally, it’s best to outline specific job expectations and how much time you should devote to the class, says Prieto.

This tactic might have helped Brandie Bartlett, PsyD, avoid the sticky situation she faced while serving as a TA for a cognitive assessment class. After offering to help conduct a one-hour lab at the beginning of class each week, Bartlett says she ended up lecturing nearly all three hours and taking on a lot of grading responsibilities, which cut into her study time.

“It’s hard to take a stand when you’re in an evaluated position and you’re trying to make a good impression,” says Bartlett, who recently completed a postdoc at Fairfax Mental Health Services in Virginia. “If I had to do it all again, I would have been more assertive earlier about the limitations of my role as a TA.”

• Ditch your first name. Many TAs are not much older than their students, but reminding yourself that you have something to teach goes a long way in boosting your confidence, Prieto says. He recommends asking students to call you Ms. or Mr., followed by your last name. Also, being punctual, polite and professional — both in behavior and dress — helps establish your credibility.

“No one can take your power away, but you can give it away if you’re not careful,” Prieto says. “These are small but important cues that convey authority.”

• Seek feedback. One of the best ways to hone your teaching skills is to request constructive criticism from others, says Meyers. He suggests that students join teaching circles — either at their own schools or through APA’s Preparing Future Faculty program, which provides doctoral students with opportunities to observe master teachers nationwide. Similarly, Prieto recommends that students record their lectures and have a colleague or instructor review the tapes.

“It’s nerve-racking, but it’s probably one of the quickest and easiest ways to get feedback that’s accurate to what you’re actually doing in the classroom,” he says.

In addition, students themselves can be a great source of advice, says Leah Farrell, a clinical psychology student at Virginia Tech who served as a TA last year. At select points in the semester, Farrell asks her students to provide written feedback about the class, and she uses the information to fine-tune her teaching.

“I find the feedback very instructive, with the content ranging from thoughts about my verbal cadence and organization of lecture slides to test content and my interpersonal style,” Farrell says.

• Keep your chin up. Learning to teach is a lifelong process, Prieto notes, and while it may come naturally to a select few, most people must work diligently to develop their skills. The good news is that, even if you don’t plan to teach your whole career, the skills you develop as a TA will translate to many other aspects of your life. In fact, preparing a 20-minute research presentation is a piece of cake after you’ve learned to craft a two-hour lecture for undergraduates.

“Teaching is not only for its own benefit,” Meyers says. “It feeds back in so many ways.”

Further reading, resources:
• Div. 2 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology): www.teachpsych.org
• Preparing Future Faculty: www.preparing-faculty.org
• TA Teaching Tips from the University of California, Santa Barbara: www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/ta/index.html
Stand and deliver
Shine at the lectern with these tips for TA success.

BY AMY NOVOTNEY
gradPSYCH staff

On the first day of her second semester as a teaching assistant at Wayne State University, Aimee Kotrba, PhD, did what any good TA would: She showed up early. As she approached the front desk and began putting her materials down, the TA from the previous class came over and asked Kotrba to take a seat and wait for her professor.

"She seemed very surprised when I announced that I was the professor," recalls Kotrba, now a postdoctoral fellow at William Beaumont Hospital in Berkley, Mich.

The mix-up prompted her to work a bit harder on her image: She donned more professional attire and walked more assertively when in the classroom. Over time, she says, it was "simply experience that made me appear more capable and confident."

Like Kotrba, many new TAs feel anxious about their first class of undergraduates. Yet, it's a task most psychology students will face at some point during graduate school. According to the National Opinion Research Center, 72 percent of social science doctoral degree recipients teach during graduate school. To help students tackle this new role, gradPSYCH scoped these secrets to TA success:

- Take time to train. A full 13 percent of graduate students take to the lectern without any training or supervision, finds a 1999 study in Teaching of Psychology (Vol. 26, No. 4). On average, TAs receive only about 22 hours of teacher training, says Loreto R. Prieto, PhD, study co-author and psychology professor at Iowa State University.

"That's a stark contrast to the amount of hours spent learning how to become a good researcher or clinician," he notes.

Don't be part of that 13 percent, says Steven A. Meyers, PhD, professor of psychology at Roosevelt University in Chicago and co-editor with Prieto of "The Teaching Assistant Training Handbook" (New Forums Press, 2001). Even if your department