



# USC University of Southern California

SYLLABUS

FALL 2021

## ALI 246- Intermediate Oral skills for International Teaching Assistants

Instructor: Tessa Tzoytzoyrakos

Day/Time: T/TH 6:00-7:50pm

Classroom: ONLINE ON ZOOM

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Office: ONLINE BY APPOINTMENT

### Course Overview:

This intermediate oral skills course is designed for International Teaching Assistants who need to improve their oral communication skills. The course is needs-based with a primary emphasis on linguistic accuracy and pronunciation. Participants will also work on broader communication skills with a focus on linguistic fluency. Class projects and assignments will assess students' ability to communicate with linguistic accuracy in an academic environment.

### Course Objectives:

The purpose of this course is to help students improve their oral communication skills in order to be able to effectively carry out their duties as International Teaching Assistants. Oftentimes, the primary complaint of undergraduate students is a difficulty understanding their ITA's pronunciation. In addition, undergraduate students complain about their ITA not being able to either understand or correctly answer their questions. Lack of linguistic and /or pragmatic mastery of the English language are often the cause of communication breakdowns. In this course, students will develop an awareness of the importance of pronunciation and how it affects oral discourse. To that end, they will develop a working knowledge of different aspects of pronunciation such as vowel and consonant phonemes, prominence, intonation, thought groups and pitch variations. This course will also focus on enhancing students' lexico-grammatical accuracy. Students will engage in controlled discussions and practice their use of academic as well as colloquial language.

Upon the completion of this course, students should be able to:

- successfully prepare for and conduct mock interviews with linguistic fluency and cultural appropriateness
- make informal and more formal field-specific presentations
- handle student questions with professionalism and linguistic accuracy
- lead and effectively participate in group discussions
- discuss with improved accuracy and fluency a variety of topics
- demonstrate improvement in pronunciation skills
- demonstrate increased competency in oral skills and functions (i.e. interacting with native speakers in the classroom, lab, office hours, and social settings, expressing opinions, handling student questions, etc.)

**Course Requirements:**

Materials will be distributed in class and also available on Bb.

**Mock TA Interviews Project:** Students will prepare for and conduct in-class mock interviews. They will alternate in their roles as “Professors” and TAs and will carry out interviews inquiring about the duties, experiences, and challenges of being a TA. Students will be evaluated on overall fluency, self-introduction and effective storytelling skills. Interviews will be videotaped for self-, peer-, and teacher feedback.

**Midterm Project:** Students will plan and conduct a formal 20-30 min oral interview of an experienced TA in their department or field of study. Alternatively, a professional in your field can be selected (approved by me). Interview will be recorded and shared with the instructor. You can choose to do your interview in person or on Zoom. Students will also design an in-class presentation that will include selected clips of the interview accompanied by an oral summary and commentary of highlights and main points discussed. This project should demonstrate improvement in overall communication and presentation skills, pronunciation, and linguistic accuracy.

**Final Project (Battle of the ITAs):** Students will design and present a 5-7 minute speech which demonstrates their ability to construct and deliver a speech with fluency and linguistic accuracy, integrating effective storytelling techniques and interactive elements that build rapport with the audience. Speech will be followed by a Q & A session. Presenters will be evaluated on presentation style, delivery, and oral discourse. Presentations will be recorded for self-, peer-, and teacher feedback. This project should demonstrate significant improvement in overall communication and presentation skills, pronunciation, and linguistic accuracy from the beginning of the semester.

**Discussions:** Students will participate in formal class discussions covering selected topics of interest. They will be evaluated on preparation, argumentation, fluency, and use of discussion expressions. Feedback will be offered to help students continue to improve on their productive and communication skills.

**The "uSC" Program:** The "uSC" (Undergraduate Student Consultant) Program offers our ITA's a great opportunity to practice English with a native speaker outside the classroom. You will be assigned a uSC with whom you will meet outside of class (two hours per week, starting week 4) for a total of 20 hours. This is a requirement and a chance for you to work on teaching skills, fluency, slang, pronunciation, conversation, or any other areas you wish to improve.

**Class Participation:** Each session will be customized to fit specific class needs and will build on what was covered in previous sessions. Similarly to how graduate students are expected to contribute to class discussions and TAs are expected to be effective and interactive speakers, you will be required to contribute to all classroom activities, including critiquing classmates' presentations on pronunciation and language use. Students learn from analyzing each other's oral performance and exchanging of ideas. Therefore, come ready to interact and engage in class discussions every session.

**Attendance:** More than **4** hours of absence will be reported to the ALI student advisor. More than **8** hours of absence will result in a course grade of **NC** (no credit). If you are late to class, that will also count towards the number of hours missed. In the event you cannot make a class, be sure to check with a classmate for the assignment missed. If you have an unavoidable conflict, please contact me via email as far in advance as possible.

**Assignments:** You are teaching assistants. Deadlines count. All assignments must be turned in **ON THE DUE DATE**. Due to the format of our projects, there will be no makeup midterm or final presentations.

**Class Policy on ZOOM:** Out of respect for your fellow students and your instructor, as well as to foster an environment conducive to effective learning and communication, your video and audio will be on during class. In case of background noise, you may temporarily mute.

**Grading Criteria:** Upon completion of this course, students will receive a grade of Credit (CR) or No Credit (NC). The final grade will be based on the following criteria:

- **Classroom and uSC participation:** The amount of interaction in the classroom and with uSCs – 30%
- **Project work:**

- Mock Interview – 15%
- Midterm: Interviewing a TA – 20%
- Class Discussions (formal and informal)- 15%
- Final: Battle of the ITAs – 20%

Your projects will be videotaped which will require you to critique the accuracy and fluency of your English.

**ITA Exam:** To qualify for the ITA exam at the end of the semester, students must complete ALL course-related assignments, attend all meetings with uSC, and not exceed the maximum number of allowable absences for the course. (Please note that "absences" will include hours missed with uSC; make-up uSC meetings must be held prior to the ITA exam date.) Please note that students who fail to attend their scheduled ITA EXAM will be at risk of receiving a No Credit for the course.

**Recommendations for success:** Being a TA is a privilege. As TAs, you need to demonstrate a professional, positive attitude in all your interactions with your students, professors, advisors, and classmates. Research also shows that a positive attitude is the driving force behind true learning and improvement. I expect you to improve greatly in this class and a positive attitude is all we need to get started.

### **Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism—presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words—is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* [https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/files/2015/11/SCampus-Final-112015\\_v8.pdf](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/files/2015/11/SCampus-Final-112015_v8.pdf). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/>, or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu/contact>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community—such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member—can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person.

*The Center for Women and Men* <http://engemannshc.usc.edu/cwm/>, provides 24/7 confidential support, and the *Sexual Assault Resource Center* webpage <https://sarc.usc.edu/>, describes reporting options and other resources.

### **Support Systems**

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute*, <http://ali.usc.edu/>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs*, <http://dsp.usc.edu/>, provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information*, <http://emergency.usc.edu/>, will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

### **Statement for Students with Disabilities:**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301. The phone number is 213 740-0776.