Exam Techniques for TA Exams

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The following are my personal opinions and are not to be seen as official policy of any of the TA associations with which I am involved. This is also a first attempt at writing down what I have been teaching people over the years, so I will welcome feedback and will no doubt update the following as time goes by. What I write here should of course be read in conjunction with careful attention to what the EATA/ITAA Handbooks say – I am intending to add some new perspectives and not to replace anything.

Over the years I have been a successful and unsuccessful candidate, an examiner, an observer, chair of exam boards, and a process facilitator for TA exams at CTA and TSTA level, and across all four fields of application. I have also run exam preparation workshops and mock exams. Much as I appreciate the fact that TA exams have been competence-based since long before many other approaches adopted a similar approach, it has always seemed to me that there are significant 'exam techniques' that need to be taken into account. Much as we may try to create examinations where we are assessing a candidate's competence in terms of their professional practice, the exam itself is still essentially an artificial situation. It is also time-limited and candidates may not have enough time to overcome any script issues that occur because of the stressful nature of the situation. Even when we set aside longer periods of time for an assessment of competence, such as we do for Training Endorsement Workshops and, within Europe only, for the CTA Trainer exam, the stress of being assessed and the artificial nature of the teaching and supervision conducted by candidates still apply.

Another issue with TA exams is the element of luck in terms of who are the examiners. Although a lot more attention has been paid in recent years to the training of examiners, the exam process itself is still somewhat like buying a lottery ticket. Having a pair of examiners for written exams and a panel of examiners for oral exams helps to even the odds in favour of candidates but we are still attempting to measure 'people skills', where there are no measurable outcomes. We need to factor in the nature of constructivism, cocreativity and the impact of relationship – it is not possible to assess a candidate simply on the observable behaviours of that candidate.

This is exacerbated by the fact that sponsors, and others who become involved in providing feedback on written exams or engage in mock exams, may not have had any examiner training. Although there is a requirement that sponsors must serve as examiners, the 'training' provided during what are now the mandatory examiners meetings tends to be focused on how the procedures work (e.g. automatic deferrals based on the ratings given, whether volunteer audiences and supervisees stay in the exam room afterwards) rather than on the assessment process itself. Having observers who provide feedback to examiners may help in the longer term although we still do not have any agreed set of competencies associated with being a TA examiner.

In spite of the drawbacks, there are many who have had excellent exam experiences where they were able to engage in collegial discussions and demonstrate their professional competence. Unfortunately, there are others who have had less positive experiences, even when they have passed. And there are those of you who have still to be examined, for whom I am writing this. There are ways for you to increase your chances of a 'good' exam experience, unrelated to how competent you are as a professional.

Before you read on, I want to emphasise that I am writing here about exam techniques – they are not a substitute for competence. They will assist you in the way in which you demonstrate your transactional analysis competence as a professional to the examiners. If you are not competent enough, they will of course demonstrate that to the examiners instead!

I will comment first about the CTA written exam, as that is the place in which we all start. I will then comment about oral exams generally, followed by some ideas about the CTA oral exam and then the three TSTA exams. I will not comment on the process for CTA Trainer because, in spite of volunteering in 2014, I have yet to be invited to be a staff member on a TEvW so I do not have any first-hand knowledge of the processes.

CTA Written Examination

You will see in the Handbook that you are expected to provide a professional self-portrayal, a section on your learning experiences and personal development during TA training, a project/case, and your responses to 6 questions where you demonstrate your knowledge of theory and TA literature as applied to practice.

Note that the Handbook also tells you the maximum scores you can get for each section. It makes sense, therefore, to check that the number of words written in each section correspond reasonably well to the percentages of the overall score that can be attained. In other words, you can only get 20% of the marks for Section A, so you should not write more than approximately 20% of the words you are allowed. Section B can only achieve 10% of the marks so it should only be about half as long as Section A. Sections C and D get the high percentages – 35% each – so each of these sections should each account for about one third of the maximum word limit. Within Section D, you are required to answer 6 questions so each answer should represent about one sixth of one third of the maximum word limit.

For the English and German languages, the maximum word limit is 24,000, so you should submit approximately 4800 words for Section A, 2400 words for Section B, 8400 words for Section C, and 1400 words for each of the six theory questions in Section D. If you are writing in a language with a different word count, you need to adjust these totals. If your number counts are significantly different to those I have suggested, you may well be including something in the wrong section and the examiner cannot transfer the credit across for you.

You can choose to submit an examination that is structured differently, such as having the theory questions contained within the case study (as long as they are clearly indicated) but be aware that this gives the examiner more work to do as they still are required to assess you separately for each of the sections.

In terms of the maximum word count, give references in the way that you will have seen them in professional journals – within the text you need to give only the surname of the author(s) and the year of publication. Putting any more than that, such as the title of the book or article, is incorrect and, more importantly, it uses up words that would be better allocated to providing more content for the examiner to assess. Be aware that many candidates end up having to edit their material down to the word limit so you do not want to 'waste' any words.

Note also that references and diagrams are not included in the word count. That means you can include some more words within your diagrams. Make sure that your diagrams are done to the correct format so that they are included as a picture as otherwise your software will include those words in the count. If you use tables, you can present these as pictures as well – although you must make sure that you say enough within the text and not expect the examiner to read through tables with lots of words as if they are text. (See also my comments below about the use of seating diagrams in the oral CTA exam.)

To ensure that you present good information and make it easy for the examiner to credit you for this, stay within the structure that is outlined in the Handbook. Show the headings/questions and then proceed to respond to them directly.

Before you start writing, map out what you expect to cover in each section. You may change your mind once you start writing but it is a good idea at the beginning to plan where you propose to write about the various TA concepts. That way, you can make sure that you cover a good range of TA concepts, including the basic ones such as ego states, transactions, games and script, plus other TA concepts that are particularly relevant to your practice. If you look first at the theory questions and choose the six that you will prefer to answer, then you will know which TA concepts you will be addressing in Section D. You can then add more information that specifically fits the other sections but do not need to repeat your theoretical descriptions if you refer the examiner to the appropriate part of Section D.

When you have chosen the TA concepts for Section D, you can then consider what other concepts you want to cover and where these will fit in the other sections. Again, this will allow you to check that you are not duplicating, and that you are presenting as wide a range of TA concepts as possible. However, it is quality and not quantity that counts. Do not present lists of TA concepts, even when referenced, without also indicating how you understand them and how you use them professionally.

Map out also which transcript extracts you intend to include, and where you will put them. How well does each transcript demonstrate your competence to the examiner, and where best can you fit it alongside appropriate TA theory. Including transcripts is always a bit of a juggling act, because they can easily use up a lot of your word allocation. Make sure that each one is good evidence of how competently you are working, and that each gives you the opportunity to demonstrate your capability of analysing the processes that occur between you and your clients. Transcripts present 'double evidence' – the examiner is provided with an example of how your skill facilitated change by the client, and at the same time you are seen to be able to step back, take a meta perspective of your work, and describe it in terms of transactional analysis concepts.

When you have finished writing, go back through and note where you have mentioned specific TA concepts. Each one should be referenced the first time you mention it, and make sure that you reference back to the originators. When you are using material from more recently published books, differentiate between how the authors have developed the ideas and what the originator proposed.

Next, turn to the competencies as described in the earlier section in the Handbook, and check to see that you have provided evidence of each competence. Pretend that you are the examiner – take the first competence and then look through your work to find evidence of that competence (only). Make some notes of what you find and then decide whether you think there is enough evidence. If there is not, work out what and where you will add. Complete this process for the first competence before you move on to the next. Repeat the same process for each competence in turn. This sounds a slow and laborious process but it is how a good examiner will do the assessing, and it is the most reliable way to assess. It prevents bias that can otherwise occur when the reader is overly-influenced by one or two competencies that have been covered well or poorly.

Get some supervision of your written exam from P/TSTAs who are not your sponsor. Your sponsor knows you and knows your work, and that makes it hard for them to avoid assumptions. They are likely to read your work from a positive frame of reference, not realising how much they are 'filling in the blanks' because they already know how you work. Someone who does not know you well will be better able to identify areas that need more explanation or description.

Oral Examinations

The following comments apply to oral examinations at any level.

Be aware that the examiners will often be more nervous than the candidate. Examiners have to think of 'good' questions to ask in front of their colleagues, only to find that the question they were going to ask has just been posed by another examiner! Examiners may be examining for the first time, or chairing a panel for the first time, or anxious because they are in a different field to you and believe, mistakenly, that they may not be able to think of questions or understand your responses.

Most importantly, examiners do not want to have to defer anyone. You have already been endorsed by their colleagues and they want things to go well. If a deferral seems likely, they may become increasingly stressed, and begin to exhibit driver behaviour. A negative life position may be triggered so that they begin to blame themselves for failing to be a good enough examiner, or they may feel that you are not okay, or that your sponsor or anyone else who endorsed you is not okay.

The TA oral exams are intended to be collegial discussions. Examiners will do their best to take care of candidates when this is necessary, but ideally they should not need to do this. Help them make the exam go well by being prepared. One way to do this is to check out the scoring sheet in the Handbook and practice what you might say against each of the criteria shown. The examiners have to assess you against those criteria, so they will be doing their best to get you to talk about how those competencies are being demonstrated within your work.

Pay careful attention to the Handbook about what you are being assessed against – there are inconsistencies between the exam scoring sheets and descriptions elsewhere in the Handbook about the competencies required. For the CTA level, for example, the Core Competencies (Section 5) for each field is not the same as the suggested structure and content of the CTA Written Exam (Section 8), and neither of these are the same as the exam scoring sheets (Section 12). At a deeper level, there is a good case for saying that all of these are about the same basic competencies and the only differences are in terms of the words that are used; however, you need to take into account which structure and which wordings are being referred to by the examiners.

Prepare! Practice! No-one is perfect – examiners will take into account how you discuss your work with them as well as your competence in doing the work itself. Be ready to critique your own work. If you struggle to talk about what you did 'wrong' as a practitioner, you are not yet ready for the exam; keep in mind transference/ countertransference and how we get 'invited' to transact in ways that match a client's familiar pattern, so that we can help them change.

Be ready also to critique TA theory. We are all enthusiastic about TA but we also need to recognise the shortcomings, the differences in opinions about how we interpret concepts, the ways in which the TA theories have been changed and developed over the years, and how sometimes non-TA approaches will be more useful to our clients. Berne was constantly updating his ideas; if there were some way that he could be brought back to life, what you think he might say to someone who fails to question and challenge what he and others have written?

The Handbook defines what documents you must submit or bring with you to the oral exam. When you prepare these, mention within them those areas that you will be confident to discuss. The examiners will look through your documentation before the exam, and typically they will select one or two items from there in the hope that it will be reasonably easy for you to answer questions and engage in a discussion. So give them some clues! In your CV, mention prominently those aspects of your work that you will enjoy telling them about. In your log of hours, mention training topics or trainers/authors that you would like to talk about. If there are areas of your experience where you would struggle to have a collegial discussion, either leave them out of the documentation or make a point of dealing with any issues and practice what you might say during an exam. When the examiners pick up on items mentioned in your documentation, they are trying to be helpful by choosing something that is meant to be easy for you to talk about.

As you read on, you will see that I have made suggestions about how to prepare for the collegial discussions that are the intended style for TA exams. I suggest that you might write 'streams of consciousness' as you think about what you will be discussing, that you have practice discussions with colleagues, and that you seek out those who have particular knowledge of aspects with which you need more familiarity. Think of the discussions as rehearsals; the ultimate rehearsal is to have a mock exam but before that stage, get plenty of practice at collegial discussions. As you do this, you may find it helpful to produce and keep updating a mind map of the various aspects that you wish to talk about during your oral exam or write about in your written exam.

A mind map, or spider map, is a simple way of capturing key ideas on a piece of paper, with the main concept in the centre and 'legs' going from that to sub-topics, with more 'legs' from those down to another level, and so on. If you are not familiar with mind maps, look on Google. They are used as revision aids and are really useful to look at as you go into your oral exams. Apart from the TA 101 teach during the TSTA exam, there is no rule that prevents you having them available to prompt you during your exams; the exams are designed to be an opportunity for you to demonstrate your competence and having a mind map available is likely to help with that. Even if you decide not to have the physical sheet in front of you, mapping out the topics onto paper (or a screen) increases the likelihood that you will be able to visualise the map afterwards so you are prompted to recall what you want to talk about.

CTA Oral Examinations

in addition to the notes above that apply to any TA oral exam, for the CTA you are expected to come prepared with segments of recordings of you working with clients. The Handbook provides ideas of how you should choose these segments.

Cover sheet for recordings

Present your work in the best way possible by structuring the expectations of the examiners. To do this, you need an introductory sheet for each recording that:

1. Includes a seating diagram, in the way proposed by Eric Berne in *Principles of Group Treatment.* In this diagram, you need to show where people are sitting, the positions of doors and windows, tables, empty chairs, where your recording equipment is situated, flipcharts or whiteboards, and anything else in the room. Based on Berne's early ideas, it is customary to draw semicircles to indicate women and open squares for men – I think of this as round bottoms and square bottoms :-).

   You also need to include arrows to indicate any pre-existing relationships if you are working with a group. Alongside each individual, you can add relevant information such as their age, your TA analysis of them, how many sessions they have attended out of how many they could have attended, and so on. In the centre of the seating diagram, you can show the date and time of the session, how long the session lasts and how frequently they are run, the number of the session out of how many have been run and how many are planned/contracted for, and the percentage that represents how many attendances there have been out of all possible attendances. In line with the saying that 'a picture paints a thousand words', a seating diagram is a way of providing a considerable amount of information in a few words (and in no words in terms of your word count if you use such a diagram as a picture in your written exam).

2. Shows your 'diagnosis' of the client (s) using as wide range of TA concepts as possible (and also using the DSM or similar non-TA diagnostic category system used by professionals in your country if you are practising as a TA psychotherapist).

3. Includes the overall contract with the client and the session contract.

4. Tells the examiners what you expect them to hear (i.e. what you did well and how the client shifted).

5. Has a title that summarises item 4 in TA terminology (e.g. deconfusion, decontamination, script exploration, discount identification and resolution, et cetera).

Transcripts

Pay attention also to how you present your transcripts so that it is easy for the examiners, and you, to use them during the exam. Indicate clearly who is speaking each time. Number every line so that the examiners and you can easily refer to specific items; this is very easy to do if you are using Word as there is a simple facility under the Layout tab which will add line numbers automatically into the left-hand margin.

Mark up your own copy of the transcript to show your detailed analysis of the process. For example, highlight driver sentence patterns, examples of discounting and/or redefining, ego states (functional/ behavioural and structural), evidence of injunctions, and so on. You will then be prepared when the examiners ask you to tell them about where you notice particular phenomena, or when they ask you about specific line numbers in the transcript. Make sure when you mark up your own copy that you still retain the line numbers to match those that the examiners will be seeing on their copies of the transcript.

TSTA Exams – The TOE

There are three sources of information in the Handbook about the Theory, Organisation and Ethics exam: the scoring sheet (Section 12), the description of the TSTA Examination (Section 11), and the description of the Training Endorsement Workshop – TEW - (Section 10).

The description for the TEW has useful information that will help you consider what you might talk about during the examination, whereas the scoring sheet gives fairly sparse information about the 5 criteria that the examiners will assess you against, and the description of the TSTA exam does little more than restate the 5 criteria.

Theory and Methodology

I recommend that you read the section on TPO questions in the TEW description as part of your preparation for the TOE. They are written for a beginning PTSTA but it is fairly simple to read them as questions about what you are doing now. During the course of the TOE exam you are unlikely to be asked questions about everything listed below because there will not be enough time; however you need to be prepared for questions on any of the following and you might also want to tell the examiners that you would particularly like to discuss some of these areas. Using the TPO questions as a prompt, in summary you need to be prepared to talk about:

1. Your theoretical understanding of the teaching and learning process, including theories of adult learning and curriculum design, and how you apply this to the aims, contents and methodology of your own training programme.
2. Your theoretical understanding about the processes of supervision.
3. How that theoretical basis translates into what you are actually doing within your own training programme. Note that if you are running a programme in conjunction with other trainers/supervisors, you still need to be able to demonstrate that you have had a significant role in how that has been designed and how it functions – it is not enough to talk only about how you provide training or supervision to someone else's programme.
4. How the theoretical basis translates into what you do with individual students, including how you manage group dynamics in teaching and/or supervision sessions.
5. Your processes for accepting students, how you assess them over time and against the different levels on their journey towards CTA, your criteria for signing a contract with them, and how you determine whether you think they are ready to take their CTA exam.

There are also some particular areas that you may be asked about during the TOE exam, and which in any case you should be paying attention to within your training programme:

1. how you help students to prepare themselves for their CTA exams (and any other certifications that may apply nationally to your students);
2. the role of personal therapy within your training programme – note that the wording here for the TPO implies that this need only be considered within the training programme itself, whereas this issue is something that needs to be considered for all trainees because any professional may have personal issues that interfere with their professional competence and may therefore need therapy. (My understanding from years ago was

that the 50 hours of personal therapy that have been required of those seeking CTA Psychotherapy was because we should not do to others what we have not experienced ourselves – presumably it was assumed that those in the educational or organisational fields would already have experienced being educated or functioning within an organisation. This raises the question nowadays about the Counselling field – can we assume that trainees will have experienced counselling or coaching themselves?

3. your familiarity and enthusiasm for the increasingly significant area of research within TA, and how you pass this on to students;
4. and how you ensure that the four fields of TA are accounted for within your programme.

Ethical Considerations

The question areas from the TEW TPO guidelines relate to the first and second criteria on the TOE exam scoring sheet: Training philosophy in relation to training programme and/or practice; and Knowledge of TA theory. There are two more criteria on the scoring sheet that highlight the importance of ethical considerations – criterion 4 about values and ethical principles in different contexts, and criterion 5 about TA theory and ethics being clearly integrated with practice.

Interestingly, the TPO outline mentions ethics only in terms of ethical issues encountered by the TEW candidate during their time as a CTA trainee, and as possible problems arising from multiple personal relationships related to having personal therapy within a training programme. During the TOE exam, you need to be ready to discuss your views about the ethical codes of the international TA associations and any way in which these might differ from the ethical codes in the countries in which you are teaching and/or supervising. You might also usefully show your familiarity with non-TA codes of ethics that apply to any of your students (or you), such as those of non-TA professional associations, and any legal requirements that may have ethical implications.

To prepare to demonstrate your competence related to ethics in the TOE exam:

1. read the various ethical codes and make notes of areas that particularly interest you
2. identify typical ethical issues that arise for your students and review how you bring these into your training programme so that students are forewarned
3. identify one or two ethical issues that have arisen for students, or for you, that have more appropriately been dealt with during supervision
4. write about the above as a stream of consciousness, and discuss them with colleagues so that you become accustomed to talking about them in a collegial style

Finally, identify some potential changes that you think could be made to the codes of ethics. This might be at a detailed level or might be philosophical. Examiners often ask candidates what they would like to see changed, or what the particular advantages and disadvantages are of the codes of ethics that apply where your training programme operates.

TA Organisations

This is the other criterion that is assessed during the TOE exam. Examiners are looking to check that you have a good knowledge of the structure and functioning of national and international TA organisations/associations. This is in fact a fairly easy area to prepare for – read the various handbooks and constitutions which you can often find online. Find out who represents you in your national and international TA associations and ask them to talk to you about how those organisations are structured and how they function. If you are a representative or delegate yourself, talk to others within the same organisations so that you have a good understanding of the overall structure.

Relate all of this to what you teach when you run a TA 101 – the required syllabus requires that you teach participants about how the TA organisations operate. Consider also your way of describing and explaining to trainees how the certification and examination processes operate.

Critique the current arrangements. Be prepared to discuss the benefits and disadvantages of what happens now. Examiners often ask candidates what they would do if they were to become ITAA or EATA President – have a response ready, preferably one that recognises that there will be different perceptions and there will be dynamics in place that may well be working against change – if it were that obvious and that easy, the current volunteers would already have done it :-)

Again, practice by writing a stream of consciousness about what you know, maybe sketch out the various organigrams, and discuss your ideas with colleagues – preferably those who have some involvement with these aspects of the TA community.

TSTA Supervision Exam

The guidelines for those who volunteer to be supervisees during a TSTA exam indicate that they should bring issues that fit within the field of practice of the supervisor/ candidate. Be aware that this will not always be what happens. As a PTSTA, you have already been endorsed to provide supervision across all four fields of TA application; as a TSTA that will continue and will apply to supervision of PTSTAs.

Supervision philosophy and models

The first criterion on the TSTA Supervision exam scoring sheet is on supervision philosophy and teaching supervision criteria. This seems generally to be interpreted by exam boards as requiring you to talk about the models of supervision that you use to understand supervision processes. Be prepared to talk about TA-based supervision models (a quick search of the *Transactional Analysis Journal* will help). Be aware that much of the material in the Mazzetti (2007) article that attained the Eric Berne Memorial Award had already been presented by Graham Barnes although that material is not so readily accessible [Barnes, Graham (1975) Techniques of Contractual Supervision.In (with earlier copyright date shown) James, Muriel (1977) *Techniques in Transactional Analysis* Reading MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company 166-175].

Note also that most TA authors who write about supervision do not include a definition. Non-TA models of supervision are also worth consulting, such as Hawkins & Shohet's 7-eyed model (see Google and note that they were up to the 4th edition by 2012. When you talk about non-TA models of supervision, be prepared to describe how you understand them from a TA perspective.

Several non-TA models of supervision refer to there being three functions of supervision and this is highly relevant when you describe your approach or philosophy. I have written elsewhere about my adaptation of Brigid Proctor's naming of these as formative, normative and restorative/supportive. The key to this is that we need to balance these three. The current emphasis on relational/relationship can give too much significance to the restorative/supportive element; an emphasis on formative fits well with our desire to help the supervisee grow in professional competence; however we must not forget that we also have normative responsibilities and will sometimes need to confront supervisees if they are failing to meet professional standards. Beware, therefore, of telling the exam board that your philosophy of supervision is heavily biased towards only one of these three functions as you may then have to behave differently when you find out what issue the supervisee has brought to your exam.

Exam Criteria

In addition to the criterion about supervision philosophy and teaching criteria, the exam scoring sheet gives some very clear indications of what the examiners will be looking for:

1. Contract clearly established, which becomes in the wording for the scoring that you establish a specific contract – note that this does not necessarily have to be a contract where the outcome is stated in observable, behavioural terms – that may be possible but you may need more of a process contract where the supervisee needs to explore, analyse, understand, etc, before they can consider options. It can be a trap to go too quickly to options when the supervisee may be discounting aspects of the situation they have brought to supervision. Note also that a contract can always be renegotiated by mutual agreement during a supervision session, and you can negotiate an ending contract within which the supervisee confirms that they will get more supervision or taken an issue to therapy.

2. Key issues identified – this is linked on the scoring sheet to the contract being fulfilled. At some level, key issues will link back to script and early attachment. If the supervisee were not discounting to maintain their frame of reference, they would not need any supervision because they would be aware and in the here -and-now. In terms of the exam, it makes sense to identify both surface and deep level issues so that you can discuss these with the examiners, although you may need to consider carefully how much you address these overtly with the supervisee.

Emotional contact achieved, relational issues addressed, awareness and use of parallel process – these three are unfortunately presented as one criterion on the scoring sheet but I will refer to them separately here.

3. There is a subtle wording change, in that "emotional contact achieved" becomes "emotional level accounted". Emotional contact with the supervisee can of course be a trap, in that too much of such contact may look as if you are providing therapy rather than supervision; you can use Ware's doors to therapy/contact to monitor this – and to explain it to the examiners – on the basis that the doors are about whether people 'talk about' their thinking, their feelings, or their behaviour. 'Talking about' can be done whilst the supervisee is in the here-and-now; it only shifts into therapy if you continue to work with them whilst they have regressed.

4. Relational issues addressed – bearing in mind that this is combined in the criterion with parallel process, you need to pay attention to the relational issues of the supervisee with others and the relational issues that may occur between you and the supervisee.

5. Parallel process – it is interesting that this appears within a TA exam because it is a non-TA concept that many people now seem to believe is part of the overall TA theory. The scoring sheet says that there may not be a parallel process in effect; however, there is so often a parallel that it is worth making it a habit to always consider it. Keep in mind that any parallel process within the supervision session may also become a parallel process between you and one or more of the examiners.

6. Protection issues – which refers to increasing safety for the supervisee and for the supervisee's client.

7. Ethical issues made explicit – although this appears last on the scoring sheet, I mention it here alongside protection issues because the two elements will often be intertwined. For instance, a present lack of safety for the client may need to be addressed in supervision as an ethical, or at least a professional practices, issue. Hence, for protection issues and ethical issues, the normative function of supervision may need to be emphasised.

8. Increasing developmental direction – which means that you clearly facilitate the development of the supervisee. Good supervision will do this anyway - but you will impress the examiners more if you overtly identify with the supervisee the way in which their development can now continue beyond the development that has occurred within the supervision session.

9. Equal relationship – the wording of this on the scoring sheet is interesting because to obtain a full score, you only have to maintain equality wherever possible. It is hard to know what is meant by this when the mid-range score is for 'supervisee usually treated as an equal', which appears to mean the same thing unless there is some special meaning to 'wherever possible'. To get a low score on this criterion, you would have to treat the supervisee 'as an inferior '. I was going to make a joke here about how you might treat the supervisee as superior some of the time and not be penalised through the scoring – I have certainly known supervisees who have in reality been superior to me in terms of intellect, knowledge of theory, ability to analyse the dynamics – but I suspect that examiners would still mark you down if you appeared to be awed by your supervisee :-)

Supervision not working out

If the supervision is not working out as you think it should, here are 3 steps to apply, in order:

1. go back to the contract – check that you have got a valid contract with the supervisee, that it covers the agreed *result* of the session, the *relationship* between you, and the mutual *responsibility* for the way in which the supervision proceeds. Sometimes the work needed by the supervisee will actually be done during a contracting process – as you facilitate them becoming aware of what is needed during supervision, they may actually be dealing with the issues that led them to discount in the first place. If necessary, you may need to suggest a contract to a supervisee because they are discounting too heavily to state what they need; obviously in this case you will need to ensure that they understand what you are proposing

and are capable of making their own decision to accept it or not.

2. If you are confident that the contract is valid and appropriate for the length of the session, make overt use of TA concepts. Invite the supervisee to choose a familiar TA concept and to analyse the situation they have brought to supervision. Avoid suggesting a concept to them unless you know that they will be familiar with it, as otherwise you may end up micro-teaching – this may be fine as part of supervision with beginners but you do not want to use up the precious time in your supervision exam in this way. If they really are a beginner, and you need to micro-teach, provide them with the minimum information and prompt them to do the analysis for themself.

3. If you have checked the contract and had the supervisee apply one or two TA concepts, and the supervision still does not seem to be going anywhere, address the process. Invite the supervisee to join you in considering the dynamics that are occurring between the two of you. This may bring into awareness, of you and the supervisee, any parallel process in existence; alternatively, it may facilitate the supervisee into recognising that they are engaging in a familiar pattern for sabotaging themselves. (transference/ countertransference in action although you may not need to use that terminology overtly with the supervisee).

Finally, be aware that even when the supervision does not work out in the way it could, you will not necessarily be deferred. The examiners will take into account your awareness of the process, the options you considered and used, your rationale for any other options that you decided not to use, and your ability to maintain an OK-OK relationship with the examiners whilst you and they are critiquing what you did.

TSTA Teaching Exam

The audience

In addition to my comments above about how examiners are often just as nervous as candidates, be aware that the volunteer audience members in teaching exams may also be feeling nervous about the need to ask questions. See below for some ideas on how you might make this easier for them by indicating topics where questions will be welcome. Keep in mind also that some audience members will want to help you by asking questions about aspects that they think you may have missed out. It is really important that you view all audience questions as opportunities for you to demonstrate your skills to the examiners. This can include acknowledging that you do not know the answer to a question.

Theory of learning

Criterion 6 on the scoring sheet for the teaching exam refers to coherence between theory of learning and the demonstrated method – this means that the examiners will ask you about your theory of learning and will then look to see if what you do matches what you have told them. You are going to be doing a prepared teach and a TA 101 teach, with an audience who have been instructed not to role-play. This means that they could have any level of TA knowledge, so they may not know enough theory or have enough practical experience to benefit from your prepared teach. They may know too much to respond to your TA 101 teach in the way that a typical beginner would. They may know more about the topics that you teach than you do, or they may know very little TA because they are there as a companion to someone. Hence, be aware that your audience may not respond in the way to which you are accustomed with your regular students. Ensure that the theory of learning that you tell the examiners about is broad enough to cope with whatever you subsequently need to do to match your audience.

For example, if you talk about the non-TA model of Kolb and the learning styles derived from it, be aware that you will not have time to structure a session that works well for activists, pragmatists, reflectors and theorists (or the equivalent names that you may be familiar with). Likewise, if you emphasise relationship between trainer and students, your attention to the relationship may become so time-consuming that you cannot cover the planned content in the time available. If you use some of the TA models of learning, the same cautions apply - keep your options open so that you can adjust as appropriate to your audience without appearing to do something that is different to what you have led the examiners to expect to see.

Exam criteria

Several of the other criteria on the scoring sheet are relatively straightforward:

1. You must know the subject matter that you are teaching – to help with this, consider having handouts available for the audience because then you can include the proper referencing for what you are teaching, so that the examiners will be reassured that you are familiar with the originators and any later developers of the theory that you are teaching. As a tip, do an online search for the topic through the *Transactional Analysis Journal* and the *International Journal of TA Research & Practice*. You may not include everything you find in your 20 minutes of teaching, but you will have demonstrated that you are knowledgeable about what is available.
2. Organisation and clarity, and creativity and enthusiasm – I have put these two criteria together because they can both be taken care of during your preparation. You need to practice/rehearse both your prepared teach and the range of TA 101 topics in front of as many audiences as possible, and use their feedback to ensure that your material flows logically, is easy to understand, and is presented creatively and enthusiastically so that participants feel highly motivated to learn.
3. Pacing, and Teacher-group interaction – again I have put two criteria together because they both relate to your connection/contact with the audience. Hopefully, you will have had feedback about the pacing when you have been rehearsing, so that you will be confident that you have the right amount of content to cover in the time available. The interaction criterion is about your contact with the audience and your skill in handling questions. When you plan the session, take into account the time limitation and indicate sometimes that there is more information available about aspects of your topic – that way you will 'prime' the audience to ask questions about those aspects of the topic that you would like to say more about.

Two of the criteria on the scoring sheet are not so straightforward:

1. Protection and Permission – this actually refers to contracts and boundaries in the learning/teaching process. Your contracting early in the session should therefore include mention of aspects such as checking that people have access to support if

the material within the session triggers issues for them, inviting them to take responsibility for what they choose to share within the group, giving them the right to pass on any activities that you incorporate – and within this overall protection, giving them permission to learn, to enjoy learning, to get involved in the activities, to ask questions (there is no such thing as a stupid question).

Although it is not mentioned within the criteria, I recommend that you also consider protection and permission outside the teaching session. The point of teaching TA to students is that they will be using what they learn in their professional work. You may therefore need to extend the attention to contracts and boundaries so that it incorporates protection and permission related to the work they will be doing with clients (e.g. making sure that beginners know about the possibility of client/ practitioner symbiosis/dependency, about cocreativity, about not dismantling a client's defences before the client is ready, or about paying attention to organisational cultures and hierarchies, etc). In other words, thinking about how an unskilled practitioner might inappropriately apply what you are teaching, and acting to preclude that.

2. Suitability of teaching to audience – this sounds straightforward in that it is looking at whether the content and method meet the learning goals of the audience – however, for your prepared teach the audience is already defined by you because you are expected to indicate where this teach will fit within your overall training programme for those seeking to attain CTA status.

   Likewise, your TA 101 teach needs to match the learning goals of an audience of beginners. You may well find that the audience during the exam will engage with you in ways that are very different to the intended audiences. Obviously you will respond to them in the here-and-now and will not pretend that they are your intended audience. You may wish to point this out to the examiners if they have any doubts about your performance against this criterion.

Presentation Tips for the Prepared Teach

You are required to present to the examiners a sheet in which you indicate where your prepared teach fits within your overall training programme. Typically, such a sheet will show the range of topics that are taught during the various years of the programme. You will then position your prepared teach within the appropriate year of the programme, indicating what has come before and what will follow during that year. You then need to position the teach within the specific workshop, again indicating what has come before and what will follow during the workshop itself. You can use this sheet to reinforce how you teach to match your theory of learning/ method. For example, you may have invited your students to form syndicate groups and discuss what they already know about the topic; you may be planning to use syndicate groups afterwards so that students can discuss what they have learned and how might they use it. You may have other, more creative options in mind for student activities before or after the teaching.

You have a choice of teaching for 20 minutes and then having 10 minutes of questions and answers, or of opting for a 30 minute session that includes questions. The 'safer' option is the 20 + 10; you can invite the participants to ask questions as you go along if they do not understand something, whilst indicating that, as they know, there will be 10 minutes at the end for questions. This allows you easier control of your timings – if you go for the 30 minute option you may have to deal with participants who want to start discussions with you as you go along, so that you may run out of time to cover all of the material.

When you prepare your teaching notes, use highlighting to indicate must know, should know and could know. Must know are the key points that you definitely need to tell them about. Should know are the explanations and examples that really should be included but have a lower priority than the must knows, so may have to be omitted if you are running out of time. Could know refers to material such as stories or other illustrations that can be included only if you have enough time after you have covered all of the must and should know material. Then, if you are getting more audience interaction than you anticipated, it is easy for you to quickly identify in your notes what you must include and what you can leave out. This method of notation is particularly useful if you prefer to go for the 30 minute option.

Either way, you will want to demonstrate to the examiners that you have good contact with your audience. You need to start with contracting anyway, and contracts are mutual agreements so that means you need the participants to give some indication at least that they are okay with the contract that you are setting out, which is of course a three-cornered contract with the TA association that is running the exams.

Keep in mind that some participants like to have the big picture whereas others like the details. Even though the session lasts only 20 minutes, describe the structure e.g. in your own words, something like *I'm going to start by contracting with you, then I will invite you to consider what you already know about the topic I'm going to be teaching, then I will present some theory and illustrate it with examples, after which we will have the question and answer session when I hope to expand on those aspects that are of particular interest to you who are here today*. To make this easier, outline the structure on a handout.

Another way to get controlled audience interaction is to invite them to talk to the person next to them about the forthcoming topic, but only for a couple of minutes. This can be done immediately following the contracting process. It means that each participant will have spoken now, which will usually mean that they will be readier to contribute with comments and questions later. Do not ask for comments from the audience after this couple of minutes; the response might be an embarrassing silence or it might be that audience members talk so much that your timings will no longer work. If someone volunteers some information without being invited, stroke them for their contribution but avoid the trap of asking whether others now wish to say something as well.

Later during the session, you might incorporate another short discussion. Keep it as between pairs or three people because any larger numbers will take too much time to shuffle around and possibly even introduce themselves to each other. Make sure that this discussion is something that most people will have something to say about, such as how the topic you have been teaching is relevant to them in their personal or professional lives. Depending on how your timing is working out, you might then propose that you get feedback from those audience members who wish to comment. If you find that too many want to comment, you can always express your pleasure that there is so much interest and ask them to hold their comments until the question and answer session.

See below for some ideas about what needs to be included in the TA 101 teach, as the same elements will be just as relevant for the prepared teach.

Prepare as much as you can beforehand – including the sheets for a flipchart if that is what you will be using. Do not spend a lot of time with your back to the audience whilst you write words on the flipchart. If you use PowerPoint, consider printing the slides out as a handout so that your audience can make their notes directly onto this instead of busily trying to make notes of the contents of the slides.

Give people permission to make notes if they wish. Do not expect to have them look at you all the time. Keep in mind NLP representational systems: visual learners learn best when they can see pictures and diagrams; auditory learners will prefer to listen to what you are saying; kinaesthetic learners want to engage in activities so it will be important that they can at least engage in making notes while they are sitting and listening.

One final point – the Handbook states that the teaching section is to provide an opportunity to demonstrate your style and philosophy of teaching and training, and to allow you to give a rationale for your teaching methods. Elsewhere, I have seen comments that indicate that there should be a range of methods that include experiential activities and, for example, brainstorming. However, the session is very short and the examiners are not likely to gain any useful information from observing you sitting there doing nothing whilst the audience are engaged in such activities. Instead, incorporate a description of the kind of activities that you would usually use into the sheet you give to the examiners to indicate where your prepared teach fits into your overall programme.

The TA 101 Teach

You are expected to have prepared and rehearsed so that you can give a 5 minute input on any topic from the TA 101 syllabus. You are also expected to have run many TA 101 courses by the time you reach your TSTA teaching exam, so the content should be familiar to you anyway.

However, I doubt that many of us run our TA 101 programs through a sequence of 5 minute inputs followed by 5 minute question sessions! Hence the need to rehearse so that you can do it in this way.

During the 2 minutes that you are allowed once you have selected a topic, use a pencil to make notes on the flipchart of what you want to cover. What you write there with pencil cannot normally be seen by the audience as it is too small and too faint – but it will provide you with a convenient checklist of what you want to cover.

Below is a checklist that I have developed over the years as a way of structuring a TA 101 teach (forgive the donkey bridge of each word starting with the same letter – it is meant to be a memory aid but feel free to change the words if you prefer :-)

- digest - provide a brief introduction and overview of what is coming
- definition – for a TA concept, you need to provide the definition including the reference back to the originator
- diagram – if there is one - Eric Berne was very keen on diagrams!
- description – explain what you are now teaching them about
- do with it – tell the audience why it is useful for them to know about this concept or material, how might they use it in their personal or professional life – this motivates them to pay attention
- demonstration – give them an example of how the concept/ phenomenon may be observed

- dangers – point out any risks there may be if they begin to apply the material in their personal or professional life (e.g. upsetting a partner or a colleague if they unilaterally change their stroking patterns, triggering a client regression if they use the concept professionally without sufficient training, etc)
- duplicate the key points – summarise the key points that you want them to remember
- dialogue – this is the required 5 minute question and answer session

Concluding comments

I hope you have found this material useful and I will welcome feedback.

Several years ago I analysed the competencies for the different fields and showed how they are not really that different – they are the competencies of a transactional analyst and what varies are the forms of evidence that are generated in different circumstances. Since then, I have mapped this general set of TA competencies against the competencies of some non-TA professional approaches, as well as against the criteria/learning outcomes used by some universities. This work may become the subject of a future article. I am also considering whether to map out the ways in which the competencies for the different fields of application are inconsistently presented in the various sections of the Handbook.

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