

Understanding and Making the Most of Your Assistantship – Meeting Notes

Questions to answer for yourself:

- Did you read the assistantship contract before you signed it?
- Did you understand it all? If not, did you ask for clarification?
- Did anything in it surprise you? If yes, did you talk to anyone about it?
- Did you have a conversation with your supervisor about schedule, expectations, communication/supervision style, deliverables?

University policy on assistantships: <https://policies.vt.edu/6210.pdf>

Graduate School website on assistantship details: <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/funding/types-of-funding/assistantships.html>

Eligibility:

- Full-time (12-18 hours) in degree program
 - o audited hours not counted
 - o monitored for entire semester; will receive notice if dropping below
 - o Research/independent study/incompletes/courses taken for P/F are ok
- 3.0 or above GPA; may receive exceptions with departmental support
- Meet employment eligibility requirements

Standard compensation, optimized for 100% assistantship for standard 9-month appointment:

- Monthly stipend (stipend table approved annually by the Board of Visitors; pay rate is dependent on departmental practices and availability of funding)
- In-state tuition and program fees, prorated by length and percentage of appointment
 - o Tuition bill – if paid late by the department, they can request waiver of late fee from the Bursar's Office
- Out-of-state tuition waiver (if you earn at least \$2000 on assistantship stipend during the semester)
- Health insurance subsidy for coverage of single student (family coverage available but not subsidized)
 - o <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/funding/types-of-funding/assistantships/benefits.html>
 - o <https://risk.controller.vt.edu/studentmedicalinsurance.html>
- Comp fee payment plan
- Standard contract start/end dates to provide 9 full paychecks in each semester. Contract start/end dates may be different from actual work start/end dates.
- Work-Life grant program: <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/funding/funding-information-for-departments/work-life-grants.html>

Additional benefits:

- Professional development; skill building
- Access to world-class equipment, resources and minds
- Opportunity to build professional network, secure job references

Communication with advisor/assistantship supervisor:

- Seek to understand expectations, ask questions:
 - o When/where to report to work
 - o Supervisor's communication style and preferences
 - o Times off for illness or personal reasons
- Treat assistantship as work
 - o If not assigned a departmental schedule, create schedule for yourself with deadlines and deliverables
 - o Proactively identify and carry out productive tasks and occasionally report progress to your supervisor. This can help show that you are engaged and provides opportunities for adjusting direction if needed. It can also improve your professional writing skills.
- Understand personal priorities, preferences, and tolerance levels (your own and your supervisor's):
 - o Communication style – direct/indirect
 - o Management style – micro/macro
 - o What's important to you: funding or relationship or project or present/future or ...

If there are differences between your needs/aspirations and your supervisor's, try to find an acceptable compromise.

Resources:

- VT GrATE: Graduate Academy for Teaching Excellence <http://vtgrate.org/>
- [Research Integrity | Research & Innovation | Virginia Tech \(vt.edu\)](#)
- Graduate School: grads@vt.edu; gibsonm@vt.edu
- Where to find assistantship postings: <https://webapps.graduateschool.vt.edu/glcweekly/>
- Graduate Ombudsperson: <https://www.graduate.ombudsman.vt.edu/>
- Job search assistance: <https://career.vt.edu/job-search/Handshake.html> -- accessible to VT alumni as well for a couple of years after graduation