

Name: Nicholas Aoki

Department: Linguistics

Contact Information: nbaoki@ucdavis.edu

Teaching Philosophy Statement

The guiding principle of my teaching philosophy is to promote *active learning*. Based on my own experience as an undergraduate and a 10-year one-on-one tutor, I have found that students retain material more effectively if they are actively participating and completing hands-on exercises, rather than passively listening to lectures and taking notes. Active learning not only boosts enthusiasm and interest, but also develops critical thinking and public speaking skills that are important for success both during and after college.

To facilitate participation during discussion sections, I employ *cold calling*, a pedagogical technique where instructors randomly call on students to answer questions without waiting for volunteers. The issue with waiting for volunteers is that participation almost always stagnates, with everyone sitting in tense silence, hoping that someone else will raise their hand. By contrast, cold calling normalizes in-class engagement, with most students participating at least once in every session. Everyone is incentivized to be as attentive as possible, knowing that they could be called on at any point. An added benefit is that I can memorize everyone's names very quickly (by the second week of the quarter), thus developing a rapport with students and fostering an environment where they feel more comfortable reaching out for extra help.

For LIN 103A (“Linguistic Analysis I: Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology”), I created my own set of slides, handouts and problem sets for each discussion section (for details, see aokinb.github.io/course_materials.html). The presentations largely shared the same format – I

would first show students how to do a practice problem, and then call on one person or a small group to write the answer to a related homework question on the blackboard. If they gave the correct response, I would ask them to explain their reasoning out loud, and if they didn't know the answer, I would verbally walk them through the problem. Although this method of teaching is time-consuming and might sound intimidating, I observed that many students seemed more comfortable participating as the quarter progressed. Moreover, discussion attendance was significantly correlated with better performance on the exams and weekly assignments, and students who began attending discussion mid-quarter saw their grades go up several letter grades (e.g., several students went from receiving Fs to As on assignments).

Fifty-minute discussion sections go by quickly, with some students needing more time to grasp the material. To support students outside of discussion, I responded to dozens of student e-mails (see Figure 1 below), provided 6 office hours per week (5 more per week than is required), and offered a 9am-5pm office hour session on the Monday of finals week, when the final paper was due. I not only graded weekly assignments for each of the 66 students in the class, but I also wrote detailed comments that were formatted as personalized letters and provided step-by-step explanations for questions that were missed (see Figure 2 below). Finally, during the Monday lecture of Week 10, the instructor gave me the opportunity to run an 80-minute review session for the final exam, for which I prepared 3 hands-on worksheets.

In summary, as the TA for LIN 103A, I endeavored to promote active learning in a demanding, but supportive atmosphere. As a young educator, there are still many skills that I am still trying to learn and hone. However, I remain committed to my teaching philosophy – I believe that the critical thinking and public speaking skills that students develop in my discussion sections will benefit them in the long-term, regardless of their future career path.

Figure 1:

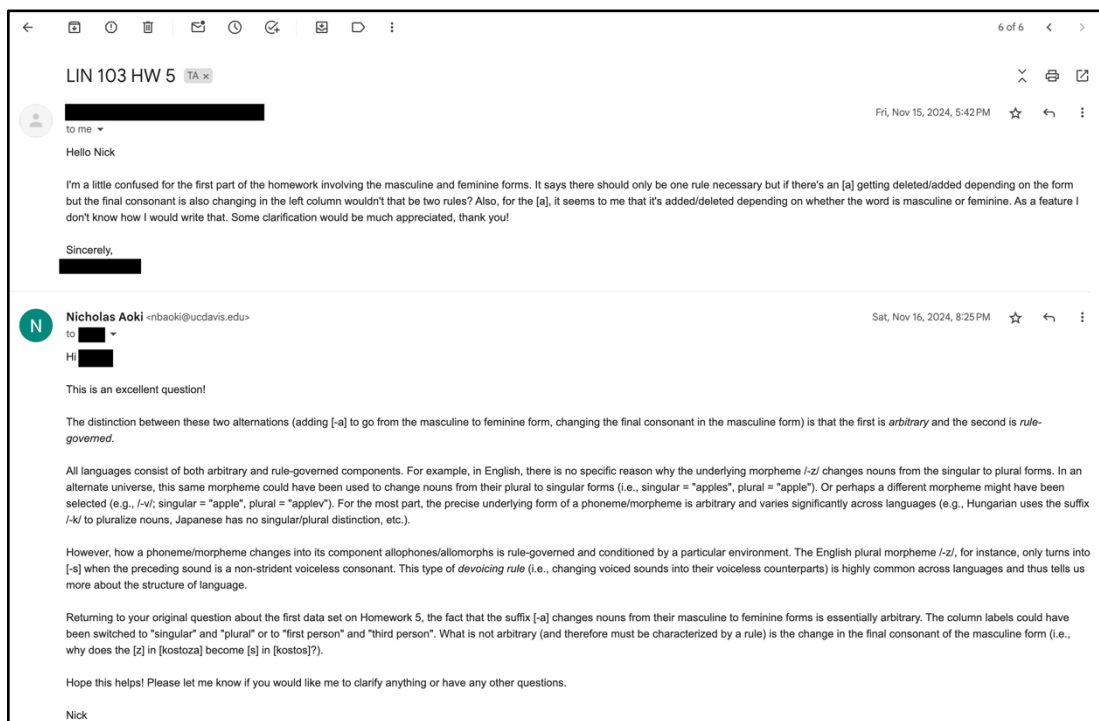


Figure 2:

