

Classroom guidelines

1.0 What are classroom guidelines?

One of the ways to create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning for everyone is to set classroom guidelines (also known as a “community agreement”) or other agreed-upon expectations for classroom conduct among students and the instructor. Classroom guidelines may involve establishing an approach to discussing difficult or controversial material, setting standards for in-class conduct—such as how and when it is acceptable to use electronic devices—or working together on group work.

Rather than listing the norms of the majority, classroom guidelines should articulate how the class strives to create a space where students and instructor, who have different backgrounds and needs, can work together in a fair and productive manner.

2.0 Benefits of setting guidelines

Research has shown that establishing agreed-upon classroom guidelines early in the term can yield more productive class time, and create an environment where students feel personally invested, valued and accepted—all key to ensuring student success. Other benefits include, but are not limited to:

- Directly involves the students and instructor in explicit creation of the classroom climate in a way that suits individuals’ needs, and not just the majority
- Enables protocol that can (and should) be referred to as the term progresses
- Helps to set a positive and inclusive tone for the term

3.0 Areas for consideration

The following points can help in creating guidelines that suit varying goals and context.

- Purpose: What are the intended outcomes of the guidelines (e.g., create a space for differing opinions, effective group work)?
- Context: What are aspects of the course context to consider (e.g., course material and topics, class size, students, amount of time spent in the classroom)?
- Process: Who will create guidelines and how (e.g., instructor, students discussing in small groups, TAs in discussion sections or labs, etc.)?
- Timing: When should guidelines be created (e.g., before the first day of class and include in the syllabus, on the first day of class, when a difficult moment arises)?
- Content: What should be covered in the guidelines (e.g., use of electronic devices, confidentiality, respectful behaviour, accountability, etc.)?

Critical considerations

Some classroom guidelines highlight freedom of expression or encourage respect for “all opinions.” Consider the impact that such a guideline might have on people who come from historically and persistently marginalized groups, whose voices and knowledge have not carried the equal power of legitimacy or authority as privileged ones. It is crucial to recognize the different positionalities of students and instructors to ensure that classroom guidelines help the class hold a space to challenge or disrupt, rather than reinforce, existing inequities. To consider how to engage in this tension, we recommend the following references: Lee & Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Picower, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012.



4.0 Suggested prompts for setting classroom guidelines

In choosing to develop guidelines with students, here are some questions that might help to generate input from the class:

- What are some standards we can set to enable you to feel valued and welcome in the classroom?
- How should we handle cell phones and laptops in class?
- What do you need to be able to participate in sensitive discussions? (e.g., when a conflict arises, when we need to discuss controversial topics)
- What are your responsibilities to yourself and one another?

5.0 Sample guidelines

Below are some examples of guidelines that may be generated in a class (adapted from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan).

- Be aware of how much you are contributing in class. If you tend to speak often, allow others to speak. If you tend to stay quiet, challenge yourself to share ideas so others can learn from you.
- Maintain a commitment to learn from each other. Listen actively, and be mindful of each other's differences in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values.
- Don't interrupt or engage in side conversations, and don't turn to electronic devices while others are speaking.
- Avoid demeaning, devaluing, or "putting down" people based on their background, lack of experiences, or different interpretations of their experiences.
- Remember that there are multiple approaches to solving problems. If you are uncertain about someone else's approach, ask a question to understand better. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work.
- Trust that people are doing the best they can. Be as patient as possible with the learning processes of others.
- Take small group work seriously. Remember that your peers' learning partly depends upon your engagement.
- Challenge ideas and not individual people.
- Make an effort to get to know other students. Introduce yourself to those sitting near you.
- Recognize that learning can be an emotional process. Sharing an emotional reaction when you feel comfortable to do so, and listening to each other's emotions can be valuable opportunities for learning.
- If you want to discuss a class conversation outside of class, focus on sharing ideas rather than who shared what. This can help respect people's privacy when discussing difficult topics.

6.0 References

Learn more about why, when and how to implement classroom guidelines by reviewing additional resources and a complete list of references at [wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Inclusive Teaching/Classroom Guidelines](http://wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Inclusive_Teaching/Classroom_Guidelines).



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