

Set ground rules and expectations

Establishing ground rules and making clear the expectations of the teacher and the student fosters a sense of community. It provides a sense of clarity that reduces misunderstandings that can lead to poor classroom performance and classroom behavior.

Why establish ground rules and expectations?

- Ground rules hold students and faculty accountable for their behavior
- They can prevent issues of incivility that arise from misunderstanding

Incivility on the part of students can be related to varying and unclear expectations on the part of faculty (Braxton & Bayer, 2004; Clark, 2008). For example, students cannot intuit that in one class it is OK to hand work in a day late and that in another class they will be penalized points. Students report frustration because they have to guess the rules with each new teacher. In one class it is OK to eat breakfast, but in another the faculty member is irritated (and yet may say nothing) when students eat in class. Another example might be that students may arrive late to class, but it is not accepted in clinical.

- Students understand more clearly the expectations of the instructor as well as their classmates
- A discussion of ground rules can illustrate that expectations go both ways. Students are able to voice their expectations of faculty and other students creating a classroom in which all members are valued. (Braxton & Jones, 2008)
- Students hold each other accountable in a variety of learning scenarios
- Establishing ground rules in a syllabus can act as a contract that can be referred to in instances where ground rules are being broken
- Rules can create a safe learning environment for course participants where all know that their ideas and viewpoints will be respected

How can you establish ground rules and expectations?

- Decide what is non-negotiable for you as the instructor
- Plan to facilitate a conversation around ground rules as a class or present your proposal and give students the opportunity to modify it

Do this on the first day of class as part of climate setting

Here are two examples: [Example 1](#), [Example 2](#)

Have students create the ground rules as a class (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005).

- In small groups, have students think about past learning environments. Which learning environments were productive? What were the characteristics of that environment? Which learning environments were not productive? What were the characteristics of that environment?
- Ask students to list the conditions needed to ensure that positive characteristics exist in a learning environment. As they list the conditions and characteristics have them define the behaviors that are expected. For example, if we want respect to be a characteristic what behaviors show respect?

Based on these conversations, have students create a draft list of ground rules for your class. Collect and compile these.

Adjust them as you see necessary and redistribute them to the class for agreement.

Once everyone agrees, put ground rules in your syllabus.

Revisit them throughout the semester to check with students that the ground rules are still working. Make adjustments as necessary.

How can you use ground rules and expectations?

- Introduce ground rules on the first day
- Provide a rationale for the ground rules. Explain how these expectations make sense in the context of your own beliefs about how learning takes place
- Ask students for feedback and get their buy-in
- Ask students what they expect from their teachers. Buy-in to their expectations or explain how you can or cannot. For example, students (especially on-line students) expect you to be available 24 hours a day. Explain what you are willing to do; let them know that you check for messages twice a day and that students can expect a response back within 24 hours.
- Throughout the semester refer to the established set of ground rules when addressing any incivility
- If using group work, consider having small groups come up with their own set of expectations at the onset
- Reiterate ground rules before discussing a topic that may be heated

References:

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