

In-person Classroom Management

Whether you are lecturing to a large group or facilitating a small group in person, managing the classroom so that you feel all students have equal opportunity to learn and participate is an important skill. There are several ideas that can help enhance these environments and manage unwelcomed disruption. This sheet focuses on in-person teaching but many of these ideas do not apply just to the physical in-person classroom but can be applied virtual online spaces too.

The aim of effective classroom management is ultimately to build relationships with your students to improve their engagement and success. Achieving this can be difficult depending on the size of the group, the mix of the cohort, the environment you are working in and your own expectations of how students should behave and interact in a learning environment.

What is disruptive behaviour?

Most students want their classes to go well. Disruptive behaviour can occur for several different causes - **many of them not to do with your teaching**, and even the most experienced lecturers are likely to encounter some form of disruptive behaviour at times.

Disruptive behaviour can be thought of as

“any behaviour that threatens the flow of academic performance in a particular context can be defined as misbehaviour” (Oruc, 2011)

Classroom management should be considered at the very initial stages of planning and be discussed collectively with your course team to ensure there is an understanding between staff of what the different approaches are for dealing with disruptive behaviour and clarifying the expectations of the students.

What assumptions are you making about the knowledge of your students?

What are you expecting they can and cannot do?

Consider how you make expectations clear to all students on arrival at the University (Burden [1999](#), Murphy, 2010, Alabayrak, 2022, Patel 2021). Make students aware of the [University Student Charter](#), [Student Code of Conduct](#) and [Social Media Policy for Students](#).

Here are some suggestions to improve students' engagement when undertaking classroom teaching to make it a positive experience for all parties. Many of these principles do not apply just to the physical classroom space but to the virtual online spaces too. Further advice on engaging students in an online synchronous classroom can be found in the document, [Online Synchronous Engagement](#).

There are tools which you can employ to make activities stimulating and engaging, but there are some key things to consider when trying to create a positive, engaged classroom but also managing situations when students are not behaving in the manner you think is appropriate.

Suggestions on how to manage a classroom:

- Agree and establish clear expectations from the start of the course and during module sessions: establish agreed ground rules for everyone (staff included) and apply these consistently.
- Treat students with respect, kindness and courtesy to model professional behaviours.
- The effect of the most common disruptive behaviours relating to phone usage, latecomers, verbal interruptions v silence, aggressive questioning, “safe space” conduct, persistent absence issues, and time wasting, could be highlighted to students.
- Think about the underpinning reasons why a student might be disruptive, such as how boredom, lack of understanding, lack of engagement, other personal issues might be contributing.
- Consider discussing the professional behaviours required in future employment settings, social responsibility and global citizenship, in some settings (e.g. labs) professional behaviours might be mandated expectations.
- In settings or courses that do not have clear mandated behaviours you might consider an exercise with students in which they establish their own expectations of group behaviour / ground rules – based on relevant professional or workplace norms. These “ground rules” should be shared across a course team to ensure a consistent approach.
- Be consistent across the teaching team. Treat all students the same.
- If team-teaching, discuss how you will deal with emergent issues, with your colleagues, before the session.
- Be prepared for disruption and think about how you will handle it in advance.
- Do not turn a ‘blind eye’ to minor disruptions. Several minor disruptions can be as disruptive as one large incident. Keep calm, do not over-react. Treat the first infringement with humour and clarify the implications and impact of repeating this.
- Think about changing how you approach a situation and work on all the students’ self-interest (assessment success, learning about being professional, using contact hours effectively).
- Take action to minimise opportunities for behaviour to be disruptive (e.g. save easily accessible seats for late comers, provide plenty of breaks, chunked activities, interactive activities).

- Regularly poll students about disruptive behaviour expectations - use student consultation as part of the learning activity and encourage the students to build negotiation skills to increase their agency.
- Peer pressure can be helpful, but we should not expect or encourage students to manage the classroom environment themselves: that is your role.
- Follow up on individual concerns about a student promptly with appropriate colleagues, such as the Academic Advisor, or Course Director.

Bibliography

[Talis list on In-person Classroom Management](#)