

Tech Snacks: Classroom Management

Tips, tricks, habits & activities

Effective classroom management isn't something that just happens naturally! It requires the intentional use of non-verbal communication, instructor personality, classroom policy, and many other subtle factors.

Project confidence

Your breathing, stance, speaking pace, eye contact, vocal inflection/tone, and mobility in the classroom all convey something about your level of confidence to your students.¹ But what if you don't actually feel that confident in front of them? Changing even one of these elements of your presentation style can help you "fake it 'til you make it." If you walk into your classroom believing that it is going to be unruly and out of control, the students are likely to sense your fear and fulfill that prophesy.

- Breathe deeply.
- Take an expansive stance.
- Speak slowly and lower your voice.
- Make more eye contact than you think you need to.
- Make a conscious effort to move around the room. Don't hide behind the podium!
- Check in with yourself on your use of nonverbal cues every few weeks, especially when you're stressed.

Embrace "wait time"

It's intimidating to stare into a classroom of blank faces, but if you ask questions and never give students enough time to process an answer, they'll stop trying. One study found that instructors typically only wait 0.7 to 1.5 seconds before speaking after they've asked a question.²

Waiting 3 seconds or more has been shown to improve the accuracy of student responses, increase the quality and depth of student responses, and allow those students to respond who typically refrain from responding.

Intervene sooner rather than later

It may seem out of place to talk about "behavior problems" at the college level — aren't we all adults here? You might be inclined to just ignore bad behavior, but letting it fly can often exacerbate the problem. Here are a few ways to nip it in the bud:

Take a preventative approach. If you notice the same issues occurring semester after semester, create clear policies to mitigate them, and communicate those to your students from day one. (Better yet, craft some those policies together with the students at the beginning of the semester.)

Distract the distractor. When a student or group of students is out of line, make eye contact and ask them a question relevant to the lesson (but avoid sarcasm and snarkiness).

Record behaviors. If you notice a student coming in late, falling asleep, distracting others, or being disrespectful, write it down. If it happens just once, it may be an isolated situation. If the behavior continues, communicate the pattern with the student, along with your expectations for improvement.

Have a talk. Pull the student aside after class and communicate your observations and expectations about their behavior in your class.

Write a note. If you're conflict averse or find it hard to catch students after class, consider writing them a note about your observations and expectations. Hand it to them while you're handing back homework to avoid embarrassment.

¹Adapted from: <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/misbehavior-college-classroom/>

²<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/student-learning-in-3-seconds/>

Rotate partners. If students are engaging in off-task behavior together during partner work, consider “randomly” assigning partners by numbering them off or having them draw playing cards torn in half. Bonus: Students often stay in place after group work is over.

Plan ahead to manage transitions

Establishing a routine or signal to help students navigate instructional transitions can help prevent distractions. For instance, when moving between lecture and group work, you might have a particular word you say, hand signal you use, or image you display to help them quickly understand the task that is expected.

Construct class policies together

Some classroom policies need to be carefully set in stone by the instructor and department, but others can be more flexible. This provides an opportunity to include students in classroom policy creation, which can lead to better “buy-in” later in the semester.

Dave Spear, a professor at Niagara College in Ontario, Canada, regularly invites students to help him develop a behavior policy.³

“With a new group we spend time on the first day producing a ‘class rules’ document. I ask students what they think the rules for conduct in the classroom should be, and they do a very thorough job. If something you feel is important is missed, then bring it up and ask their opinion; for example, ‘What should be the policy on cell phone use?’ They are always more willing to follow the rules they created as opposed to the ones they have forced upon them.”

Inviting students to help craft classroom policies on cellphone use, attendance, late work, or other areas of class management can create a greater sense of teamwork. This helps set the tone that the instructor is not working *against* the students but *with* them towards the learning outcomes of the course.

Other tips

Give students assignment options. Choice fosters ownership and buy-in.

Be truthful when things go wrong. If students are confused or frustrated, don’t pretend that things are going great. Adjust where you can, and ask for their perspectives.

Firmly reiterate your expectations as needed. For instance, if attendance is becoming a class problem, remind students about your expectations and any related consequences.

Show students you care. Know their names and make references to their interests.

Observe your own teaching. OTLE can set up a video recording of your class so that you can get a sense of the way you use nonverbal cues in the classroom.

³ <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/misbehavior-college-classroom>