

MANAGING STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

This job aid describes the most effective ways to increase the likelihood of positive student behaviour in your classes.

This job aid will help you to:

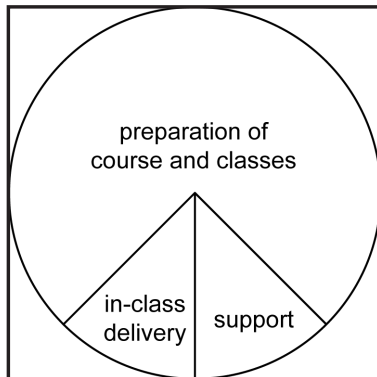
- plan ahead to increase positive student behaviour
- prevent or defuse disruptive behaviour
- handle problems when they arise
- manage the classroom environment with an awareness of your authority and responsibilities

net Includes techniques for online courses.



Instructor influence on behaviour

An instructor has several chances to influence behaviour in the classroom and lab. It is dangerous (and less effective) to rely on reacting to poor behaviour as it



occurs—far better to **prevent** or reduce its occurrence.

As this diagram shows, the most effective way to reduce undesirable behaviour in your classes is to make sure that your courses and lessons are thoroughly and appropriately prepared for your students. And you must ensure that they understand your expectations right from the beginning. The checklists in this job aid will guide you in improving student behaviour in your classes and labs.

See also the job aid *Starting Off on the Right Foot*.

Class and course preparation

Use the following checklist to ensure your course is well prepared.

When preparing for my class and course:

- I include the right amount of subject matter material for the course length
- My planned evaluations treat students fairly
- Lessons are prepared for every class
- I provide an introduction to each lesson
- My lessons match stated learning outcomes
- My tests and assignments match stated learning outcomes
- I gather all my resources well before the class
- I verify that there is enough subject matter for each class
- I check that the students are not overloaded
- I have read the BCIT policies* on conduct in the classroom and have reviewed them with my education supervisor

Student support

Use the following checklist to ensure your students feel that they have your support.

To establish good relationships with my students:

- I have posted office hours at times when students are available
- I remain in my office during posted office hours
- I treat all students equally and fairly
- I am compassionate without being “easy”

In class

In class there are many ways to prevent or defuse disruptive behaviour. They involve your own behaviour as well as your interactions with your students. You set the tone for your whole course in the first class and your behaviour toward the students is the most powerful tool for modelling what you expect from them.

Use the following checklist to manage student behaviour in the classroom.

On-going classroom organization:

- I arrive, start, and end on time
- I ensure that everyone can hear and see

At the first class:

- I hand out and explain my course outline at the beginning of the course
- I specify the learning outcomes of the course
- I discuss and negotiate classroom ground-rules for acceptable classroom behaviour for the course
- I provide an introduction to the whole course
- I communicate my expectations and criteria for assignments

Interacting with my students:

- I demonstrate and promote respect for others
- I make eye contact with all students
- I provide opportunity for questions
- I respond to all questions satisfactorily
- I use effective questioning techniques
- I use students' names when I speak to them

Delivering information:

- I state the learning outcomes for each lesson
- I teach at a pace that is appropriate for the student group
- I deliver material in a variety of ways to attend to different learning styles
- I connect new material to previously learned material
- I connect new material to real-life situations
- I summarize the lesson(s) at the end of each class
- I tell the students of preparation and supplies needed for the next class

Involving my students:

- I acknowledge students' previous or advanced knowledge of the subject
- I use this knowledge to make the lesson more relevant
- I use a variety of active learning strategies in the class
- I use appropriate media (handouts, overheads, presentation software)
- I give students a chance to practice or work with materials in class
- I help students learn strategies to make their group work more effective

Dealing with problems:

- I stay alert for potential problems
- I address problems as soon as they arise in class
- I involve students in the resolution of problems
- I am aware of my responsibilities and my authority to manage the classroom environment

The best of preparation on your part will not guarantee a completely harmonious classroom experience. Conflict is not inevitable but it is very possible. Your response when conflict appears in your classroom will influence how the conflict is resolved. If you know what you have authority to do and what resources are available to assist you, conflict can be managed with a minimum of disruption in the classroom. Get to know the resources available and use them when you need them.

net Managing behaviour in an online course

Managing student behaviour in an online course isn't that different from a face-to-face classroom. As the instructor, you have a major role to play in setting the appropriate tone. An online course tends to be less instructor-dominated than traditional classrooms, and the dynamics and interaction can be very exciting. However, even online, problems can develop from the inappropriate behaviour of an individual, or the lack of planning on the part of the instructor.

Making introductions before class work starts

Starting the course with an introduction exercise is an excellent way to set the tone for the course and allow learners to get to know each other in a non-stressful forum. Ask each learner to post a short bio to the discussion forum, giving a little of their personal backgrounds, what they want to get out of the course, what their previous studies were and some of their recent work history, if appropriate. Then ask each learner to respond to one other learner's introduction. This short exercise will be of significant benefit when you set up groups for group assignments.

Discussion forums

When creating groups for group projects, it is a good idea to set up ground rules for what has become known as "netiquette", for online behaviour. Don't write the rules yourself; have each group come up with their own set of ground rules, with some preliminary guidance from you. You should monitor this activity, and respond to the end result, to ensure that it is workable and reasonable.

Group work

Group work helps alleviate the feeling of isolation that studying at a distance can create. Unless absolutely inappropriate to the context of the course, you should consider group assignments, discussions and exercises as not only a method of learning but also keeping students focused and involved in an enjoyable, online educational experience.

Online response times

You will need to be able to respond to student questions in a reasonable amount of time. State in a course overview document what your response time will be; from 24 to 48 hours is standard. When you are not available for a longer period, let the class know beforehand.

Part of keeping your course on track will mean responding to postings in discussion forums, or checking in with students via email, etc. You may be surprised at what is required by you to keep an online class running smoothly. You need to be proactive in setting up discussion groups, and should post a first message in each discussion forum for particular topics. If there is an overly long quiet period, post a message to ask if there are any problems.

You will find that keeping a discussion thread alive is a delicate balance between intervention when necessary and stepping back when the thread is lively and your students are keeping the momentum going. One thing to avoid is to weigh-in with a summary and your own personal opinion before the discussion officially ends. This is a sure way to kill the discussion, as the students will feel that you have wrapped it up.

When to intervene

Be aware of your institute's policies regarding harassment, bullying and inappropriate behaviour generally. Occasionally you may need to delete an offensive posting. Act quickly, as these can be especially damaging to quieter students. As the instructor, you have the ability to remove offensive postings and should do so as soon as you become aware of them. You then need to communicate with the student who posted the message to try to understand their point of view. Ultimately, a student who continues to disrupt the course will need to be removed entirely.

Summary

As with a face-to-face class, maintaining a balance of enthusiasm and respect online depends largely on how well you have prepared beforehand and thought out your response to possible disruptions. This will put you in a much better position to deal with any student behavioural problems that may occur.

