

Guidelines for Class Participation

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As a Graduate Student Instructor, it is useful to learn how to balance the tension between the need for students to take responsibility for the frequency and manner in which they participate in class and the need for instructor intervention when there are concerns about frequency and manner of participation. A useful way of handling this tension is to let students know your expectations for the way they communicate with others (including you) in the classroom, and that they will be held accountable for communicating in respectful ways with everyone in the class. Of course, the same guidelines are applicable to you. By doing this, any individual in the class has the right to make a descriptive comment about a violation and recommend a better approach when necessary. As the instructor, you play an important role as a facilitator and supporter in your students' efforts to achieve respectful ways of communicating in the classroom.

Ground rules for class participation can be designed by you or negotiated with your students. By asking for their input, you give students the sense of ownership that can help them take the ground rules more seriously. The following represent guidelines that can be used to develop an atmosphere of mutual respect and collective inquiry.

1. Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. Challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
2. Listen carefully to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should reflect that you have paid attention to the speaker's comments.
3. Be courteous. Don't interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking.
4. Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
5. Allow everyone the chance to talk. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.
6. If you are offended by something or think someone else might be, speak up and don't leave it for someone else to have to respond to it.