

Strategies for Preventing Disruption and Disrespect

The following are examples of practices that can help minimize student incivility. What might these look like in your particular teaching settings? When might particular practices be especially useful or relevant?

1. Setting norms and expectations

- Develop classroom discussion guidelines—and refer to them throughout the semester.
- Highlight syllabus statements that spell out expectations about punctuality, classroom etiquette, participation, etc.
- Establish and explain technology policies that minimize disruption: e.g., phones silenced, or laptops at the back of the room where they won't distract classmates.

2. Building rapport and community

- Learn about students' interests and goals.
- Regularly start class with icebreakers, relevant to student interests when possible.
- Solicit and respond to student feedback about the course, demonstrating your interest in their experience of the learning environment.
- Point students to campus resources (e.g., CAPS, MESA, Spectrum) to support their well-being.

3. Modeling and acknowledging desired behavior

- Practice modes of interaction that you want students to use. e.g., clarify others' remarks before disagreeing or questioning, take responsibility for mistakes, give the benefit of the doubt.
- Thank students for their punctuality or thorough preparation, or commend their focused attention during pair activities.

4. Establishing your own and colleagues' professional authority

- Explain the basis of your expertise (e.g., education, teaching experience, personal background), and do the same for any guest speakers.
- Demonstrate professional behaviors such as punctuality, thorough preparation, and fairly-applied, clear course policies (such behaviors are strongly correlated to student perceptions of faculty competence).

5. Focusing students' attention during class

- Use active learning techniques such as think-pair-share or 'muddiest point' assessments
- Provide brief breaks during long lectures
- Regularly ask questions that challenge students to think

6. Holding students accountable if they transgress norms

- Remind students of established classroom guidelines: e.g., "This seems like a good time to recall our agreement that we wouldn't interrupt one another."
- Establish a simple point system for baseline classroom expectations (e.g., 2 points per session: 1 for punctuality, 1 for engagement).
- Establish and use a disruptive behavior policy that includes consequences for not complying.