


# Setting effective Classroom norms

 BEST SUITED FOR  
10-25 students

 BEST DONE  
beginning of term  
with ongoing reaffirmation  
and reassessment

 APPROX. PREP TIME  
15-60 minutes

## Overview · Start here

### Troubleshooting · This teaching strategy addresses

- Some of the course expectations, commitments, and opportunities are still unclear to some students. Some students (knowingly or unknowingly) don't yet comply with course policies.
- Communication among students and between the students and the teacher can yet be improved.

### In a nutshell · What this teaching strategy does

Before the term starts, you will choose your preferred model for setting norms in and around your own classroom (**Design**). At the beginning of the term, you will articulate a set of classroom norms, ideally together with your students (**Normsetting activity**). You and your students will then mutually agree to these norms (**Commitment**). If necessary, you will re-affirm and modify these norms throughout the term (**Reaffirmation & Reassessment**).

### Outcomes · After implementing this strategy, notice

- Greater transparency and demystification of course expectations
- Equity: Making class expectations explicit levels the playing field for all students.
- Agency and accountability: The students share responsibility for their learning environment.
- Empathy and solidarity: By affirming student agency, you help students feel seen and heard.
- Ongoing communication among students and between students and teacher

## How to · Design your own approach for articulating, implementing, and reaffirming classroom norms

### Stage 1 · GENERATING NORMS

#### Choose level of student involvement

Decide how much say you want your students to have when it comes to articulating and implementing classroom norms.

#### All norms are generated by the students.

This will likely make students feel empowered and make them feel more committed to the norms. At the same time, this may take up more class time (although check out the option to do this asynchronously below). The teacher also misses the opportunity to contribute norms that may be good for the class.

#### Some norms are generated by the students, some are generated by the teacher.

This will likely make students feel empowered and make them feel more committed to the norms. The teacher can contribute norms that may be good for them and good for the class. At the same time, this may take up more class time (although check out the option to do this asynchronously below).

#### All norms are generated by the teacher.

The teacher has full autonomy and can generate norms on their own before the quarter starts, without taking up class time. At the same time, when norms are imposed 'top down,' students are likely to feel less empowered and are less likely to feel committed to the norms. The teacher may also overlook norms that are meaningful to the students.

#### Choose time and place

When and where do you want your students to generate norms?

#### Synchronously (in class)

The students get to know each other and build trust. The teacher and the students can provide feedback in real time. At the same time, an in-class activity takes some time away from other instruction

#### Asynchronously (homework)

An asynchronous activity takes up no class time. Students also have more time to think of norms on their own. At the same time, this kind of activity may be harder for the teacher to moderate and feedback is not immediate.

#### Generate norms yourself

Think about which norms are important to you and your students.

See our **HANDOUT** for explicit desiderata and example norms.

#### Collect norms in a shared artifact

It is important that you and the students can refer back to a written list of norms throughout the quarter.

Keep the list of norms short and manageable. 3-8 norms are ideal! After stating each norm, include a sentence that motivates or justified the norm. (Why should we follow this norm? What does it help with?)

#### Decide how to structure the norm-generating activity

How will you motivate the activity and guide students through it?

#### 1 Framing the activity

- Clearly explain to students the rationale behind articulating explicit classroom norms.

EXAMPLE LANGUAGE: "I want us to take time to reflect upon and discuss together how we are going to commit to acting towards each other so that we can learn together and have rigorous conversations and disagreements, while also being respectful and supportive of each other. We will start today, but this will be ongoing as we learn from our continued interactions with each other."

- Provide guidance to students by explaining how to articulate good classroom norms. Provide examples.

See our **HANDOUT** for explicit desiderata and example norms. You may even decide to use this handout as a resource in class.

#### 2 Students generate norms

individually / in small groups / whole class

#### 3 Students and/or teacher write down norms

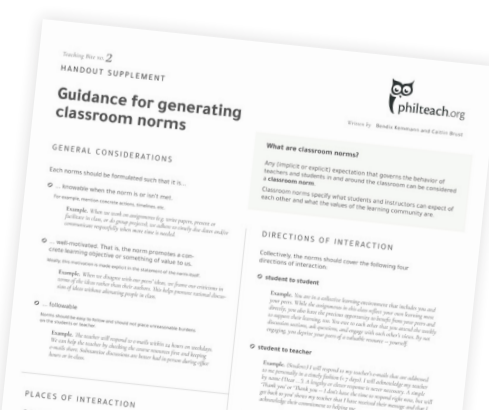
whiteboard / Google Docs / Canvas  
PollEV / etc.

#### 4 Class discusses norms

clarify / amend / upvote

#### Handout

You can use our handout to guide your creation of effective classroom norms. You can also share this handout with your students so that they have concrete examples and desiderata to look at when generating norms.



### Common misconceptions about classroom norms

It is tempting to think that you don't need to set classroom norms because...

#### ✱ ...the relevant norms are 'basic' or common knowledge.

Not every student may be familiar with basic academic expectations. Moreover, philosophy classes in particular are often governed by highly specific norms that students from other fields are unfamiliar with at first.

#### ✱ ...there is not enough time and doing so takes valuable time away from course instruction.

Setting explicit classroom norms enhances course instruction and conversation. Keep in mind that the conversations you and your students will have in class amount to doing philosophy, and setting good norms is fundamental to doing philosophy well. Implementing classroom norms doesn't have to take more than five minutes of classroom time, and this investment may save you a lot of time in the long run.

#### ✱ ...the exercise is shallow, handwavy and ultimately ineffective.

This will depend on how well norms are implemented and reaffirmed throughout the term. This Teaching Bite helps you make classroom norms effective.

**Reflect on this** · Classroom norms always exist. The question is whether they are implicit or explicit, how much agency you and your students have in shaping them, and whether they are collectively known and agreed to.

### Stage 2

## COMMITTING TO NORMS TOGETHER

#### Commitment

Now you and your students can commit to the norms and to the ongoing process of revisiting norms.

everyone simply gives verbal assent or nods

everyone signs list of norms

### Stage 3

## REAFFIRMING & REVISITING NORMS

#### Reaffirm norms (ongoing)

Remind students of the norms in class when appropriate or discuss norms with students individually.

Have a plan for revisiting norms. For example, you can tell your students that you will briefly revisit the norms together halfway through the quarter.



**Dive deeper**  
references & more resources