

Guidance for generating classroom norms

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Each norms should be formulated such that it is...

- ... knowable when the norm is or isn't met.

For example, mention concrete actions, timelines, etc.

Example. When we work on assignments (e.g. write papers, present or facilitate in class, or do group projects), we adhere to timely due dates and/or communicate respectfully when more time is needed.

- ... well-motivated. That is, the norm promotes a concrete learning objective or something of value to us.

Ideally, this motivation is made explicit in the statement of the norm itself.

Example. When we disagree with our peers' ideas, we frame our criticisms in terms of the ideas rather than their authors. This helps promote rational discussion of ideas without alienating people in class.

- ... followable

Norms should be easy to follow and should not place unreasonable burdens on the students or teacher.

Example. The teacher will respond to e-mails within 24 hours on weekdays. We can help the teacher by checking the course resources first and keeping e-mails short. Substantive discussions are better had in person during office hours or in class.

PLACES OF INTERACTION

Collectively, the norms should cover the various places and activities through which the class interacts:

○ classroom discussions

Example. Reasonable disagreement is an important part of philosophical discussion. When you disagree with another person's view, do so with care. For example, restate the view as charitably as you can, and acknowledge anything important you can learn from it, before you state your disagreement.

○ office hours

Example. You can come to me during office hours (Mondays 1pm-3pm in 92EE) to discuss anything related to the course, your ability to thrive, or your studies at Stanford. To ensure that I can meet with everyone, please select one 15-minute meeting time at calendly.com/bendix/oh. Be mindful of others, so cancel our meet-up if you can no longer make it.

○ group work

Example. At the beginning of your group work, have a discussion with all members of the group about a fair division of labor, and write down what each person will contribute by when. Give feedback to each other at least once during the group work phase.

○ assessments

Example. The student completes each assignment on time to allow the teacher to provide timely feedback and to honor their other commitments. In exceptional circumstances when this is not possible, the student communicates with the teacher at least 24h before the deadline to find a solution together.

What are classroom norms?

Any (implicit or explicit) expectation that governs the behavior of teachers and students in and around the classroom can be considered a **classroom norm**.

Classroom norms specify what students and instructors can expect of each other and what the values of the learning community are.

DIRECTIONS OF INTERACTION

Collectively, the norms should cover the following four directions of interaction:

○ student to student

Example. You are in a collective learning environment that includes you and your peers. While the assignments in this class reflect your own learning most directly, you also have the precious opportunity to benefit from your peers and to support their learning, too. You owe to each other that you attend the weekly discussion sections, ask questions, and engage with each other's views. By not engaging, you deprive your peers of a valuable resource -- yourself.

○ student to teacher

Example. (Student:) I will respond to my teacher's e-mails that are addressed to me personally in a timely fashion (< 7 days). I will acknowledge my teacher by name ('Dear ...'). A lengthy or clever response is never necessary. A simple 'Thank you' or 'Thank you -- I don't have the time to respond right now, but will get back to you' shows my teacher that I have received their message and that I acknowledge their commitment to helping me.

○ teacher to student

Example. (Teacher:) I am not interested in busy work or in giving you assignments just for administrative or historical reasons. Every assignment I give you serves clear learning objectives that I will explain to you. I believe that every assignment serves an important role in helping you meet your learning goals in an effective and time-bound way.

Example. (Teacher:) I will not operate on the assumption that you know everything in my 'hidden curriculum,' i.e. that you will anticipate everything I implicitly assume but haven't explicitly stated.

○ student/teacher to self

Example. (Student to self:) While the assignments in this course have been carefully designed to help me achieve my learning goals in an effective and time-bound way, my learning ultimately transcends those assignments. The assignments are an important means to help me meet my learning goals; and they are not an end in themselves.

○ giving feedback

Example. It is your opportunity, and your responsibility, to communicate with me what is working for you in this course and what isn't. You can do so anytime by using the anonymous feedback form [include link], via e-mail, or by talking to me directly. I welcome feedback and making it specific allows me to act on it effectively. I will respond to your feedback by the next class (e.g. by making a visible change to the class, by asking your peers about their thoughts, or by explaining why the relevant point of feedback can't be implemented but what other options there are in the vicinity).

Dive deeper

references & more resources

