

Sample Syllabus Statements: Guidelines for Classroom Behaviors

Any of the following sets of guidelines for classroom behavior could be included in your syllabus.

Example 1 (from U-M Faculty Member Evelyn Alsutany, American Culture)

Class Conduct: A positive learning environment relies upon creating an atmosphere where diverse perspectives can be expressed, especially in a course that focuses on pressing and controversial social and political issues. Each student is encouraged to take an active part in class discussions and activities. Honest and respectful dialogue is expected. Disagreement and challenging of ideas in a supportive and sensitive manner is encouraged. Hostility and disrespectful behavior is not acceptable.

Just as we expect others to listen attentively to our own views, we must reciprocate and listen to others when they speak, especially when we disagree with them. However, in this class, our emphasis will be on engaging in the mutual exploration of issues as presented in the course readings as scholars rather than in defending points of view we have formed outside the classroom.

Example 2 (from U-M Faculty Member Alisse Portnoy, English)

In our structured and unstructured discussions and dialogues, we also will have many opportunities to explore some challenging, high-stakes issues and increase our understandings of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy; we sometimes will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening; sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. Always we will need respect for others. Thus, an important second aim of our course necessarily will be for us to increase our facility with the sometimes difficult conversations that arise inside issues of social justice as we deepen our understandings of multiple perspectives – whatever our backgrounds, experiences, or positions.

Example 3 (From U. of S. Carolina Center for Teaching Excellence)

<http://www.sc.edu/cte/guide/syllabus/statements.shtml>

In order to learn, we must be open to the views of people different from ourselves. In this time we share together over the semester, please honor the uniqueness of your fellow classmates and appreciate the opportunity we have to learn from one another. Please respect each others' opinions and refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. Finally, remember to keep confidential all issues of a personal or professional nature that are discussed in class.

Additional examples can be found here:

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/teachinglearninginitiatives/docs/civilitysamples.pdf>

Some Guidelines for Technology Usage

Excerpt from the CRLT GSI Guidebook

The following is an excerpt from Chapter 17 (written by CRLT's Erping Zhu and Matt Kaplan) of *McKeachie's Teaching Tips, 14E*. From McKeachie/Svinicki. © 2014 Wadsworth, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. www.cengage.com/permissions

Technology can support student learning, but it can also become a distraction (Lloyd, Dean and Cooper, 2007, p. 493). Research indicates that multitasking (e.g., surfing the Web, texting, or using social networks during lecture) has a negative impact on learning (Clapp, Rubens, Sabharwal, & Gazzaley, 2011; Ellis, Daniels, Jauregui, 2010; Hembrooke & Gay, 2003). You may want to establish ground rules in your class to ensure students get most the out of technology tools, rather than being distracted by them. Having such policies on your syllabus, for example, can help avoid misunderstandings by making your expectations clear from the outset. The following examples can be adapted for your own teaching context:

Do not use laptops for entertainment during class and do not display any material on the laptop which may be distracting or offensive to your fellow students. (Northern Michigan University, 2010)
Laptops may be used only for legitimate classroom purposes, such as taking notes, downloading class information from TWEN, or working on an in-class exercise. E-mail, instant messaging, surfing the Internet, reading the news, or playing games are not considered legitimate classroom purposes; such inappropriate laptop use is distracting to those seated around you and is unprofessional. (Mazzie, 2008)

When you notice students using laptops in lectures only to check Facebook pages or browse websites that are non-related to lectures, you can ask them to close the laptop until it is needed for a specific activity. You can also designate a specific laptop-free location at for students who do use computers in class and do not wish to be distracted by others who do.

Excerpt from CRLT Occasional Paper # 30

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no30.pdf

Set a laptop policy and communicate it to students

"Students are not encouraged to bring laptops to class. A closed laptop rule during lecture will be enforced and other communication devices will need to be on 'silent' during lecture." (U-M Syllabus)

Such policies need not entail all-or-nothing approaches. Faculty can identify in the syllabus days when laptops will be permitted in class (e.g., for specific activities, notetaking, or research), as well as times when students will not be able to use laptops because their distracting presence would create problems. Similarly, during a single class session you might plan out times when laptops can and cannot be used and clearly communicate this to students. A simple phrase, such as "Screens closed, please, for this discussion so I have everyone's full attention" conveys both your policy on laptop use for the activity and a rationale for why you want their screens closed.

Identify a laptop-free zone in class

Instructors can implement a laptop-free zone, reserving the first or first few rows of the classroom for students who do not use laptops. This creates an area where students who are distracted by neighboring screens and nearby typing are free from those distractions (McCreary, 2009).