Make implicit rules visible to all students

**Goal:** Academic culture contains many “hidden” or implied expectations for classwork and student behavior that may be clear to some students but not all. Making these expectations more obvious can help level the playing field for all students.

**Advantages:** Even among those with some understanding, these unwritten rules for academic success can vary by course, by program or by institution, so making them clear is helpful for all of your students.

**Strategies**

**Illuminate the implicit rules for**
- student preparation for class
- participation in class
- group work
- office hours

Starting with the syllabus, describe your expectations and explain terms and policies that may have different meanings in other cultures (e.g., what constitutes plagiarism).

**Give concrete examples**

Before leading class discussion, offer samples of specific phrases that students can use to make their point, to respond to another student, to change the topic, and so on.

**Encourage help-seeking**

Students may view asking for help as a sign of weakness. Encourage students to view office hours as an opportunity to confirm understanding of course content, learn about helpful resources, clarify expectations for assignments, and explore research opportunities.

**Disagreement is okay**

Some students may feel that it is disrespectful to challenge authority, whether critiquing a published article or asking questions about a presentation by the instructor. Be explicit about the value we place on a respectful exchange of differing perspectives. Underscore that there is often more than one way to approach a problem or interpret findings and we are eager to hear multiple perspectives. As one example, provide sample phrases that students can use to introduce differing ideas: “It is possible to approach this problem from another angle” or “We might consider an alternate explanation” or “I interpreted the issue in a (slightly) different way…”

**Social behavior is part of the equation**

Social aspects of common interactions in an academic setting are often unspoken. Students may benefit from guidance on how to write emails to their professors, make an appointment for extra help, interact with other students in labs or study groups. These initial points of contact can have a direct impact on the success of these interactions.

**Implementation**

- Describe expectations on the syllabus.
- Talk about implicit rules for your course with your students. Give a short presentation and/or distribute a handout.
- Give an assignment that requires meeting with the instructor as a model for office hour meetings.

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**References**


This poster was developed by Heather Macdonald, College of William and Mary, for SAGE 2YC: Supporting and Advancing Geoscience Education at Two-Year Colleges.