



Promoting Classroom Civility: Suggestions for responding to incivilities and disruptions

The learning environment in the classroom is the result of a collaborative effort between instructors and students. Situations will arise, however, that pull attention away from the primary activities of teaching and learning. Here are some suggestions for ways to respond to these situations. Please note that the following include a range of suggestions meant to be balanced with your assessment of the situation and tailored to the context of your classroom community and teaching style.

Mild Incivilities	
<i>Rambling</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Refocus, restate, reconnect to topic○ “From what I hear you saying, we can connect your comment to our topic by _____. ”○ “How would you summarize the connection to _____?”○ “Let me interrupt you to clarify. I think you’re saying_____.”
<i>Side-Conversing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Call on the students for their input into discussion, or ask if they have a comment to share.○ Make eye contact with students, so they understand you’re aware of the side conversation.○ Walk toward the students while continuing your tasks.○ Stop and wait for them to be silent.
<i>Texting, ichatting, Facebooking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ If possible, make eye contact with student.○ If behavior is persistent through class, “Please put your phone away. It’s distracting you from focusing on our topic.”○ If iPads or laptops are unnecessary for class activity, issue a general reminder: “Just to remind everyone, I expect laptops, phones, iPads, etc to be put away. If they’re out, please put them away now.” Remind students at the beginning of class to silence and put away their phones.○ For the chronic texter, consider talking to the student after class or sending an email: “I’ve noticed you’ve been texting during class. It is very distracting and I’m concerned you’re not getting everything out of our discussion sections that you could. Please have your phone put away during class.”
<i>Chronic Tardiness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Speak to student after class and remind him/her of attendance policy, and if there are consequences to tardiness.○ In a one-to-one conversation or email ask directly, “I’ve noticed you’ve been late to class all this week, I’m concerned. Can you tell me what’s going on?”

Moderate Incivilities	
<i>Complaining/Whining</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cue student that you have heard the complaints. “I hear what you’re saying.” ○ Have students discuss complaints in office hours. “I recognize your complaint. Let’s discuss it in office hours.” ○ Stand by policies, linking them to the interest of student learning (if applicable). If there are extenuating circumstances that warrant flexibility, discuss this in private.
<i>“Sharp-Shooting” (student intentionally tries to trip up instructor)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Try not to be reactive or defensive. Challenging the student in return may stimulate more of this behavior. ○ Admit if you are wrong or admit you don’t know all the answers. ○ “That’s an interesting angle; I hadn’t considered that.” ○ “Interesting point. I don’t necessarily agree with you, but you are entitled to your perspective.” ○ “That’s a provocative perspective. It’s not quite on topic for what we need to cover today, but you are welcome to come to office hours to discuss further if you’d like.”
<i>Heckling & Clowning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If there are any positive or useful elements of the comment, build on those: “In your comment, I heard _____, which relates to _____ that we’re talking about.” ○ If possible, use the negative tone of comments to open discussion: “Based on your comment, it sounds like you have some doubts about _____. What are people’s thoughts about this perspective?” ○ If it is more appropriate to move past these comments, “It looks like we obviously disagree, but we have to move on.” “I’d like to hear others’ comments about this topic.” ○ If this is a pattern, invite the student to meet in office hours. Be open and curious. “How is the class going for you?” “What do you think of our discussions?” “Are these topics of interest to you?” “I’ve noticed you have had some critical perspectives lately. Let’s talk about them.”
<i>Grandstanding (student trying to take over discussion promoting own arguments and perspectives)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “I can see you are very excited about this perspective. We have to move on now but you’re welcome to talk to me about this later in office hours.” ○ “I appreciate your enthusiasm, but we have to move on.” ○ “Let’s bookmark your comments, and we can come back to them at the end of class if there’s time.”
<i>Sleeping</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ May choose to walk near student while lecturing. ○ May wake student gently by saying their name. May be more caring and less shaming to ask “Are you feeling okay?” ○ If habitual, may pull the student aside after class or send an email, “I noticed you were sleeping quite a bit in class. I’m concerned. Are you okay?” Remind student of responsibility for material covered in class. If chronic, explore need for additional resources listed below.

Disruptions	
<p>Rude <i>(e.g., student answers phone in class, makes inappropriate noises, puts feet on desk, wears cap over face, wears headphones, etc.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If widely distracting and noticeable, address behavior directly. “Please don’t answer your phone in class. If there is an emergency call you’re waiting for, in the future, please let me know before class.” ○ While continuing with lecture or tasks, may walk up to student and more quietly redirect their behavior, “Please put your feet down.” “Please remove your headphones.” ○ If problem is consistent, speak with the student after class.
<p>Hostile/angry/combative/offensive comments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Try not to personalize comments, as it may make you more reactive and likely to respond defensively. ○ Pause to breathe and gather your response. Speak calmly. ○ Instead of arguing, try acknowledging the tone of the response. “You seem really angry. I’m wondering if anyone else is also feeling this way.” ○ Be firm but not aggressive. “I recognize that this has become heated. We need to tone it down.” ○ If offensive comments or language has been used, “I see that you’re angry but I ask that you use appropriate language.” Consider speaking with student after class or in office hours to address specifics of language use. ○ Ask student to take a break and get a drink of water and return when calm. ○ Talk to student during break or after class. “It seemed like you were really angry during class. Can you tell me what was upsetting you?” Or, if this is a pattern, “I’ve noticed how angry you are in class. I’m concerned.” Sudden changes in students’ behavior or ongoing combativeness is reason to explore student distress, described below.
<p>Overt disregard for classroom environment <i>(e.g., overtly disrespectful postures, harassing comments, threats, vulgarity toward instructor or students)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you ever feel your safety or that of your students is threatened, do not hesitate to call 911 or UT Police at 512-471-4441 ○ Stop talking. Wait for disruptive student’s attention. Ask student to step out of the classroom if necessary. ○ If student’s behavior is concerning, speak together after class or step out of the class with student to assess situation. ○ Contact Behavior Concerns Advice Line 512-232-5050. See below for additional resources.

General Suggestions to Consider	
Avoid publicly shaming comments	When possible, speak with students privately and use it as an opportunity to build rapport with students.
Try not to take students' behaviors personally	Some students may not be aware that their behavior is disruptive. Most students won't have an aggressive or hostile intention. Bringing issues to their attention will mostly likely help.
When problems are repeated, document your attempts to correct the situation	<p>If you verbally have brought disruptive behaviors to students' attention but see no change, send an email as a way to document your efforts. "Dear Student, Last week I had asked you to drop by my office hours to discuss your recent tardiness to class. I just wanted to follow up with you. When would be a good time to meet? My office hours are..." OR "Dear Student, Last week we talked about your cell phone use in class and how it has been quite distracting lately. I continue to notice you texting in class. I think it'd be helpful for us to touch base in person. I'd like to see how the class is going for you overall."</p>
Consider the possibility of student distress and consult about concerning behaviors	<p>Changes in a student's behavior or ongoing problems likely indicate factors outside your classroom that are troubling the student. In these cases, it is helpful to assume a stance of genuine concern for the student. Explore whether they are willing to sit and talk with you. The Office of Dean of Students recommends asking yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this student's behavior distressing and out of the ordinary? • Is this beyond my skill level? • Has this behavior been increasing over time? • Does the student appear to be at risk? • Does the student's behavior place others at risk? • Am I feeling as if I could use help or guidance in this situation? <p>If you answer yes to any of these, consider reaching out to university resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call the Behavior Concerns Advice Line at 512-232-5050 for a confidential consultation. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. • If students are in more extreme stress, the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center has a crisis team available to see students on a walk-in basis (M-F, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.). Call ahead if possible: 512-471-3515. <p>The UT Counseling and Mental Health Center provides a list of behavioral indicators of student crisis and distress at: http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/studentindistress.html</p>

Resources at UT	
<i>For a comprehensive list of resources on the UT Campus, please consult: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/resourceslinks.php</i>	
Sanger Learning Center	Provides a range of academic support from ongoing tutoring and peer academic coaching to consultation with learning specialists around issues such as time management, test anxiety, procrastination, motivation, reading, note-taking, and study skills. http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc , 512-232-8400, Jester A115.
Counseling and Mental Health Center	Provides mental health counseling and consultation, including psychiatric services. Specialized services available for alcohol and substance abuse, sexual assault, and eating disorders. If NOT a life-threatening emergency, students in crisis can walk in to see the crisis team or call. A range of groups are offered addressing interpersonal communication, anxiety, perfectionism, depression, etc. Many online educational resources available for students. Telephone counseling hotline available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 512-471-CALL (2255) http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/index.html For appointment call: 512-471-3515, Student Services Building, 5 th floor.
Center for Strategic Advising and Career Counseling	Sometimes students' academic problems may be linked to dissatisfaction with their major. Career counseling can help. Counselors provide career assessments and focused counseling on exploration of career goals in the contexts of students' values, interests, personality, and skills. http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/csacc/career 512-232-8400, Jester A115
Student Emergency Services (in Dean of Students)	This office is available to help students and their families with outreach, advocacy, academic concerns and even emergency funds in a variety of urgent situations. This office does NOT provide counseling services. Call 512-471-5017 (8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Friday). For emergencies after hours, call UT Police at 512-471-4441 or 24-hour Telephone Counseling, 512-471-CALL (2255).
Student Judicial Services (in Dean of Students)	Addresses concerns and disciplinary action related to student conduct, including academic integrity, underage drinking, hazing activities, and a range of other behavioral concerns. Call to consult or report: 512-471-2841. http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/ , Student Services Building, 4.104.
Services for Students with Disabilities	Provides advocacy and accommodations for students with disabilities. Resources regarding course load reduction and medical withdrawal. Training and guidelines also available for faculty on how to be supportive of students with disabilities. http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/ Call 512-471-6259; Videophone 512-410-6644; Student Services Building, 4.206.
Campus Climate Response Team	Anonymous online forms available for reporting a bias incident or situation that is contributing to a hostile classroom or campus environment. http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/campus-culture/campus-climate-response-team/

These guidelines are derived, in part, from the following sources:

- McKinney, K. (2010). Addressing Student's Needs: Dealing with Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom. Reprinted by Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning, <http://www.cirtl.net/node/2553>.
- Honolulu Community College (2010). Addressing Students' Needs: Common Disruptive Student Behaviors and Possible Responses. Reprinted by Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning, <http://www.cirtl.net/node/5776>.
- Rodriguez, L. (n.d.). Classroom Management. <http://www.4faculty.org/includes/108r2.jsp>
- Center for Faculty Excellence. (2004). Managing Classroom Conflict. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://cfe.unc.edu/pdfs/FYC22.pdf>