



Classroom climate has a significant impact on students’ overall performance and well-being. Here are some recommendations for establishing a **norm of inclusion** in your class—beginning with your syllabus and the first class meeting.

Guidelines for a community of learners

Community guidelines for classroom interaction, introduced at the first class meeting, are an effective practice for fostering an inclusive classroom. Community guidelines emphasize the value of the classroom as a **learning community** with shared goals and aspirations. The guidelines serve both the practical purpose of outlining expectations for civil engagement, as well as establish a common agreement to which students can hold one another accountable. Students and professor alike can invoke the community guidelines when the class is negotiating difficult terrain.

Questions to ask yourself when composing your guideline

- What goals do I have that benefit from additional guidance?
- What kind of interactions occur in my course?
- Do I provide concrete examples for respectful interaction?
- Do I frame my expectations in positive language?
- Will students have input into developing the guidelines? If so, how will I solicit their input?
- What is non-negotiable for me?
- What is most important to me in building a community of learners?

Community guidelines that make a difference

How do you meaningfully communicate these guidelines so that students will take note?

FIRST DAY OF CLASS	Introduce guidelines and statements aloud at your first class meeting. Distribute a hard copy, or include it as a page on your Canvas site. Revisit in class after several sessions to elicit revisions or additional suggestions.
MIDTERM	Use at midterm for students to provide feedback about their experience of the class interactions and learning environment.
STRATEGIC MOMENTS	Use in strategic moments where interactions might feel tense. Remind student of your agreement if you’re moving into <i>a potentially high-stakes conversation</i> .
SEMESTER’S END	Use at semester’s end for students to self-assess their participation.

Most importantly--be proactive and personal rather than passive. Simply adding community guidelines to the syllabus is not enough to communicate the message of inclusion you want to convey.

Communicating welcome, safety, and inclusion

Community guidelines are complemented by statements of welcome, safety, and inclusion. These statements are especially important to those who are historically marginalized due to their social identities or personal circumstances. Who these students are is not always apparent "just by looking." Therefore, it's important to be proactive and speak to the broadest diversity. Even simple statements such as **You Belong Here** or **Your Success and Well-Being Matter** have an impact.

Below are example statements that speak to particular dimensions of student identities and circumstances. These statements help set the tone of your class and demonstrate your willingness to engage with students as individuals. A reasonable expectation is to ask that students inform you by the end of the first week of class if they need a particular accommodation.

If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

(Speaks to students with disabilities, including those who are neurodiverse.)

I will honor your request to address you by your chosen name or personal pronoun. Please advise me of this early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

(The Virginia Tech Chosen Name and Personal Pronoun practice does provide students with the opportunity to make these indications in HokieSpa, which should then show up on course rosters.)

If you are a veteran or active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) please know that I want to work with you to accommodate your circumstances.

Virginia Tech provides a variety of free services to support student success. [List relevant services and their locations] All of these services are provided at no additional cost to you.

(Speaks especially to First Generation students who may be less familiar with the availability of university resources.)

In the event I suspect you need additional support, I will express my concerns and the reasons for them, and remind you of resources that might be helpful to you. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I am concerned and that help, if needed, is available.

(Speaks to all students, but especially those who are managing depression, anxiety, and other mental health illnesses.)

If you are facing challenges securing food, housing, or child care and believe this may affect your performance in the course, you are urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Likewise, you may notify me if you are comfortable doing so. I can help to connect you to resources in the local community.

I respect and support your decision to honor your cultural and religious holidays. If you have religious or cultural observances that coincide with this class please notify me through email by [date]. However, if I do not hear from you by [date], I will assume that you plan to attend all class meetings.

(Speaks to all students, but particularly to Jewish and Muslim students.)

I want you to feel able to share your life experiences in classroom discussions and written work. I want you to trust that I will keep any information you share private. Please be aware that I do have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a faculty member. This means I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on campus with the university Title IX Coordinator.

Students need to hear from you and observe your intentions through your actions. If you have questions about establishing a norm of inclusion, contact:

inclusivemt@vt.edu