

Difficult Classroom Situations

Silence

If the group is silent or unresponsive:

- Use buzz groups, pyramiding sequences. Ask what's going on – why are they silent? Make a clear statement about what you want from the group.

If individual students are silent:

- Use less 'whole-group' methods such as think-pair-share to get discussion going
- Try to draw the student out by picking up on something relevant to them and the topic for discussion e.g., "You've had experience as a nurse, Jane, haven't you – so how do you think psychological illness is perceived by nurses in general?"

Non-listening

If students are not listening to each other, are not building discussion but are point scoring:

- Use a listening exercise e.g., where one student has to paraphrase what another student says.

Dominance

If one or two students dominate

- Use hand signals and verbally ask them to let others speak
- Assign roles for the group discussion, e.g., timekeeper, scribe, summarizer, reporter

Derailing

If the discussion goes off track, or becomes irrelevant:

- Set a clear topic at the start
- Draw the groups attention to the situation, e.g., "I'm wondering how this is related to our topic of discussion?"
- Ask a clear question or make a clear statement to direct discussion back to the topic

Exclusion

If you get the sense of a clique among some students, or a private joke

- Don't use sarcasm, but confront the students. Invite them to share their discussion with the group

Anger

If a student is angry remember the anger resolution process:

- Listen - Give full attention, stay silent
- Paraphrase - Wait three seconds, summarize your understanding of what was said
- Empathize - Acknowledge their feelings and point of view, "I do want to help"
- Apologize - If applicable
- Ask questions - "What would you like me to do?"
- Explain - Explain what you can and can't do
- Take action - Get their understanding and agreement on a plan of action, and follow up on this!

The expert student

Students who seem to have a comment or opinion about just about everything. While you will probably find these students frustrating and disruptive, don't openly show your frustration. Sometimes, people who appear to be 'experts' are over-compensating for an actual lack of self-esteem.

- In class discussion times, allow them to respond, but use techniques such as 'redirecting' to encourage other students to have a go.
- If you can't work around the person using subtle directing and redirecting then talk with them before or after class.

The negative student

You may also experience different kinds of negativity, either overt (such as challenging the class discussion or activity in a negative manner) or covert (such as remaining silent and not participating).

- Try methods such as those above ('the expert') for dealing with the overtly negative student, and try bringing the covertly negative student into the group activity by methods such as asking them directly to give their opinion, etc.

The 'disruptive' student

- Try using silence to direct the student's attention to you and to the situation, politely ask for his/her co-operation, and use the ground-rules set up by you and the class as a way to direct your request.
- Otherwise, ask the student to stay after class and talk to them about how disruptive their behavior is to you and to other students.

Adapted from University of Queensland

<http://www.uq.edu.au/tutors/difficult-classroom-situations>