

# Classroom Climate and Rapport Builders

## *Building Instructor-Student Rapport*

Practice	How it Affects Classroom Climate	Examples/Further Information
<p><b>Answer questions – in class, in office hours, electronically...</b></p>	<p>Students develop a belief that you are interested in helping them personally.</p>	<p>Sometimes there are just too many questions to answer and too much content to teach. Create a system where students can (and are encouraged to) ask questions. Add a question conversation or “Parking Lot” of questions to Canvas, or give students index cards at the beginning of class and require them to ask a question (either individually or in a group) and turn these in at the end of class. When everyone is required to turn in a question on a card, no student feels singled out as not knowing something or needing to ask a question, allowing for a safer, more equitable climate. Find common themes in the questions and answer them in bulk.</p>
<p><b>Demonstrate concern for and interest in students by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praising work, actions, or participation</li> <li>• Asking their opinion about topics, assignments, your teaching (even when it feels uncomfortable)</li> <li>• Engaging in informal communication with students before or after class</li> <li>• Knowing who is in your class – backgrounds, cultures, interests</li> </ul>	<p>Builds trust, motivates students</p> <p>Students are positively impacted by personalized praise.</p> <p>Requesting input from students indicates that you are interested in their perspectives.</p> <p>Knowing about all of your students, and honoring their differences contributes to a sense of belonging</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for all student input often and share with students how you will use their input. Make note of input from traditionally marginalized students.</li> <li>• Give short surveys about a class session, an assignment, or a test. Respond to student feedback.</li> <li>• Let students know that their opinion about class will never be reflected in their grade.</li> <li>• When speaking informally with students before or after class, be sure to talk with different students on different days. If you do not know what to talk about, ask them how they are doing? how other classes are going? how your class is going? or if they’ve seen the latest Star Wars movie, etc...</li> <li>• Make it a practice to greet students as they enter the classroom, either from the door or by walking around the room and chatting.</li> <li>• A combination of formal and informal communication shows that you want to build a relationship with students. When we share something personal with our students, it begins to provide a glimpse into our own humanity.</li> <li>• Make sure your curriculum includes materials and perspectives from a diversity of backgrounds.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Use humor</b> Content-related puns, cartoons, video clips, self-deprecating humor (students show a positive reaction to this).</p>	<p>Creates a relaxed atmosphere, fires up the brain, makes unusual connections</p> <p>When used intentionally and strategically, humor can increase students' attention and memory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use humor that is positive and relevant to content</li> <li>• Use appropriate jokes, puns, videos, etc. that do not negatively target any student populations</li> <li>• Avoid sarcasm</li> <li>• Consider context and audience. A class consisting of mostly freshmen is different than that of mostly upper classmen or grad students</li> </ul>
<p><b>Admit when you make a mistake; apologize when you need to</b></p>	<p>If you make a mistake that is socially or culturally offensive, apologize</p> <p>When you admit a content mistake, you are role modeling for your students how to be a life-long learner and a collegial partner in a relationship.</p>	<p>When you make a mistake, try something like this...</p> <p>"I understand that when I _____ the impact was _____. I'm sorry. In the future, I will _____.</p> <p>"You know, that is something I should absolutely know, and to be honest, I don't have a complete answer for you right now. I'd rather look into it tonight and give you a complete answer next class. Thank you for the excellent, question _____ (name). I'll get back to you next class."</p> <p>And then follow through.</p>
<p><b>Encourage academic risk-taking</b></p>	<p>Use low stakes and no stakes activities and assessments</p> <p>Recognize effort and questions as an integral part of the learning process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging risk taking shows that you recognize that learning comes from risk taking and trial/error efforts. Make sure there are many opportunities for students to take risks and succeed in your class.</li> <li>• Remind students that they are in your class to learn and grow. They are not expected to know everything. And the more willing they are to engage and take chances, the more they will learn.</li> <li>• Keep in mind that historically marginalized students may not feel comfortable engaging in risk-taking. It is important to continue to build trust with all students throughout the semester.</li> </ul>

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Share your research interest and how it relates to course material and the outside world	Sharing your research interest provides a personal perspective on who you are and that gives students a chance to know you more personally.	It also offers the opportunity to introduce your students to the world of professionalism in your field. Sharing how the material relates to the outside world situates your field and context into a broader world perspective.
Tell and show students you are on their side; you see their strengths; you are there to help them through the difficult material	This message sends the signal that you are an ally who uses an asset-based framework to understand students and can be trusted to support them.	Phrases you might integrate into your teaching practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “If you closely read the section on _____ and pay attention to the images on p. _____, I will help you the rest of the way.”</li> <li>• “Some of you have heard how difficult this class is, I’ve got your back. We can do this together.”</li> </ul>
Believe in students and tell them so.	Research has shown that all students benefit from belief in student success.	Back up your comments about beliefs in students by sharing why you have this belief. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “You earned the chair you’re sitting in, you can do this.”</li> <li>• “If you’re not understanding this, try a different way - sketch out the concept, diagram it, connect it to something you already know. You’ve got this! You belong here.”</li> </ul>
Create classroom norms <i>with</i> students; connect norms to the CSU Principles of Community	Proactively developing a positive climate, where people and ideas are the priority, is highly desired by students. It says that the norms support the exchange of ideas and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure all students have a voice in developing norms. Historically marginalized students might not speak up in a small group, especially if they have experienced microaggressions; create a system where all students contribute equally.</li> <li>• Bring the norms to students’ attention, especially when they are adhering to them. “Last week you agreed to put your cell phones away during class. I want you to know, I’ve noticed you’ve been keeping to your word. I admire all of you for that. You’re going to do that much better in this class because of it.”</li> </ul>
Share your pronouns with students.	Students who do not identify as gender binary recognize the conversation space you open up for them to claim their own identity.	Using someone’s correct personal pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive environment, just as using a person’s name can be a way to respect them.” ( <a href="http://mypronouns.org">mypronouns.org</a> ) Make sure students know this is optional and not a mandate. Some students may not be comfortable sharing their pronouns.

## *Building Student-Student Rapport*

Practice	How it Affects Classroom Climate	Examples/Further Information
Integrate some get-to-know-you activities into your class	Builds comfort and trust among students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It allows students the opportunity to get to know peers and to use these relationships to create a more inclusive experience for all students and develop skills for working more effectively in groups</li> </ul>
Encourage student-student interaction/discussion	<p>Builds trust among students</p> <p>Fosters a more inclusive classroom climate where diverse perspectives are discussed and encouraged</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSU students, as a group, are diverse and have the possibility of impacting their peers and the chance of opening others' eyes to different perspectives. It's sometimes hard, however, to examine others' beliefs when one doesn't know the background and context of the speaker.</li> <li>Students often find other students more relatable because they are seen as peers (or near-peers). Peer to peer problem solving and discussion is often less threatening than interacting with you as the instructor due to your position power.</li> <li>Integrate many opportunities for one-on-one discussion into your class at the beginning of the semester with activities like think-pair-share, one-sentence summary, question development, supporting an opinion, and other <a href="#">CATS (Classroom Assessment Techniques)</a>. As students become more comfortable with each other, open some of the activities to small groups. Save whole class discussion for later in the semester when students feel more comfortable and confident.</li> <li>Some students might feel intimidated to engage during interactions and discussions for various reasons. Make it a point to support students who choose to not engage by checking in with them and/or introducing them to other students.</li> </ul>
Support group projects with structure	Working in groups is not easy. Giving guidelines and support allows students to focus more on content than issues with group dynamics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structure in group projects is more easily managed when students already know how to interact in a respectful, inclusive manner. Let students know exactly how to function in a group and this is as important as the content they are working on.</li> <li>Give students the opportunity to practice inclusivity by suggesting they invite others into their group. For example, an instructor can offer, "If you see someone who has not yet joined a group, please introduce yourself to them and invite them in to your group, even if your group is already full."</li> <li>Respectful groups are more productive and this signals to your students that you care about their productivity and learning.</li> </ul>

## References

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