

Teaching Tips: Dealing with Challenging Situations¹

1. Familiarize yourself with departmental and university policies and resources

<http://policies.temple.edu/>

<http://www.temple.edu/grad/policies/>

2. Make your expectations explicit

- Let students know the syllabus is a kind of contract between professor/instructor/TA, and student.
- Communicate your expectations. They vary from instructor to instructor, so state yours explicitly. Address administrative issues, but also address what you expect of your students in terms of their conduct. Recognize that students of different cultures and backgrounds will expect different kinds of classroom milieus.
- Teach in a way consistent with your values and natural style. This will help you be more natural, and more consistent. At the same time, be flexible, if your style fails to reach the students in your class.

3. Help students understand the difference between academic honesty and dishonesty. Share examples of blatant and unintentional plagiarism, and cheating.

4. Carefully document all problems and concerns

- Record how you've calculated grades. Be able to articulate what led you to more subjective assessments
- Keep related documentation at hand (documentation of Disability; letters from students)
- Keep tests and grades for an academic year after you've given them.

5. Take action promptly and effectively

- Don't ignore problems. They won't go away.
- Bring classroom management problems to the attention of the class. Deal with individual problem students in private, or in a way that does not cause embarrassment.

6. Make challenging situations an opportunity for growth

- Work with challenging classroom dynamics in ways that diffuse conflict, build understanding, and make struggles opportunities to learn

¹ Adapted from a document by Lesley D. Harman, Faculty Associate, Teaching Support Centre
http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/re_02_dec2002.html

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Preventing and Responding to Conflicts²

1. Create a positive classroom atmosphere through your own clarity and consistency
2. Avoid taking the situation personally
3. Make sure you understand your students' positions
4. Make sure you understand your position, and make sure they understand your position
5. Make use of your own resources so you have the help you need.

Excellent Online Resources

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/workshops/conflict/> (scenarios and analyses)

<http://gradschpdprograms.syr.edu/resources/problems.php> (video role plays)

² Adapted from <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infotracs/tmMay04.html#Conflicts>