

How Can I Create a Platform for Difficult Conversations in the Online Classroom?

Presented by:

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Supplemental Materials for How Can I Manage Difficult Situations in the Classroom?

Presentation Questions

During the 20 Minute Mentor, you will have the opportunity to think through some of the steps. Use this worksheet to jot down your responses.

Part 1: Your Conversation: Think about a conversation that you had in the past that did not go as well as you would have liked. Make a note of it and we'll use this as our foundation in the future questions.

Part 2: Avoid Procrastination: In Your Conversation, when did you first recognize that a difficult conversation was needed?

How much time passed after that before you actually had the conversation?

Did any of the problems discussed occur for you (stress, escalating situation, conversation getting harder)?

Part 3: Set the Stage: Did you do anything to set the stage for Your Conversation? If so, do you think it made things better?

Would any of the stage setting suggestions have improved your outcome (setting the stage, being present, assuming the best, remembering power dynamics)?

Establishing Trust & Expectations

One way to avoid difficult conversations is to prevent challenging situations from arising in the first place. Use the beginning of class to set clear expectations and to build trust.

If you think about areas where challenging situations have arisen which required difficult conversations. Review your syllabus to be sure it is crystal clear about expectations. Be sure to have 2 or 3 other people review those areas for clarity, as we often cannot see ambiguity in our own language.

In addition to setting clear expectations, work to establish trust from the beginning of class. The traditional “introduce yourself” assignment can be made more robust and can help the students get to know each other and you. One idea is the Five Nouns Assignment.

Introduce Yourself: Let's take some time to get to know each other. Please **share 5 nouns** that best describe you and **explain** what they each noun means. Also, feel free to include a picture.

For more on the importance of establishing trust, read *The Speed of Trust* by Stephen M. Covey.

Web Resources

We Have to Talk: A Step-by-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations by Judy Ringer, <https://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-stepbystep-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php>. This web page simply and directly walks you through the steps of having a difficult conversation using a formula similar to that found in *Crucial Conversations*. It is a quick read and will get you using the method right away.

How to Have Difficult Conversations by Dan Mager on Psychology Today, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/some-assembly-required/201703/how-have-difficult-conversations>. This web page reiterates the points made in the 20 Minute Mentor presentation with some additional tips for “fighting fair”.

Challenging Conversations and How to Manage Them from ACAS, a human resources organization, <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3799>. This website includes a free 20 page downloadable booklet on having difficult conversations and a separate downloadable table with a step-by-step guide. There are also several instructional videos on having difficult conversations.

Building Trust with Students from the *Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust and Responsiveness in the Classroom* by Stephen D. Brookfield. I use this excellent book with my graduate education students. Chapter 12 on Building Trust with Students is a quick yet valuable read. While the entire book is worth reading, you can find this chapter excerpted from the book in various places online.

Creating Trust in Online Education by Rob Kelly in *Faculty Focus*, <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/creating-trust-in-online-education/>. This article outlines 4 basic strategies for building trust in a way that specifically speaks to the online experience.

Works Cited

Covey, S. M. (2006). *The Speed of Trust*. Free Press.

Patterson, G. M. (2011). *Crucial Conversations Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High, Second Edition*. McGraw Hill.

Scott, S. (2004). *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time*. Berkley.