

Techniques for Addressing Low-Level Interruptions

Even when you have established clear expectations and procedures and shared them with your students, you should expect at least a few instances where students do not follow your expectations. Nilson (2010) suggests, “When you sanction a student for these and other mild, garden-variety uncivil behaviors, smile through your firmness. A smile conveys not only warmth and approachability but also unflappable cool and relaxed confidence. It says you don’t take the misconduct personally, that you are just doing your job to maintain a productive learning environment, and that student misbehavior doesn’t get under your skin. With this kind of cool, students sense they can’t bait you, so they won’t” (p. 79).

Use name-dropping, proximity, and reminding to address low-level interruptions.

Name-Dropping: When you notice a student who is not following an expectation, simply “drop” their name into your lecture. For example, “So, John, remember that it’s important to use APA formatting in your research paper.” This technique simply draws the student’s attention to the fact that you have noticed him and his behavior. This prompts the student to think about what he is doing and whether or not it is within the expectations of the class.

Proximity: When you are lecturing or monitoring student work and notice a student who is not following your expectations, simply move closer to the student. This action often encourages the student to stop the behavior and to refocus on the class.

Reminding: If the behavior continues, remind the student of the expectation that he is not following. Use a calm, quiet voice and assume that the student has simply forgotten what he should be doing and you are giving him a reminder. For example, “John, just a reminder that the use of technology in this class should be restricted to class-related uses.” Be sure to use a friendly tone of voice to avoid confrontations.