



Teaching For Success® National Faculty Success Center

**QuickCourse Series**

# *Positive Class Discipline*



Positive Classroom Discipline

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# Positive Class Discipline

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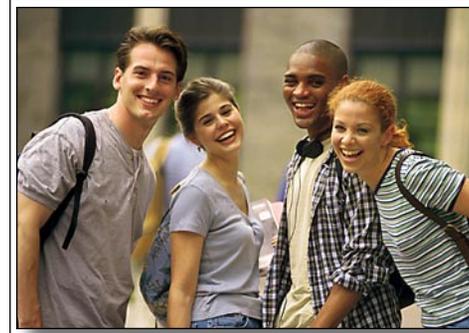
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## Course Benefits

**D**iscipline is a fundamental component of the Critical Success Factor of good Classroom Management and a professional teaching skill. This QuickCourse will help you create an effective and easy-to-use program of positive discipline for your classroom or laboratory.

**Why Bother?**

In college after college, faculty report that students enter their classes with very diverse attitudes about what constitutes proper classroom behavior and how to positively interact and enter into discussions and team projects with peers. No longer can you assume that students know what is expected of them or are aware of the specific



**T**his QuickCourse will help any instructor create an effective and easy-to-use program of positive discipline for their classroom or laboratory. It's crucial to develop a systematic method for positive classroom management.

behaviors that their instructors, institutions or states cite as inappropriate and out of bounds. In the same regard, students need to know the positive behaviors that undergird and foster rapid and effective learning.

Therefore, classroom behavior standards and consequences for ignoring the rules should be specified by faculty from day one and communicated to students via the syllabus and supporting handouts.

If you wait to deal with behavioral issues when they occur, valuable class time is wasted. In addition, if handled poorly, minor infractions can erupt into serious student-instructor conflicts that may require disciplinary action and involvement by administrative officials.

**What benefits can You expect from this QC?**

Using the advice and following the steps found in this QuickCourse, you will be able to determine what behavior is

*Success Tip*

Teaching For Success strongly recommends that instructors always coordinate their disciplinary policies, measures, methods with those codified by their department, institution and state.

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unacceptable and outline a strategy for dealing with this behavior in a systematic way.

By learning how to proactively approach discipline, you will be much better prepared to deal with unexpected student behaviors that disrupt or degrade the learning process for everyone. Mastering this professional classroom-management skill increases your instructional effectiveness many times over.

**The bottom line**

While you may find enforcing classroom discipline to be awkward or distasteful, the fact is that instructors and their serious students in all disciplines are faced with learning-disruptive behaviors from time to time.

**Your turn:**

*Question: What is your philosophy on classroom discipline? (Input your response in the field below)*

**Expectations**

But, before you can enforce a code of behavior, you must be absolutely clear about institutional and personal



**T**he truth of the matter is that you will have to deal with discipline in the college classroom.

Most of your students will be motivated and well-behaved, but there are always going to be some who will be disruptive.

expectations for acceptable behavior and punishments for unacceptable behavior.

In addition, it's crucial for you to develop a systematic method of delineating acceptable versus unacceptable behavior and the consequences of engaging in unacceptable behavior. This QuickCourse includes instructions needed to create a plan to maintain positive classroom discipline, and it also offers recommendations on how to get additional guidance concerning student conduct and appropriate corrective measures.

Once you have determined your philosophy, the behaviors you expect of your students and those required by your institution and state mandates, you can then proceed to detail and communicate the consequences of unacceptable behavior. And, when necessary, inform students about your institution's system of appeals.

**Quotes**

Life is tons of discipline.  
—Robert Frost

Only the man who can impose discipline on himself is fit to discipline others...  
—William Feather

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**Applicability**

This QuickCourse is designed for full-time and part-time instructors and teaching assistants at the college level, but educators and trainers in other environments can also benefit from this course.

**Time required**

On average, it should take between one and two hours to read the material in this QuickCourse, create a plan, and implement the recommended tips and action steps. As you study this information, this QC helps you create a positive disciplinary system that is ready to implement at the beginning of your next class meeting.

**Six steps to disciplinary success**

I will guide you through the six steps in designing an effective discipline plan. They include:

1. Learn your institution's student-conduct code.
2. Identify disruptive and desirable behaviors.
3. Choose consequences for disruptive behaviors.
4. Simplify and organize your list of behaviors and graduated sequence of consequences.
5. Transfer these policies to your course syllabus.
6. Explain these policies to your students and activate your entire plan from day one.

Interactive text fields are provided along the way so that you can enter notes and ideas pertaining to your specific situation. The recommendations and information contained in this QC will likely trigger ideas that you would like to try with your class. Be sure to enter these ideas in the text fields as you progress through each section.



**A**ccording to the rules of your college or university, what are you legally allowed to do with students who misbehave or disrupt?

Do you have the right to insist they leave your class and should you do so?

**Why study discipline?**

**W**hen you take the position of instructor or educator, you are asked to play many roles. One of the least pleasurable roles (in my experience) is that of disciplinarian.

I, as perhaps you, would much rather focus on the less confrontational aspects of the teaching profession. I'd certainly rather not worry about having to correct the behavior of other people. Teaching would be much easier in a class of polite, non-disruptive students who actually want to be in the classes you teach.

**Crucial Questions:**

- What are your discipline options?
- What are your rights?
- What are your students' rights?
- What could you do to prevent serious confrontations from occurring?

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However, the truth of the matter is that you will have to deal with discipline in the college classroom. Although most of your students will be motivated and well-behaved, there are always going to be some who will be disruptive in one way or another to you and your class.

And, if you remember the old adage that it takes only a bad apple to spoil the bunch, you can imagine the harm one or two disruptive students can do to a class!

This **Teaching for Success QuickCourse** is designed to help you deal with discipline in your classroom in the most effective way possible.

**Your turn**

*Situation: A single parent brings a one-year-old child to class saying it will only be for a week or two while a day-care facility is being found. What would you do? Input your response in the field below.*

**Do you know what to do?**

Discipline is a fairly subjective matter. If we consider parenting for a moment, we can clearly see that there are different ways of handling discipline. Metaphorically speak-



“It is important for instructors to understand that the code of student conduct is the vital centerpiece for dealing with student misconduct. In effect, it is the ‘law of the land.’”

ing, are we to spare the rod and spoil the child?

But, as a professional higher education instructor, are you prepared to handle the disruptive students, who are adults, that you are bound to encounter?

Do you know what to do if, for example, two students annoy the rest of the class as they carry on a conversation while you are in the middle of a presentation?

Do you talk to them after class or scold them in front of the entire class?

What if they continue to disrupt after you spoke to them? According to the rules of your college or university, do you know what you are

**Success Tip**

- If no Code of Conduct exists at your institution, locate the recommended sources in the Works Cited section and send them to your appropriate college officials.
- You can still develop a good discipline plan without such a code, but it would be stronger with a supporting official, student code of conduct already in place.

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legally allowed to do with students who violate policy, misbehave or disrupt?

Do you have the right to insist they leave your class and should you do so?

If you have the right, at what point should you act, and when you ask a student to leave, what will be the likely effect on the rest of your class?

Moreover, what could you have done to prevent the situation from escalating?

Your Turn:

*Question? What are your main concerns about enforcing discipline and your rights as an instructor? (Input your response in the field below.)*

I share many of these same concerns. Here are some of the failed disciplinary strategies that I have tried over the years and represent the motivation behind the ideas in this QuickCourse to approach discipline in a more fair and systematic way.



Finally, remind students that following the student code of conduct is a sign of respect they offer you, the school, their classmates, themselves and those who have helped them get to college.

Varying approaches

Over the years I have experimented with different approaches, and I've relied on three common procedures:

- Ignore the disruptive behavior.
- Give a disapproving look to the student.
- Talk to students after class.

Sometimes these typical responses worked, and sometimes they didn't. But I wasn't satisfied with a hit-and-miss approach. I wanted to know what to do and have a plan that I could fall back on. I talked to other instructors, read articles, attended workshops and took my own experience into consideration.

Code of Conduct

Here's an example of codified behavior. Delaware County Community College's Student Handbook states, "Obstruction or disruption of teaching, research, administrative disciplinary procedures or other College activities, including the College's public service functions or other authorized activities on College-owned or controlled property" (DCCC 43) is a major violation of the code of student conduct.

This type of clear policy statement by your institution will help you lay the foundation for an effective course plan.

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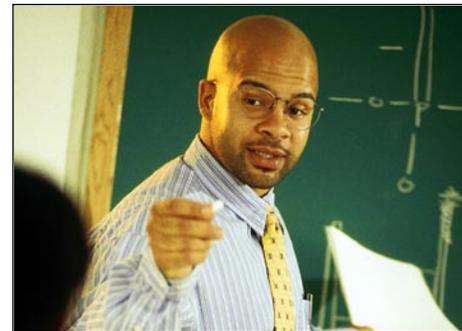
Through these varied sources, I found a much better system for dealing with disruptions than my old one.

Through the succeeding sections of this QuickCourse, you will find practical information from the fruits of my research for improving your current approach or developing an brand-new effective discipline plan to use in your classroom. Learning the following steps will put you on the right track.

If you would like the piece of mind of knowing that discipline will not be a stumbling block to your success, follow these six steps to creating a disciplined, yet positive learning environment for your class.

**Your turn:**

*Enter, a list or description of your current methods or approaches to discipline in the field below.*



**S**ome even interrupted my lecture in-progress to find out if “they missed anything important.”

*It didn't take long for me to recognize that we were operating on very different planes.*

## Step 1: Learn the Code

One of the most important but often overlooked steps is to use your college's student code of conduct as the foundation for your discipline plan. Gerald Amada, author of *Coping with Misconduct in the College Classroom*, explains why: “It is important for instructors to understand that the code of student conduct is the vital centerpiece for dealing with student misconduct. In effect, it is the ‘law of the land,’ at least insofar as student behavioral issues are concerned” (Amada 22).

Start out by locating your college student code of conduct. At most colleges, the student code of conduct is outlined in the student handbook. It may also be in the college catalog. If your college doesn't have a student code of conduct, strongly encourage them to develop one.

Student conduct codes should be included in the student-information section of your institution's website.

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Your turn:

*Question: List your institution's documents that define disallowed behaviors and the consequences of engaging in these behaviors? (Input your response in the field below.)*

Once you have located the student code of conduct, study it carefully. Find out what kind of behavior the college has outlined as unacceptable and the procedures for dealing with it. If you have any questions, be sure to address them to the proper college authorities.

To effectively meet situations in the classroom that arise quickly and often unexpectedly, you must know the behaviors that your college has defined as acceptable and unacceptable.

At most colleges, unacceptable behavior is called the disruption or obstruction of teaching, and it is usually outlined as a major violation of student conduct. It is this particular code that can give you, as an instructor, leverage in dealing with disruptive students. It's important to be clear, firm and decisive on disciplinary matters. State in your syllabus and during the first class session that you take the college's student code of conduct seriously, and so should your students. (Step 5 deals with this in more detail.)

Also let them know on day one the ramifications that can come from their not following this code of conduct. (See Steps 4 and 5 for more on this point.)



**B**e sure to keep in mind those consequences that your college may have already put in place. My college has a strict policy on absences. After the third absence, an instructor has the right to withdraw a student from his/her course.

## Step 2: Identify Behaviors

In the next step, list the positive behaviors you will expect students to exhibit in your classroom as well as those behaviors considered unacceptable or disruptive.

List even those behaviors that seem obvious to you. This is important because, as Virginia Gonzales and Estela Lopez point out in their article "The Age of Incivility: Countering disruptive behavior in the classroom," "Professors can no longer assume that there is a commonly understood set of behaviors that will be adopted within the classroom" (Gonzalez and Lopez 2-3).

### Uncommon courtesy?

Unfortunately, I learned this truth the hard way. When I first started teaching, I was surprised at the lack of what I considered common courtesy displayed by my students. For example, many of my students thought nothing of getting up to sharpen a pencil in the middle of a lecture.