Managing Student Behaviour Online

In the online classroom, you’ll encounter a lot of the same student behaviours as you find in the face-to-face classroom, although there are also some differences (e.g., if students communicate in ALL CAPS that can be translated to “yelling” online. Or simple typos could create confusion. Introverts may flourish online and become more dominant, whereas in F2F environments they are quiet). Strategies to manage difficult behaviour are much the same as well.

The most effective intervention is prevention, so it is worth putting effort in upfront to set expectations and the tone you want. We are all entitled to a positive, safe, learning environment, and Camosun’s student conduct policies still apply in the virtual classroom.

Set the tone and expectations

- **Establish a consistent online presence.** Communicate regularly. Check-in through discussions, virtual office hours, synchronous course check-ins, emails, course news announcements, etc. Let your students know how they can connect with you (and their peers), how frequently you will be communicating, and which tools you will be using to support your course.
- **Nurture a supportive online community** between students. Provide opportunities for engagement and a place to ask questions related to the course. A nice way to provide clarity surrounding course questions is to create a COURSE HELP forum in discussions. While students are encouraged to post questions if they are comfortable (they can also email the instructor privately), students can help each other out as well…it can be a nice way of streamlining communication as usually more than one student has the same question!
- **Foster personal relationships** with each student and between students.
- **Clearly outline expectations** in several places within your course site including your syllabus, and refer to it regularly (e.g. participation levels, communication, abusive language and behaviour will not be tolerated, etc.).
- **Model the behaviour you expect.** As the online environment may be new to some students, it is important role model how to effectively communicate and behave in an online environment.
- **Aim for clarity** in all of your communications, and assignments to minimize confusion.
- **Solicit regular feedback** to determine what’s working or not, and be responsive.
- **Work with students to create ground rules** for both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments (e.g. Expectations for participation? Inclusion? Raising hands virtually for questions or comments? Sending private chat messages, or addressing the whole group? Rules for how names are displayed, muting microphones, showing faces on camera? Appropriate language, sharing, confidentiality, etc.).
  - **Activity recommendation:** Set up a discussion activity and have students develop online learning expectations surrounding general ground rules, communication, how to get help, strategies for dealing with conflict, etc. Post a summary in course content (and/or in a widget on the course home in D2L as a daily visual reminder).
- **Work with students to create conflict resolution strategies** and escalation processes they can apply when working in groups and teams.
  - **Activity Recommendation:** Have your students develop a team learning contract that allows them to highlight expectations, communication strategies, tools they will use to collaborate, how they will assign roles, responsibilities and how they will deal with conflict.
Respond promptly

- When inappropriate behaviour occurs, intervene quickly and supportively so the other students know you are involved and that they are being protected.
- Get to know and use the online tools that help manage behaviour in synchronous activities (e.g. raising hands, muting mics and cameras, stop screen share, stop chat, etc.) and asynchronous discussion activities (how to leverage search features in discussion threads, delete and edit posts, review post history), etc.
- Try to understand potential causes of challenging behaviour, and mitigate where possible by accessing student supports (e.g. students with disabilities, mental health issues, language barriers, other stressors or triggers, etc.)
- Check in regularly with groups/teams on how projects are progressing to flag and help diffuse potential conflict.
- Consider incorporating individual self-assessments as a way for team members to be more accountable regarding their contributions to team projects.
- Set up a private meeting with the offending student to try to ascertain the reason for the behaviour and the context of the situation at hand.
- Address challenging behaviour immediately through reminders, one-on-one meetings, problem solving, and warnings.
- Consult your chair, associate dean and/or **Office of Student Support**
- Report serious incidents (such as threats of violence, sexual harassment, or on-going bullying).
- Retain any evidence, and document all actions.

Know your resources

- Know Camosun’s policies on **Student Conduct** and **Sexual Violence and Misconduct**
- Contact the **Office of Student Support** for advice and intervention
- Check out the **Supporting Students in Distress** guide

For more detailed ideas check out:

- [Managing difficult behaviours in the online classroom](https://uvic.ca) (UVic)
- [Managing student behaviour](https://bcit.ca) (BCIT)
- [Difficult online students](https://insidehighered.com) (Inside Higher Ed)
- [Five tips for dealing with combative students in an online environment](https://focusonlearning.org) (Faculty Focus)
- [Five skills that online teachers are constantly developing](https://elearningindustry.com) (eLearning Industry)