



Classroom climate has a significant impact on students' overall performance and well-being. Here are some recommendations for establishing a **norm of inclusion** in your class—beginning with your syllabus and the first class meeting.

## Guidelines for a community of learners

Community guidelines for classroom interaction, introduced at the first class meeting, are an effective practice for fostering an inclusive classroom. Community guidelines emphasize the value of the classroom as a **learning community** with shared goals and aspirations. The guidelines serve both the practical purpose of outlining expectations for civil engagement, as well as establish a common agreement to which students can hold one another accountable. Students and professor alike can invoke the community guidelines when the class is negotiating difficult terrain.

### Questions to ask yourself when composing your guidelines

- What goals do I have that benefit from additional guidance?
- What kind of interactions occur in my course?
- Do I provide concrete examples for respectful interaction?
- Do I frame my expectations in positive language?
- Will students have input into developing the guidelines? If so, how will I solicit their input?
- What is non-negotiable for me?
- What is most important to me in building a community of learners?

## Community guidelines that make a difference

How do you meaningfully communicate these guidelines so that students will take note?

<b>FIRST DAY OF CLASS</b>	Introduce guidelines and statements aloud at your <b>first class</b> meeting. Distribute a hard copy, or include it as a page on your Canvas site. Revisit in class after several sessions to elicit revisions or additional suggestions.
<b>MIDTERM</b>	Use at <b>midterm</b> for students to provide feedback about their experience of the class interactions and learning environment.
<b>STRATEGIC MOMENTS</b>	Use in <b>strategic moments</b> where interactions might feel tense. Remind student of your agreement if you're moving into a <i>potentially high-stakes conversation</i> .
<b>SEMESTER'S END</b>	Use at <b>semester's end</b> for students to self-assess their participation.

**Most importantly--be proactive and personal** rather than passive. Simply adding community guidelines to the syllabus is not enough to communicate the message of inclusion you want to convey.

## Communicating welcome, safety, and inclusion

Community guidelines are complemented by statements of welcome, safety, and inclusion. These statements are especially important to those who are historically marginalized due to their social identities or personal circumstances. Who these students are is not always apparent "just by looking." Therefore, it's important to be proactive and speak to the broadest diversity. Even simple statements such as **You Belong Here** or **Your Success and Well-Being Matter** have an impact.

*Here are some sample statements that help set the tone of your class and demonstrate your willingness to engage with students:*

If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Virginia Tech provides a variety of services to support student success. [List relevant services and their locations] All of these services are provided at no additional cost to you.

In the event I suspect you need additional support, I will express my concerns and the reasons for them and remind you of resources that might be helpful to you. It is not my intention to be intrusive, but simply to let you know I am concerned and that help, if needed, is available.

If you are facing challenges securing food, housing, or childcare and believe this may affect your performance in the course, you are urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Likewise, you may notify me if you are comfortable doing so. I can help to connect you to resources in the local community.

I want you to feel able to share your life experiences in classroom discussions and written work. I want you to trust that I will keep any information you share private. Please be aware that I do have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as a faculty member. This means I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on campus with the university Title IX Coordinator.

*The course, **Teaching for Inclusion: Inclusive Pedagogy: How Student Identities Matter**, offered through the Professional Development Network, provides additional information on campus and extended resources that faculty can access to communicate welcome, safety, and inclusion so that all students can be successful.*

### Inclusion & Religious Diversity:

10/2-4\* Rosh Hashanah  
 10/11-12\* Yom Kippur  
 1/29 Lunar New Year  
 2/28 Ramadan Begins  
 4/18 Good Friday  
 3/29-30 Eid al-Fitr\*  
 4/12-20 Passover\*  
 4/5 Orthodox Good Friday  
 \*sundown to sundown

The academic calendar does not accommodate religious observances. However, certain Jewish and Muslim holidays that require rest, fasting, and contemplation coincide with the work week. You can respect religious diversity among your students by not scheduling assignments, tests, or exams on core holidays, granting absences without penalty for students who request them, and learning more about the various belief systems of our diverse populations of students.

See the full Interfaith calendar at: <https://dos.vt.edu/interfaith/calendar.html>

### Chosen Name and Identity FAQs for Faculty

[inclusive.vt.edu/resources/names-pronouns/faculty-faqs.html](https://inclusive.vt.edu/resources/names-pronouns/faculty-faqs.html)

Virginia Tech recognizes that some members of our community use a name other than their legal name, and that all of us have and use gender pronouns to refer to ourselves and others. A person's name and pronouns represent very important and salient parts of their identity, making it essential for the university's records system to manage this information as inclusively and accurately as possible.

**Students need to hear from you and observe your intentions through your actions.  
 If you have questions about establishing a norm of inclusion, contact:**

**[inclusivemt@vt.edu](mailto:inclusivemt@vt.edu)**