

ENssentials Quick Guide

'Welcoming and getting to know your students'

Why is it important to welcome your students, and get to know them?

We know from student feedback as well as evidence from the literature that for students to thrive, and to learn effectively, they need to feel that they belong and that they matter. As teachers, we have a responsibility to support all of our students' transitions into our classrooms, considering where they come from, who they are or where they are learning. We need to welcome them into the space as individuals and know that they are seen, that we will listen to them, that we will respect them and that ultimately, they matter. In doing so, this will contribute to a more positive learning environment and minimise any possible issues regarding classroom management. This Quick Guide aims to explore how we can do this within our own contexts, and provides some ideas that you can integrate into your teaching to ensure that each one of your students is welcomed into your class, and knows that you care about them as individuals.

What are the current challenges?

Our classrooms are increasingly diverse, with individual students arriving from different contexts of learning with differing educational backgrounds and experiences, different

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expectations about their learning and a range of motivations for being a student in your class. This can be challenging for you as a teacher with your own assumptions, expectations and pressures. Moreover, we know that our students are facing a range of societal challenges including post-pandemic impact, poverty, homelessness, mental ill-health and other issues that can make it hard for them to focus solely on their studies. We know that growing numbers of our students are having to work in full-time jobs just to be able to live. All of this has an impact on how and what they can learn.

What steps can you take in your teaching to make sure they feel welcomed into your classroom?

We have organised the below into three sections that look at how you welcome your students, but also how you get to know them and begin to build relationships:

Your teaching practices

- Know who you are as a teacher. Explore your assumptions about learning and teaching and your own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.
- Reflect upon and explore your own assumptions and expectations of learners and any biases you hold and work to address these; consider how much your learners (or some of them) may need to adapt themselves to their new learning environment as well as your expectations of them and the dominant culture.
- Acknowledge the challenge students experience in adapting (and in some cases expected assimilation) to their target culture, i.e. where they are living and studying now. Acknowledge culture as a concept as generalising – culture can be viewed as ‘smoke’, elusive, intangible, form shifting,

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diffuse – think about the diversity of culture in China, and even within Scotland between regions, accents, traditions, for example.

- Introduce yourself to your students, share aspects of your own life and academic journey/experiences studying to try to build commonality and allow your students to see you beyond your professional title/role as lecturer;
- Establish expectations at the start of any new module so your students know how you want them to engage with your teaching, as your students come from a range of learning contexts and may not be familiar with your approaches – it may be helpful to do this through a co-created learning agreement;
- Teacher presence and visibility;
- Remember your joy and enthusiasm for what you teach (you love this!);
- Teach the students you have and not the ones you wish you had...

Your students

- Stand at the door as the students arrive and welcome them into the space;
- Get to know your students' experiences and motivations, eg. [through warm-up activities](#), which in turns helps with establishing expectations;
- Get to know your students' names e.g. ask students to write their name on a piece of folded paper in each class. In larger classes, you could use digital tools to do this eg. an introductory padlet
- Encourage collaboration between your students through groupwork linked to low stakes' activities;
- Create lots of opportunities for informal feedback – (link to materials on evaluation?)

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Your learning and teaching materials

- Consider [co-creating a learning agreement](#) with your students to establish clear expectations at the start of a new module;
- Don't overload modules with content but think carefully about what you want your students to do, and how you will know when they have got there?;
- Build in time for your students to get to know you, and each other e.g. start with a shared, collaborative activity such as a group scavenger hunt or even just talking to them about why they are studying this course, and what they are interested in;
- Signpost to your students repeatedly and relentlessly at the end of each session what you want them to do before the next session, and why;
- Scaffold the learning you expect them to demonstrate in the summative assignment through the use of formative assignments;
- Use [active learning](#) in your teaching to engage your students explicitly in their learning.

Useful References and Resources

[Coe, R., Rauch, C.J., Kime, S., Singleton, D. \(2020\). Great Teaching Toolkit: Evidence Review. Cambridge Assessment International Education.](#)

Any questions

Please get in touch with us at dlte@napier.ac.uk if there is anything you would like to discuss, or explore further in relation anything in this Quick Guide.