

Building Relationships with Students

What

Building relationships with your students is critical to creating an inclusive, safe, and productive classroom. Getting to know your students personally and academically does not mean you have to sacrifice your high expectations. We fear that being too friendly can risk weakening academic rigor. Yet students want to know you care; they want the feeling that they belong at the university. This pays dividends. When instructors take the time to develop student relationships, the students report higher levels of academic progress, an increase in student engagement, and a willingness to take more academic risks.

**Developing student relationships does not take much time.
It just takes a little intentionality and curiosity.**

How

- Get to know student names and pronouns.
- Arrive early and stay after class to engage with students. Students may ask academic questions; it's also a good time to walk around and check in on them.
- Begin class with a question unrelated to the course content. For example, have students list one to three fun activities they participated in over the weekend. Have them share with a partner, then have several students share with the whole class.
- Have students develop a personal narrative PowerPoint slide or video. What are their favorite ways to relax, hobbies, and foods? Share one or two slides at the beginning/end of each class throughout the semester.
- Share your narrative PowerPoint slide or video. Students are curious about you. It makes you more approachable, and students may feel more comfortable taking risks if they feel they know and trust you.
- To build rapport, incorporate partner and small group activities during class.
- Consider creating videos of you teaching the course content, this will provide more time for small group interactions and discussions during class.
- Use emojis in your email. You can still be firm and hold students accountable while also showing empathy and perhaps humor. 😊
- Check on students by sending an email if they are absent. Always let them know you are there to support them.



Always let your students know they must be prepared to share with the whole class.

References:

- Lemov, D. (2021). *Teach Like a Champion: 63 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*.
- Lentfer, V. (2023). *Cultivating Compassion in the Classroom: A Teacher's Guide to Thriving through Chaos, When All You Want to Do is Teach*.



Vicki Lentfer

College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences