



**Teaching guide
inclusive learning
environment**



**Universiteit
Leiden**

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Inclusive Teaching Tips

An inclusive learning environment where all students feel at home and have a space to share their views and experiences is a precondition for students to develop their interests and talents. Leiden University strives to realize a healthy and engaged learning community and prepares students to engage with societal issues and be able to work in a diverse working environment. This inclusive teaching guide supports lecturers in their ambitions to enable students regardless of background to thrive in academic education.

Why inclusive teaching is important

Inclusion is about equal opportunities. In educational practice this means minimising barriers for students regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender, ethnic identity or abilities. It requires critical reflection on the narrative central to our education and recognition that there are more ways to experience and understand the world. A diversity of perspectives enriches the debate and promotes new insights and skills in dealing with societal challenges and diversity in the learning and working environment.

Teaching guide in educational practice

This teaching guide supports lecturers in developing and delivering inclusive education. It is based on existing resources and best practices and a living document that will be further supplemented. Each section addresses a specific topic with questions, tips and resources, arranged in order of college design and implementation. Start where you want and follow your own pace. It's a journey, not a race.



I

Before the course

- 1 Partner up with colleagues: collaboration and feedback
- 2 New take on the syllabus
- 3 Presenting ideas and knowledge
- 4 Examples, languages and vocabulary in teaching practice
- 5 Ground rules and standards of conduct
- 6 Visual materials



1

Partner up with colleagues: collaboration and feedback

Just as many of our biases are implicit, many of the potentially exclusive elements of our teaching are deeply ingrained in our thinking and are likely to escape our own attention.

1

Partner up with colleagues: collaboration and feedback

- A** Am I planning to revisit my course material alone or with colleagues? If the latter, do I choose colleagues who differ from me in discipline, methodological preference, background, or school of thought?
- B** Will I openly ask for feedback from former students on my course material?
- C** Will I enter into dialogue with the critique that I do not understand?

Just as many of our biases are implicit, many of the potentially exclusive elements of our teaching are deeply ingrained in our thinking and are likely to escape our own attention. As experts in our fields, a common unconscious bias is that experiences and perspectives unlike our own are neglected or left out in our selection of course materials, themes and examples. Because of a specialized focus, and an academic environment where a diversity of perspectives is not always present, it can be difficult to recognize our own blind spots in our teaching.

Example: you design a course in your field of expertise, but don't integrate opposing research or think about countering views in your designing/teaching. Possible discussions that might result among or with students aren't given any attention. Not including different points of view in your teaching might result in missing out on a broader perspective. This might affect the overall quality of a class or course.



Tip

“I made plans to exchange syllabi with a new colleague over coffee, I also included questions on representation and a sense of belonging in anonymous student evaluation forms in the middle of my course.”



Further reading:
[Blackwell Handbook of Psychology: Intergroup processes](#)

2

New take on the syllabus

You might have heard of the importance of scanning your reading list with regards to academic sources which represent diverse worldviews, genders, ethnic backgrounds, identities and all the intersections in-between.

2

New take on the syllabus

- A** Have I thought about whose perspectives are important for the topic I am teaching? Do authors from social positions different from those of my main sources also feature in my curriculum? What about stakeholders, affected parties, and target groups?
- B** For whom have I designed my course? Who is my target student? If I imagine them with different backgrounds, culture, languages and schooling, would I change anything about my reading list?
- C** In what ways do I encourage my students to engage with historically marginal voices?
- D** Do the authors on my assigned reading list reflect different identities and backgrounds?
- E** Are the books and articles available for free in the library?

You might have heard of the importance of scanning your reading list with regards to academic sources which represent diverse worldviews, genders, ethnic backgrounds, identities and all the intersections in-between. ‘Why does this matter?’ ‘Isn’t what I have assigned already sufficient for the content?’ ‘I don’t care about someone’s identity, I care about their ideas.’ These are all fair points!

Epistemological diversity – that is, diversity of knowledge systems and paradigms – helps students critically evaluate specific assumptions and motivations rooted in personal experiences, bring opposing viewpoints and more experiences into dialogue with one another, foster a deeper understanding of complex problems and ultimately develop sounder arguments.

The logic behind checking whether our authors represent diverse identities stems from the reality that where we sit informs where we stand.

Our lived experiences affect how we look at the world, which in turn matters for what we see in it. In today's world, certain expressions of gender, sexuality, culture, as well as social (historical) markers like race and ethnicity, have political implications: they can affect how many rights and resources we have, independent of our merit and our ideas.

Scanning for author identity is a meaningful first step, but it is an imperfect proxy for epistemological diversity. Here, we provide tips that take this into account.



Tip

“It didn't necessarily take a lot of time to scan my reading list. I already had a pretty good sense of who the authors were that I was assigning. What could have taken time was fixing the imbalance, but I opted to crowdsource. I asked for recommendations from my network on Twitter, LinkedIn, and via email. Within an hour I had a list of 10 names that I was lucky enough to be introduced to!”



Tip

Professor Manjeet Ramgotra (SOAS) taught Aristotle's *The Politics* alongside bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman*. to challenge some of Aristotle's gender and racial hierarchies.



Further reading:

Morreira, S. & Lockett, K. (2018) [Questions academics can ask to decolonise their classrooms](#) provides tips and questions about readings and your class curriculum.

The Utrecht University [Toolbox diversity education](#) includes a useful literature scan tool and other resources.

Jane Sumner's Gender Balance Assessment Tool, uses gender and race algorithm tools by Kamil Wais, Kabir Khanna and Kosuke Imai to scan your reading list for you: <https://jsumner.shinyapps.io/syllabustool/>

3

Presenting ideas and knowledge

For some time, teachers were expected to accommodate the 'learning style' of individual students. Recent research in neuroscience, education and psychology has shown that there is limited evidence to support that specific students are best suited to specific modalities. Instead, learning preferences change over time and may differ per situation.

3

Presenting ideas and knowledge

Presenting ideas and knowledge in different forms

- A** Do I articulate the social position from which I speak when I lecture, for example as a female European lecturer who comes from a family of academics? What about my intellectual position within my field of studies?
- B** Do I include a range of teaching approaches and activities, and make use of different modalities (e.g. text, images, audio, video) when explaining concepts?
- C** Will my lessons allow less vocal or eloquent students to feel comfortable participating? Am I aware of why some students might be less vocal? Do I allow for different forms of participation (e.g. anonymous vs. non-anonymous, group discussion vs. bilateral discussion, presentations)?
- D** Do I make assumptions about students' background knowledge of a subject? If so, do I offer supportive material that can get them up to speed?
- E** Do my guest lecturers have different backgrounds or perspectives than me?

For some time, teachers were expected to accommodate the 'learning style' of individual students. Recent research in neuroscience, education and psychology has shown that there is limited evidence to support that specific students are best suited to specific modalities. Instead, learning preferences change over time and may differ per situation.

Representing class material in varied modalities is valuable as long as it is not attached to the assumption of an individual and single learning style. Some examples of these modalities could be: multiple choice vs. essays, discussion, visuals (powerpoints, drawings, graphs), movement activities, videos, podcasts, readings, role play, etc.



Tip

“In preparing for my courses, I always ask my class in advance about any specific type of support that is important for them, and that I can take them into consideration as long as I know in advance. One student for example, asked for the powerpoint presentation to be made available before class to be able to follow the class better. This was a simple task but greatly improved the student’s learning experience.”



Tip

“In my online learning environment I include a section on prior knowledge. There is a mini-quiz where students can test their prior knowledge, and links to resources that can help them fill the gaps.”

Furthermore, using a variety of teaching methods and modes of communication can help students with different language backgrounds access and understand content, and also help all students learn and understand the language used in your subject.



Tip

“I use Mentimeter or other interactive presentation software from time to time to enable students to think about something out loud and brainstorm, while remaining anonymous.”



Further reading:

See Bourk (2014) for an explanation and examples of positionality.

<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=tqr>

Education Endowment Foundation (2021) explains the latest research on learning modalities <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/learning-styles>

The online module “Accessible Lectures in Three Steps”, created by lecturers at FSW, as part of the Comeniusproject Effectief Onderwijs voor Alle Studenten provides useful information for making your teaching more accessible for students with a disability: [Accessible lectures - Leiden University \(universiteitleiden.nl\)](https://www.universiteitleiden.nl)

4

Examples, languages and vocabulary in teaching practice

Drawing from a variety of examples and cases may provide more students with the possibility to relate to the material. This may help facilitate a sense of belonging.

4

Examples, languages and vocabulary in teaching practice

- A** Do I take into account the role of language in my explanations and materials? How do I ensure that all students can understand and make use of vocabulary and ways of communicating that are specific to my subject area?
- B** Do I use examples and cases from different communities and regions? Will I make room for relevant personal experiences to be shared; if so, how will they be tied to other content and used for reflection?
- C** Do I use examples and cases as opportunities to stimulate reflection on issues of social importance (for example: poverty reduction, LGBT rights)? Or do I use examples that further enforce specific ways of knowing (for example, using the gender binary as an example of a nominal scale in a methods course)?
- D** Is it possible to share why it is important for all students to understand a particular concept or topic (for example, in the current course, the rest of their studies and/or their future careers)?
- E** Do I plan opportunities for students to discuss content and make use of resources in the different languages they speak?

Drawing from a variety of examples and cases may provide more students with the possibility to relate to the material. This may help facilitate a sense of belonging. Our examples do not need to perfectly match our students' life-worlds, but if the examples given in class never match their life-worlds, they might not feel as though the course was designed for them.

Similarly, many university students are learning in a language that is not their mother tongue (whether that language is English or Dutch). For multilinguals, learning is most effective when it can be connected to the languages they speak. This does not mean you need to teach in multiple languages! It is helpful just to give students space to make use of different languages during your classes or when working for your subject.



Tip

“I realized at some point that all the examples I used for achievements in gender equity were of white European feminists, using examples of different regions helped students recognize that feminism is a world-wide movement and made discussions more lively.”



Tip

“I invite students to share and compare vocabulary in their own languages too. This helps them to make connections between the new language they are learning and other languages they know, and also helps strengthen the sense of community in the group.”



Notes about potentially distressing content

- A** Do I use examples or content that refers to physical, mental or sexual violence, abuse, slurs, drug use, suicide or something that might unintentionally trigger anxiety, trauma responses or a feeling of exclusion?
- B** Do I add notes in my syllabus about content which might trigger anxiety, trauma responses or a feeling of exclusion?

Content warnings are verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive or hurtful content – note that this is not synonymous with offensive, disagreeable or even unpleasant content, nor are the warnings intended as censorship. Experiencing discomfort with a certain topic is not the same as experiencing a learning environment to be unsafe. It is the ways in which students are allowed to respond to their feelings of discomfort that makes a learning environment safe or unsafe.

Content warnings are about giving vulnerable students who have experienced trauma the freedom to manage their exposure to distressing material. Victims of violence and assault may otherwise shut down, dissociate, panic, suffer setbacks and/or disengage from the class as they manage the symptoms that the material provokes.

However, recent research has shown that students typically do not avoid material, even when warned, and indeed that ‘warnings’ can elicit anticipatory anxiety and/or a sense of vulnerability. Using a “content note,” rather than a warning, may help to signal distressing topics without elevating anxiety levels and give students agency without signaling any student out as particularly vulnerable..



Tip

Transparency can be used to make your students aware of your pedagogical justification for using the material, and your concern for its impact on them.



Further reading:

More guiding questions can be found in the document “[Strive for JUSTICE in Course Learning](#)” in which JUSTICE represents the following focus points: Justified, Underscored, Scaffolded, Transparent, Informed, Chosen and Evaluated.

5

Ground rules and standards of conduct

Ground rules are agreements about expected behavior during meetings or classes. Making these expectations explicit helps prevent or reduce misunderstandings and potentially unsafe situations of conflict for students, keeping discussions and disagreements respectful and constructive.

5

Ground rules and standards of conduct

Ground rules

- A** Are there ground rules I could introduce to facilitate a more inclusive learning environment?
- B** Do I introduce them myself or let them be determined in a bottom-up manner?
- C** Will they be communicated and/or announced during class, as a disclaimer in the syllabus, or as an online platform?

Ground rules are agreements about expected behavior during meetings or classes. Making these expectations explicit helps prevent or reduce misunderstandings and potentially unsafe situations of conflict for students, keeping discussions and disagreements respectful and constructive. They can be developed in a participatory manner, early on in the course, with your Faculty's Code of Conduct as a guideline. Small groups could be asked to come up with their own ideas, and you can offer prompts to stimulate thinking.

It is more effective to be as specific as possible; norms like “respect differences” are too vague to provide a clear standard. These norms can be referred to when conflict arises (they can't, and shouldn't, of course, prevent disagreement in the first place), and can be revisited throughout the course so that if students want to make adjustments, collectively, they can.

Suggestions for ground rules:

Do not engage in private conversations while others are speaking, and ensure that any comments you make reflect that you have paid attention to what the speaker has said.

Challenge or critique ideas, but not people. If someone says something that is incorrect or offensive, do correct them with the aim of building a culture of mutual respect and open dialogue.



Tip

“I used to play the ‘value game.’ I had students list 10 values that they hold dear in order of priority. Once they have their own list, I had them talk to their neighbor and try to combine them. Eventually, we whittled it down to one list of values for the whole group. A follow-up discussion can then be facilitated, with questions like: how many values of yours ended up on the list? How do we form consensus?”

Avoid generalizations about groups of people. This includes members of the LGBT community, political parties, religious groups, and particular demographic groups. If you are speaking from your own experience, you should make this clear.

Try to support your claims by providing evidence, and if you are not sure something you want to say is factually correct, phrase it as a question.

Using pronouns

- D** What are the key issues to consider when it comes deciding whether or not, and if so, how to communicate my gender pronouns?
- E** If I choose to communicate my pronouns, do I do this on the syllabus, in my email signature, or at the beginning of class?
- F** Do I ask students for their pronouns? Do I do this privately (via email, or by requesting that they respond if they have specific pronouns they would like me to use)? In the first round of introductions?



Tip

Ezra, Ella and Xine, the coordinators of TransStudies, Trans Lives: Past, Present, and Future Symposium at UCL, introduced the following groundrules for their event: (1) Respect the right of others to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own, and recognise that we are all still learning. Be willing to change your perspective, and make space for others to do the same; (2) Listen carefully and politely, and share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion by allowing others to contribute.



Personal pronouns are used when referring to someone in the third person. In Dutch, English, and many other languages, these pronouns are gendered as binary (male or female; e.g. she/her, he/him). Hence, pronouns become a means of signaling our gender to others.

However, people do not always experience themselves as falling neatly into binary gender categories. Being given the wrong pronouns can cause discomfort, disrespect and lead to feelings of exclusion and alienation. Because it is not possible to know a person's gender identity by name or by visual appearance alone, understanding how a student wishes to be identified can mitigate the risk of exclusion.



Tip

Read the University's guide on-gender inclusive communication about gender diversity, gender inclusive forms of salutation and pronouns: [Resources - Leiden University \(universiteitleiden.nl\)](#)

How to ensure students can share their pronouns while also not forcing students or staff to disclose their pronouns is a tricky issue, as you may not want to put students on the spot. As a lecturer, you may signal that it is safe for students by mentioning your own pronouns if you feel comfortable doing so. At the same time, there can also be reasons for staff not to want to discuss their own pronouns in class.

You can, in any case, refer students to the university guidelines on gender neutral address: it is university policy to use gender neutral forms address, and to respect a person's preference for how they wish to be addressed. Sharing this information can ensure students understand the importance of recognizing and respecting gender diversity, while also providing concrete information on how they can ensure gender inclusion in their choice of pronouns and language.



Further reading:

For more information on gender pronouns, see the [university's brochure](#) on pronouns.

For the university's [writing guidelines](#) on gender neutral forms of address, see here.

Further tips on gender inclusive communication can be found [here](#).

6

Visual materials

Images and illustrations are an important part of our learning materials. Just like texts, they can convey specific messages as well as assumptions and prejudices.

6

Visual materials

- A** Did I take any steps to avoid that my visual materials make use of caricatures or stereotypes of a specific group?
- B** Can all of my visual materials be accessed virtually? How do I accommodate students with mobility issues?
- C** Are my visual materials clearly structured, with meaningful headings, and meaningful hyperlinks?
- D** Are the visual materials I rely on accessible for students with visual or auditory impairments? Could I make use of larger print, bigger spacing between lines, clearer fonts (sans-serif like Arial or Helvetica)? (Leiden University uses a sans serif font such as Arial or Helvetica and serif font Merriweather* in its house style. Do I provide captions for any audio or alternative text for images? Is there sufficient color contrast (i.e. light text on a dark background), and if something is highlighted, is it accompanied by a form of highlighting which is not dependent on colour?
- E** Have I shared my visual material on Brightspace before class, so that students can access the material on their own laptops instead of having to stare at the projection screen?

Images and illustrations are an important part of our learning materials. Just like texts, they can convey specific messages as well as assumptions and prejudices. As with textual examples, choose your illustrations carefully.

For readers with visual or auditory disabilities, there are many technical possibilities for making images and sound ‘readable’. Not being able to easily access the materials, in turn, can not only negatively impact these students’ participation and performance but also induce stress and make someone feel unwelcome.

Leiden University has committed itself to making education accessible by signing the declaration of intent for more inclusive education, which is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We therefore ask staff to ensure their materials is accessible to students by using alt- text image descriptions, and adding subtitles to all permanent video’s, among others.

* In this document the serif font Merriweather has been used. This font is suitable for documents with a lot of text; it has been tested for readability and accessibility.



Tip

“I use many visual icons and cartoons in my online learning environment. The typical scientist cartoon is a man with grey hair, so I actively searched for cartoons of women scientists and scientists of color.”



Tip

“I use one summarizing visual to cover the content and purpose of the entire course. For every new lecture/topic I use a specific section of that same visual to communicate to students where we are in light of the entire course.”



Further reading:

Tips on making presentations, files, documents, and websites more accessible, and captioning video's can be found here:

[Accessible Education - Leiden University \(universiteit.leiden.nl\)](https://www.universiteit.leiden.nl/onderwijs/onderwijsontwikkeling/onderwijsontwikkeling/onderwijsontwikkeling/onderwijsontwikkeling/onderwijsontwikkeling/)

Students with disabilities can receive advice and support from the [Fenestra Disability Centre](#).

II During the course

- 7 Language use and presentation
- 8 Encouraging participation
- 9 Facilitating online interaction
- 10 Hot moments in the classroom



7

Language use and presentation

Students have diverse backgrounds, learning preferences and needs. Neurodiversity including autism, ADHD and dyslexia, as well as visual, auditory and physical disabilities can all affect students' preferences and needs when it comes to the manner in which material is presented.

7

Language use and presentation

- A** Do I use accessible language? Do I explain jargon, acronyms or idioms when I use them?
- B** Is any of my language potentially stigmatizing, for example, using a negative trait as the defining characteristic of an individual ('addicts' instead of 'persons with drug dependence')?
- C** Do I give students time to process information?
- D** Do I describe pertinent parts of graphics and other visuals out loud?
- E** Many students (especially those on the autism spectrum) have sensory sensitivities. If I make use of flashing images or particularly loud videos, do I flag this in advance?
- F** Do I address the group in gender-neutral language?

Students have diverse backgrounds, learning preferences and needs. Neurodiversity including autism, ADHD and dyslexia, as well as visual, auditory and physical disabilities can all affect students' preferences and needs when it comes to the manner in which material is presented.

Questions about language, visuals and auditory sources, and about engaging students with different backgrounds, personalities, questions and needs are important to keep in mind when teaching, as discussed in the previous chapters.



Tip

“To avoid gendered terminology, I try to swap out ‘guys’, or ‘ladies and gentlemen’, with ‘everybody’, ‘all’, ‘team’, ‘folks’, ‘friends’ or ‘people’.”

8

Encouraging participation

Diversity in backgrounds and experiences can also mean that contributions by students come in form of lived or personal experiences that take the form of narratives rather than concise remarks but are equally valuable for exploring different perspectives on the subject matter.

Encouraging participation

- A** Do I offer positive reinforcement when students offer insightful comments?
- B** Do I value all input, even if it is communicated in ways that differ from my understanding of decorum? Do I give credit for the content of what a student says, even if they make mistakes in the language?
- C** Do I give everyone the opportunity to speak?
- D** Do I guide students without shaming them?
- E** If I need to divide up the class, do I split up the students or mix up the group? Does my method ensure gender and skill diversity, and encourage connections across different groups of students?
- F** Do I encourage students to share without putting individual students in boxes based on my assumptions of their lived experiences?
- G** Do I offer students the opportunity to provide (anonymous) feedback during the course, so that I get informed about ways to better meet the needs of the specific group I am teaching?

Diversity in backgrounds and experiences can also mean that contributions by students come in form of lived or personal experiences that take the form of narratives rather than concise remarks but are equally valuable for exploring different perspectives on the subject matter.

Singling out students based on our assumption of their lived assumption, due, for instance, to last names, gender presentation or racial identity, can be alarming and can severely compromise trust.



Tip

To support students' language development, consider 'recasting' what they said. 'Recasts' (repeating what the student said, but using correct language) are a subtle way of providing feedback without interrupting the flow or making the student feel ashamed, and are sometimes so subtle that the student does not notice them at all. For example, engage first with the content of what the student said and while doing so rephrase what the student said using appropriate terminology.



Tip

To get more insight in the perceived accessibility of your lecture, you can ask students to complete the StuFF-L (Student-FeedbackForm-Lecture). It only takes a couple of minutes at the end of one lecture. The items and scoring instruction of this feedback form can be found in the online module “Accessible Lectures in Three Steps”.



Further reading:

Accessible Lectures in Three Steps: [Accessible lectures - Leiden University \(universiteitleiden.nl\)](https://www.universiteitleiden.nl)

In Ch. 12 of **bell hooks' (1994) Teaching to Transgress**, hooks discusses how teachers can reproduce classism by rewarding a particular, stoic, obedient demeanor associated with white middle classes and punishing demeanor that diverges from these norms, e.g. loudness, unrestrained laughter or emotional communication.

9

Facilitating online interaction

Small group discussions from which different students report back ensure a broader group of students contributes to discussions, online and offline.

9

Facilitating online interaction

- A** Have I considered different ways to make sure students feel seen even in an online environment?
- B** Can I call students' names to indicate that their contributions are recognized?
- C** Have I thought of ways to engage students digitally (Wooclap polls, word clouds, break-out rooms)?
- D** Do I give students the clear ability to opt-out of being recorded?

Small group discussions from which different students report back ensure a broader group of students contributes to discussions, online and offline. Digital tools such as Wooclap can engage large numbers of students in an instant and anonymously, unlike individual contributions in a class setting.

A virtual environment can present different challenges compared to in-person teaching. For example, students may be more prone to use direct language, and it can be more difficult to communicate the appropriate tone. Students may also feel anonymous or concerned about contributing without seeing and knowing other students. At the same time, digital settings also provide advantages: some students feel freer in the anonymous environment to contribute.



Tip

Digital tools such as Wooclap can be useful to engage large numbers of students anonymously.



Further reading:

Suggestions for online cooperative learning activities can be found in the following handbook by the Open University (in Dutch): <https://youlearn.ou.nl/web/bison/werkvormen>

10

Hot moments in the classroom

The divisions and polarization that surrounds societal and political questions are also entering our classroom.

A hot moment is a sudden outburst of tension or conflict during a lesson. Here, 'hot' stands for 'heated, offensive or tense'.

Hot moments in the classroom

- A** Are you investing in the building of relationships and trust which can sustain heated classroom discussions in your class?
- B** Have you discussed with your students what is needed to ensure a constructive and inclusive classroom experience?
- C** Are you familiar with different ways to approach hot moments in the classroom?

The divisions and polarization that surrounds societal and political questions are also entering our classroom. A hot moment is a sudden outburst of tension or conflict during a lesson. Here, 'hot' stands for 'heated, offensive or tense'. When tensions rise and you are caught off guard, there are different techniques and interventions that can help get the discussion back on track. This can be not only a challenging moment for the lecturer but is also a situation in which different students may be affected in different ways by the intervention you choose.

It may help to realize that you don't have to convince students to think differently, but that the university can be a safe space where these different points of view can be debated in an academic context.

Hot moments are not only a matter of instant reaction. Course design and the practicing of skills focused on dialogue, the building of trust and community can equip students with skills and resilience to be able to engage in complex and divisive topics in a constructive fashion.

To build relationships and a learning community, it can be helpful to invest time in the first three sessions for students to get to know each other, use exercises to share different experiences and perspectives, and help them recognize and respect these differences. This may help them discuss also more complex issues later in the semester. Exercises in which students are asked to represent each other, or assess each other can also help to build trust, exercise empathy and foster a sense of responsibility.

Key elements for addressing hot moments are: pause, recognize the emotional aspects of the situation, clarify the issue at hand, depersonalize by focusing on the issue, not the person, refer to the classroom guidelines you set up at the beginning of the class, and refocus on common ground.



Tip

I start my first class of a large lecture course with a word cloud in which I ask students what they think is important to ensure classroom discussions are inclusive. This helps create a norm which I can refer back to when things get heated.



Tip

You can try to acknowledge their emotions (are the students sad, mad, upset, disappointed?). You can use reflectional tools to discuss this further. Not to convince or solve, but as a way to facilitate expressing their frustration.



Tip

I try to pause my scheduled class when I get surprised by a hot moment. Even though it might feel difficult there is a message in a hot moment: students are showing they want to discuss a topic that bothers them and are emotional about.



Tip

A hot moment can be seen as a heated conversation where emotions and opinions are expressed in a stronger manner than usual. If the moment becomes more intense it sometimes turns into a conflict in the classroom. There are various ways to de-escalate the situation, such as the conflict ladder, that aids in managing and preventing conflicts.



Tip

I try to build a bridge to their future profession. How do they plan to have difficult conversations in their work field? How can they learn to navigate their emotions and different points of view? Ask: how can you share your opinion in a respectful manner while safeguarding a safe working and learning environment towards people with another worldview?



Further reading:

The [resource page Israel Palestine](#) contains basic tips about dealing with hot moments

There are many other useful guides including: [Hot moments in the classroom \(University of Michigan\)](#) and [Teaching controversial issues \(Judy Pace\)](#) and Wingert, D., & Molitor, T. (2009). Best practices: [Preventing and managing challenging classroom situations](#). *Currents in Teaching and Learning*, 1(2), 4-18.

See also the [Inclusive Teaching Guide of Stanford University](#), including the document: [Class Community Commitments: A Guide for Instructors](#)

An interesting source to find reflectional tools: [Succeeding in postgraduate study: Session 2: 6 Tools to support reflective learning | OpenLearn - Open University](#)

The conflict ladder is a useful tool that aids in managing and preventing conflicts. See [this link](#).

[How to manage 'hot moments' in class? - Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam \(vu.nl\)](#)

III After the course

- 11 Giving and receiving feedback
- 12 Assessment
- 13 Student performance and well-being



11

Giving and receiving feedback

Teaching is always a two-way street, and this becomes especially apparent at the end of a course, when students are scheduling office hours to talk about final assignments, or ask for reference letters, and we are asking them to evaluate the course.

Giving and receiving feedback

- A** When asking questions about the course, do I seek feedback from different groups of students (e.g. Dutch, international, different study backgrounds, quiet vs more outspoken ones, etc)?
- B** When a student offers a suggestion, do I take it seriously? Do I summarize the content anonymously, and ask a broader group of students whether they feel comfortable with the proposed amendment?
- C** While it can be challenging to not take some of the feedback personally, do I try to be objective and seek solutions of what could be changed next time you teach the course to improve the course?
- D** When drafting student recommendations, do I use similar adjectives to describe students of different genders, and students from different backgrounds? Do I use a student's preferred pronouns?

Teaching is always a two-way street, and this becomes especially apparent at the end of a course, when students are scheduling office hours to talk about final assignments, or ask for reference letters, and we are asking them to evaluate the course. These moments offer important insight into our own teaching, as we learn what students have taken away from the course. Nevertheless, it is important to remain sensitive to individual student circumstances as much as possible and to keep our own biases in check.

These moments may also present opportunities to connect with students on a more personal level, which has been shown to correlate with students' academic success. In these instances, however, it is key that we protect our boundaries to avoid jeopardizing our own well-being and, in turn, eroding our professionalism, reliability, and by extension capacities as mentors.



Tip

“A particular gray area for many professors... is whether to self-disclose in the classroom or during personal interactions with students. To answer this question, I pull from my training in counseling psychology and internally evaluate the purpose of self-disclosure. If the information I am sharing serves the student and our relationship then I proceed (albeit within a professional manner). For example, I may share my own personal experience with not getting into graduate school the first time I applied as a way to allay some student fears. However, it would be wrong of me to share information as a means to gain something from my students or work through an issue I’m having.” (Wyrick, A. (2017) “[Professor Goldi locks and the three boundaries.](#)”)



Further reading:

Tips about ways to evaluate your education can be found in a document created by Van Berlo at Radboud University, see [this link](#).

12

Assessment

Everyone has unconscious biases. When our working memory is overloaded with information, we look for shortcuts. The result is a variety of biases according to which we can end up grading students based on our general impression of them, their participation in class, on their backgrounds or physical traits, or on how their work compares to work by their peers.

Assessment

- A** Have I implemented anonymized grading?
- B** Do I have detailed assessment criteria to minimize the room for discretion during my grading? Did I share the criteria with students in advance?
- C** Do I communicate the possibilities available for students who need specific facilities during assessment (e.g. extra exam time, larger font, quiet room)?
- D** Do I accommodate religious holidays that I might not be familiar with when I plan my deadlines?
- E** Do I offer background information, context, or examples in my assignment instructions? Do I try to make visible the 'hidden curriculum' by, for instance, elaborating on the structure, length and type of response that is expected, or on how to discern credible sources?

Everyone has unconscious biases. When our working memory is overloaded with information, we look for shortcuts. The result is a variety of biases according to which we can end up grading students based on our general impression of them, their participation in class, on their backgrounds or physical traits, or on how their work compares to work by their peers.

This is efficient from our brain's perspectives, but it can unfairly impact the grades our students receive if they are not being marked based on the content submitted, but based on a heuristic.

Moreover, we often grade students not only on how well they know the content of our course but on how well they perform according to the 'hidden curriculum' - or the "amorphous collection of

implicit academic, social, and cultural messages, unwritten rules and unspoken expectations, and unofficial norms, behaviours and values of the dominant-culture context in which all teaching and learning is situated” (Betterton 2021).

Examples include the expectation that students know how to consult certain databases, or understand what is expected when we ask them to “analyze” or “synthesize” in an assignment. Because not all students are exposed to this socioeconomic and cultural context, the playing field is not leveled.



Tip

The academic calendar includes major religious holidays (from 2025-2026 on) which can influence students’ schedule and daily life.



Tip

Ask the student to contact the study adviser for information; they can help students in applying for facilities or more time during exams; Fenestra Disability Centre offers advice to students with disabilities.



Tip

“I make sure that students fasting during Ramadan can take their exam in the morning rather than in the afternoon.”



Further reading:

Boston University, ‘Teaching the Hidden Curriculum’

Betterton, Kayleigh (2021) “Unconscious bias in assessment: what does the research tell us?” <https://cirl.etoncollege.com/unconscious-bias-in-assessment-what-does-the-research-tell-us/>

13

Student performance and well-being

As you as a lecturer see the students more often than the study advisers, you are more likely to notice any concerns or changes in their performance and well-being. Part-time work, care tasks, financial stress and other personal circumstances can have an impact on students' performance and well-being.

Student performance and well-being

- A** Do I notice any change in a student's performance or behavior?
- B** Am I aware of factors affecting the students' performance?

As you as a lecturer see the students more often than the study advisers, you are more likely to notice any concerns or changes in their performance and well-being. Part-time work, care tasks, financial stress and other personal circumstances can have an impact on students' performance and well-being. Lecturers have an important role in signaling concerns, and referring students to the support they need. At the same time, whilst it is good to be empathetic, this does not mean that you need to become a student's counsellor or solve their problems.

Resources:

- ✓ Refer students to the **study advisor** of the program they follow with their questions.
- ✓ Suggest students with questions about study skills, to the POPcorners of the faculties of **Humanities, Social Sciences** and in **the Hague**.
- ✓ **Student counsellors** can advise students with financial concerns, care tasks and disabilities, among others.
- ✓ Consult the **well-being webpage** for information on different forms of support.
- ✓ Inform yourself about different resources in the area of **diversity and inclusion** within the University.
- ✓ Contact the **advisory team for concerning or threatening behavior** if you are concerned about the behavior of a student.



Tip

There are many resources available. For example, refer the student to the student advisor or the POPcorner if you notice that things are not going well for a while.

Colofon

This guide is based on the **Inclusive teaching tips 1.0**, developed by **Emily Wolff** and **Elena Bondarouk** and the Staff Alliance for Equity (SAFE).

The guide was further developed by the inclusive education working group:

Najat Al-Hani (LLInC)

Aya Ezawa (FGW)

Alison Fischer (FdR)

Looi van Kessel (FGW)

Tessa Mearns (ICLON)

Suzanne Mol (FSW)

Adriaan Norbart (LUMC)

Contact and more information:

SAZ/Expertise office D&I: **diversiteit@leidenuniv.nl**