



Click4it Wiki - Toolkit

■ Creating Ground Rules for a Learning Group

Content

There are many key areas to consider when setting ground rules in a learning context. Seven such areas are listed below. Of course a trainer/teacher may wish to add to or ignore sections of this list as you find appropriate:

I) Participation – What/how are learners expected to contribute to the session or group? E.g. Are all participants required to contribute to discussion at some point? Are there any punishments or consequences for too little participation? Are there any boundaries required for preventing 1-2 students dominating discussion?

II) Punctuality – What is acceptable in terms of punctuality and lateness when attending group sessions? E.g. Will there be any disciplinary action or punishment for frequent lateness? Are there any considerations for students to keep in mind about distracting other participants when entering a session late?

III) Attendance – What is expected in terms of attendance at sessions? E.g. What length of notice is required prior to absence? What are acceptable and unacceptable excuses for non-attendance? Will there be any disciplinary action or punishment for unacceptable absence?

IV) Preparation – How are learners and participants expected to prepare for a meeting or session? E.g. Are there any homework requirements? Are there any required readings prior to sessions? Is any prior preparation of ideas required before meeting?

V) Listening & Speaking Protocols – When are people required to listen to others, waiting for their turn to speak? Do students have to raise a hand to ask permission to speak? Is there any maximum length of time a participant can speak for? Should students address you, or the whole group when making a contribution? Is any mobile use acceptable during the class, or must they be switched off? Also, encouraging students to speak up when they fail to understand something might also be very important.



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VI) Contribution Content – What boundaries are there about what students can communicate to each other? E.g. Is it OK to criticize what another participant says? If so, what are the boundaries between criticism and abuse/harassment? Also, how can you keep personal issues out of the session or discussion?

VII) Confidentiality – What are the boundaries for the content that can and can't be shared outside of group discussions and meetings? For example, are there any personal or private details revealed in class sessions? Is there any sensitive information about an organization or company that must be kept secret?

Process

I) Preparation

Prepare for your ground rule setting session by considering:

A) What are the key issue things that ground rules you need ground rules for? See the above list under 'Content' for a ideas.

B) What steps will you take with your class for developing ground rules? A suggested process of steps is provided in II, which you may adapt as you see appropriate.

C) Consider for each step: 1. Will this be performed better as a written or oral exercise? ; 2. Should this be an individual, pair, small group or class exercise? ; 3. What materials do you need for each step? E.g. photocopies, whiteboard, pens; 4. How much time will be spent on each step? ; 5. If you are following this process with a virtual or blended learning group, how can you best adapt each step using IT and web tools?

II) In class/session

Step 1 - Brainstorm - Ask students to think about the best group discussions they have been a part of, and reflect on what made these discussions so satisfying. Also ask students to think about the worst group discussions in which they have participated in and reflect on what made these discussions so unsatisfactory.

Step 2 – Expand Discussion – Provide students with a list of other issue areas you believe ground rules need to be set for (see 'Content') for ideas. Then ask participants to consider this list in relation to the best and worst group discussions they have been a part of.



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Step 3 – *Draft the Ground Rules* - Based on their discussion up until this point, ask students to suggest a list of ground rules for all key issue areas.

Step 4 – *Confirm the Ground Rules* - Use students' suggestions to compose a set of ground rules to which they all agree, and distribute them in writing.

Step 5 – *Regular Review* – Periodically, review the ground rules with your class and revise them if changes are needed.



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