



TEA RESOURCES:

GROUND RULES

What are Ground Rules?

Ground Rules are boundaries set for the comfort and safety of all students, in order to optimise the environment in which they learn. I often get asked “Really, we are all adults do we really need Rules” and my answer is an emphatic ‘Yes.’ Let me give you an example of why.

I had a student who came to class with particular political views regarding immigration in the UK and was voicing these rather loudly, to the detriment of two polish students also in the class. I immediately stopped the class and sent the students for a break, speaking to the student who had been voicing her views. I explained that she signed up to the ground rules and that her behaviour was not acceptable. She apologised and when the class came back she apologised to her peers as well.

This is a classic example of when Ground Rules are so important in giving you the teacher a strong position from which to stop inappropriate behaviour in class.

Ground Rules are normally set at the beginning of a course, however this doesn't mean you can't go back to them during the course and update them, amend or even disregard one or two of them if they become obsolete.

How should Ground Rules be set in your class?

There are three main ways to set ground rules in class, one is that the teacher sets them, the second is that they are set purely by the students or as I prefer to do, some set by you the teacher and some set by the students.

If as in the first case you set them, the students may not buy into them and disregard them. By letting the students set them, you are unable to put forward anything that you know with experience needs to be in their ie mobile phones being switched to silent.

The best way to set ground rules is by agreeing a balance between what the students feel needs to be in them and what you do. As a teacher, one of the main rules to put forward is anything to ensure health and safety, for example no drinks near computers. I also like phones switched to silent or vibrate so that if a student has to take an urgent call they can quietly leave the room to do so.

How can we make sure students abide by the rules?

I ask students to think of a course they have been on lately, and what little annoyances they had, or concerns re the running of the class. Students normally come up with phones being a problem, people talking over each other, or someone eating a bag of crisps. We have a discussion in class and agree the Ground Rules. I capture all these on a flip chart and ask the students then to sign it with their initials so that they are showing they agree to it. I then hang this on the wall during class so it is clear to be seen. Sometimes, I photocopy the page and give a copy of the ground rules to each student to put in their files.

If a situation arises, I refer to the ground rules, explaining that they signed up to them. I find that the students themselves point this out to their peers, and I don't need to interfere. I constantly refer to the rules in my class in a non-threatening almost humorous way so that they are not forgotten and standards are kept.

If a student constantly disregards the rules, I take them to one side and explain that they have broken a rule and that if the student is not prepared to change their ways, I would ask them to leave the class.

Be firm and remember to lead by example.

GROUND RULES

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What must be considered when setting them?

When considering ground rules, it is imperative to make sure they are agreed by all students in the class. This is to make sure that everyone has a voice and that students take ownership of the rules and know what is and what is not acceptable behaviour.

Language needs to be appropriate and inclusive with no sexist or stereotypical remarks, and students should not feel harassed into agreeing them until they are happy.

The Ground Rules need to reflect the diversity of the group, eg, the gender, the age, religion and other strands of the Equality Act 2010.

10 Ground Rules you might put in place in your class:

Ground Rules

1. Keep mobile 'phones on silent or vibrate and leave the room quietly to use the 'phone.
2. No texting, leave the room quietly to use the 'phone
3. No question is a silly one
4. What is said in the group stays in the group to respect confidentiality
5. Respect everyone's views and opinions
6. Don't talk over another person that is talking
7. No eating in class only at breaks unless for medical reasons
8. Show respect for each other's views
9. Be punctual
10. Let the teacher know if you are going to be absent