

BUILDING SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM CULTURE



These practices create an inclusive classroom where first-generation students feel they belong and all students can succeed.

Strategy 1

Create a Welcoming and Belonging-Centered Environment

What it is:

Intentionally establish that every student belongs and brings valuable perspectives to your classroom.

Why it matters:

First-generation students may struggle with imposter syndrome and question whether they belong in higher education.

Try This in Class:

- Address belonging directly on the first day
- Share your own academic journey, including challenges
- Frame help-seeking as a strength, not weakness
- Create space for different perspectives in discussions

Example Practices:

On day one, tell students directly that they belong in your course. When discussing resources, say "Successful students use {name the resource}."

Strategy 2

Facilitate a Growth Mindset Through Assessment

What it is:

Design assessment to emphasize learning and improvement rather than just evaluation.

Why it matters:

Students need opportunities to practice, receive feedback, and improve—not just be judged on performance.

Try This in Class:

- Provide feedback that explains how to improve, not just what's wrong
- Return feedback promptly, before the next related assessment
- Use frequent low-stakes assignments across the semester
- Celebrate progress and improvement, not just mastery

Example Practices:

Frame early assignments as practice opportunities. Point out specific improvements between drafts when returning work. Design weekly low-stakes reflections or quizzes to build skills gradually.



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Strategy 3

Communicate Proactively and Consistently

What it is:

Establish clear, reliable communication patterns that keep students informed and supported.

Why it matters:

Unclear expectations create barriers, especially for students without family experience navigating college.

Try This in Class:

- State communication norms clearly: response times, where information is posted
- Create regular weekly or bi-weekly check-ins
- Reach out proactively to students who are missing or falling behind
- Acknowledge struggle and offer specific, actionable help

Example Practices:

Include your email response time in the syllabus. Send a brief weekly announcement each Monday. When a student misses multiple classes, send a warm check-in email offering to discuss specific support options.



Small, intentional choices in course design can transform the experience for first-generation students while strengthening learning for everyone.

