

Establishing Ground Rules

This lesson gives students an opportunity to discuss the importance of ground rules in establishing a safe and respectful learning environment. Students work collaboratively in developing ground rules for class discussion to minimize negative and unproductive conflict and create an atmosphere where differing points of view can be respectfully considered.

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OBJECTIVES

- Students will establish ground rules that provide a climate where it feels safe to discuss various topics.
- Students will examine the value behind each of the identified ground rules.
- Students will understand how ground rules can be used to invoke responsible and respectful communication.

GRADES

Grades 3 & up

TIME

20–30 minutes

REQUIREMENTS

- Chart paper, markers and poster board

KEY WORDS

abide
consensus
ground rule

commitment
contract
respect



TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

communication skills, cooperative learning, establishing ground rules, reaching consensus, webbing

PROCEDURES

1. Write GROUND RULES on the top of a piece of chart paper or on the chalkboard.
2. Ask students, “Why are ground rules essential for creating a safe and respectful environment for class discussions on difficult topics?” (For example, to have safe discussions, to encourage learning, to learn from mistakes, to minimize negative and unproductive conflicts, to hear different perspectives respectfully.)
3. Develop a web of student responses, and ask students to add additional words or ideas that come to mind when thinking about ground rules for respectful discussion.
4. Divide the class into small groups of 4–5 students and provide each group with a piece of chart paper and markers. Have each group select a recorder.
5. Explain to the class that each group is to develop 1–2 ground rules that they believe are important for each of the following three areas:
 - What does respectful discussion sound like?
 - What does it look like?
 - What does it feel like?In addition to developing these ground rules, students should be prepared to explain why they think each ground rule is important.
6. On a piece of poster board, write GROUND RULES FOR RESPECT at the top.
7. After all groups have had time to develop two ground rules for each area, have a recorder from each group share the ground rules with the rest of the class. Discuss any ground rules that are unclear, clarify their meanings, and offer examples. Post each ground rule on the GROUND RULES FOR RESPECT poster board. If a group shares a ground rule that has already been established, put a check mark (✓) by the ground rule to acknowledge agreement.
8. Hold a class discussion using the following questions as a guide:
 - How can these ground rules be used to help make our classroom a safe and respectful place?
 - How can we ensure that all members of the class abide by the ground rules?
 - What happens if someone does not abide by the ground rules?
9. Ask for consensus on abiding by each ground rule. Ask students to demonstrate their commitment to upholding the ground rules by signing their name or initials on the GROUND RULES FOR RESPECT poster board. Place the poster board (permanently) in a highly visible area of the classroom.
10. (*Optional*) Type up the class ground rules in the form of personal contracts and have each student sign their personal contract as a demonstration of their agreement to honor the ground rules.