

Reframing Our Language

Practical Tips to Support Student Success

This guide offers practical language shifts that help instructors communicate expectations more clearly and support students learning more effectively.

For the Syllabus

Student Support Hours

- From “Office Hours”
 - Students may be under the impression that these are the hours you, the instructor, work in your office and are not to be disturbed. Or students may view going to the office as a negative they’re in trouble kind of way.
- To “Student Hours”
 - Signals that this time is dedicated to supporting students. Clarify how students can benefit and what to expect during these hours.

Listing Resources

- From “There are resources available to support you.”
 - May be too vague and assumes students already know what’s available.
- To an Explicit List of Resources
 - An explicit list of resources combined with how that resource may directly benefit them takes out the guess work out for students. It may even illuminate resources they were previously unaware of.

Framing Study Expectations

- From “Don’t do...”
 - Negative phrases can leave students unsure of what’s expected or allowed.
- To “Do this”
 - Provides students with a clear, transparent list of ways to be successful in the class. It can also provide students with a clear set of expectations of what they will do in class.

Including Trigger Warnings About Sensitive Topics

- From “Some content in the class covers sensitive topics and may be triggering”
 - Generic warning may not make students feel empowered to seek support. Students may feel that they just have to face the content as is.
- To “We’re going to be covering some sensitive topics soon. Please email me if you have concerns and we will work together to find alternatives.”

- By explicitly inviting students to reach out to you if they find content triggering shows that you care and want to work with the student.

For the Classroom Regarding Content

Students Effort

- From “Don’t worry, you’ll get it if you keep trying”
 - May imply student’s aren’t trying hard enough and equate success solely with effort.
- To “I see you are putting in the effort; let’s explore some strategies together.”
 - Acknowledges the work and effort they are putting in as well as acknowledging that it may be time to try a different strategy for learning. Suggests finding a new tool for learning rather than just trying “harder”.

Challenging Material

- From “If you find this material confusing or challenging you should look at...”
 - Students may feel embarrassed or isolated if they struggle and then they may resist using any resource.
- To “I know this material is challenging and so I have this additional resource which offers a different perspective or approach.”
 - Levels the field for students and helps them recognize that this material is challenging for all, not just them.

For Questions (Inviting questions and answering questions)

Inviting Questions

- From “Do you have any questions”
 - This closed question may discourage students from speaking up as it is eliciting a “yes I have questions” or a “no I don’t have any” response.
- To “What questions do you have?”
 - Normalizes curiosity and signals that questions are expected.

Responding to a Student's Answer

- From “No” or “That’s not right” or “Yea not quite” or “Uhhh maybe”
 - Students can perceive this as evidence that they should not try to participate again. A dismissive response from us can discourage future participation.
- To “Thank you, tell me more about that”
 - By thanking students for their participation, we are showing that we value student voice. Asking follow-up questions or inviting them to tell us more, we are intentionally looking for student thinking and not just correct answers.

*