

Expectations and Procedures for Online Environments

Setting expectations and procedures is critical for establishing and maintaining a healthy learning environment. When teaching in online environments, it is necessary to identify, adapt, and create practical strategies for establishing expectations and procedures based on the characteristics of online learning environments. Compared to face-to-face classrooms, strategies utilized in online environments rely more on technology tools, such as Learning Management Systems, synchronous and asynchronous communication tools, and learning evaluation tools. The primary goal of establishing and maintaining expectations and procedures is to create an effective learning process and promote student academic and personal growth.

1. In what ways have I established and implemented expectations and procedures in an online environment?
2. What are the similarities and differences between establishing and implementing expectations and procedures in face-to-face and online environments?
3. How can expectations and procedures support instruction and classroom administration in an online environment?



to Consider

Establishing clear expectations and procedures is foundational for productive learning. Well-planned expectations and procedures serve as a structure to help students feel that the learning environment is safe and predictable. Expectations describe goals, and procedures serve as steps to achieve them. Academic expectations communicate the established standards regarding how students learn while behavioral expectations are the established standards regarding students' actions. Procedures are the routines and practices set up to enable students to achieve the established expectations.

Expectations and procedures in online environments differ from face-to-face settings due to a heavy reliance on technology, different physical learning environments, and differences in parent and family support and involvement. Establishing expectations and procedures begins with identifying what works, adapting what partially works, and creating new expectations and procedures specifically for online environments. Establishing expectations for an online environment should include both academic and behavioral expectations. Academic expectations focus on how students interact with the instructional content and teachers during academic activities as well as explain how students' access, engage in, and submit learning activities. Expectations will be different for asynchronous versus synchronous learning. Behavioral expectations aim to assist students in co-creating an effective learning environment appropriate for all including how students should interact with other students and with technology. Behavioral expectations might include topics such as camera use during synchronous video conferencing, use of a school-issued device, and peer interactions.

Support students in meeting expectations by establishing supporting procedures and routines such as virtual attendance policies, consistent schedules, and routines for how to access technology tools and applications. Procedures are also needed for interacting with the instructional content and to help students transition between class activities. During synchronous video conferencing, hand signals, attention-getting noises, or other signals can be utilized to communicate how to complete one activity and what to do to prepare for the next activity. Procedures are also needed for navigating asynchronous activities, including how to access instructional content and submit assignments.

When possible, co-construct expectations and procedures with students to foster a sense of buy-in and ownership that promotes motivation. Also, it is better to focus on a few specific expectations. Students are often more motivated by the attached promise of positive rewards for compliance. Also, consider how expectations and procedures will be conveyed to students and families. It is best to post expectations and procedures in an easily accessible, central location, and practice them in a low-stakes, supportive environment. In a blended environment, it is useful to practice online learning expectations and procedures within the face-to-face environment, where teachers are available to support students.

KEY Elements