



Communicating with students

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Rule 1: Have a dedicated assessment communication space in your VLE

Accept that (many) students are motivated by assessments. Do not stop trying to improve their motivation for deep learning, but to avoid any grief from students who want to know everything they can about the assessment do collate all information you are willing to give them in a specific VLE section. If students then ask, you can just refer them to that section.

Rule 2: Do not communicate anything that is important only through lectures!

If there is any organisational issue, please ensure that you not only communicate these verbally but also in writing and preferably have that information permanently accessible on your VLE. You can of course communicate via email, but, from my own experience I hate trawling through old emails to find some relevant info.

Rule 3: Do not give exam hints

The standard rule should be “all syllabus is examinable”. If you have reasons to exclude a certain part of the syllabus do that very explicitly and not only verbally (rules 1 and 2 apply).

Rule 4: Communicate expectations clearly

Do not assume, especially for early years UG students and for PG students that they know what to do. Students come from very different backgrounds and hence may have very different prior expectations of how to study. Therefore, for the avoidance of any doubts and indeed to help students develop good study habits, do clearly articulate what you expect students to do, and importantly when you expect them to do so. For instance, if you expect students to come with a certain amount of preparation to lectures or tutorials tell them what your expectation is. Once this is clearly communicated you can hold them to it. How do you communicate this? Rules 1 and 2 apply.

Rule 5: Consider using a discussion board

A general rule could be that the larger a class the more useful it would be to use a discussion board (use that provided by your VLE or for instance piazza.com). If you allow students to post questions anonymously you should find that the discussion board can eliminate all content and organisational related emails. And you will soon find out that keeping your email inbox as clear as possible is invaluable. Any questions that do come via email can then be re-directed to the discussion board and repeat questions can then be answered with a short “see the discussion board”.

Rule 6: Clarify your own and your tutor’s role on the discussion board

If you use a discussion board, you should make it clear to students what your role on that discussion board is to be. Will you answer all questions? Will you only review worked answers by students? Will you only give hints on how to proceed? All of the above is possible but it should be clear what you will do. How do you communicate this? Rules 1 and 2 apply.

Rule 7: Be honest but always supportive

There is no point telling a student that “(s)he will be fine” when they come two days before the exam and you realise they have done nothing. But do give (short) advice on how the student may get started with revision. But, if a student has not invested effort there is no expectation that you should invest a lot of time in this.