

Best Practices for an Inclusive Classroom:

The University of Waterloo is committed to fostering an equitable community: one that is safe, welcoming and inclusive. Diversity of people and ideas are key to innovation, which is at the heart of our goals as an institution. Incorporating equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), into your classroom is a crucial step in strengthening the university, and ensuring all students have equal opportunity to participate, contribute and belong.

1. Start your first session with a land acknowledgement.

A land acknowledgement is a statement that names the Indigenous peoples that live(d) on the land we occupy, acknowledges the colonial history/present of the land we are on, and is an important first step towards reconciliation.

An example you can use is: *We acknowledge that we live, work and study on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.*

You can also customize your land acknowledgement so that it specifically relates to the topic and content of your class. You do not need to repeat the land acknowledgement every class, but it is best practice to do it the first time your group is gathered. We also recommend you add the land acknowledgement to your email signature, and if not already completed – suggest to your instructor/professor that they add it to their syllabi.

For more information, please review: [Indigenization at UWaterloo](#), [how to be an ally](#), and [why we do land acknowledgements](#).

2. Respect the preferred or self-identified names of your students.

A preferred name is the name a person would like to be called, that differs from their legal name. Examples of students who might have a preferred name, include (but are not limited to), a trans-student who would like to be identified by a name that correlates with/is more typically associated with their gender identity (e.g., legal name is Petra, but the student would like to be known as Peter). It also might be a student who prefers an anglicized name, or a student who would like to be called a shortened version of their legal name. There are many reasons a student might select a preferred name that is different from their legal name. It is best practice to accommodate students' preferred name. You do not need to understand a student's reason, to refer to them appropriately (by their preferred name).

Provide students with an opportunity to share their preferred name at the start of your first session together if your class size is small enough to do so. If it is not, then invite students to share their preferred name with you after class or via email if it differs from their legal name.

3. Respect the pronouns of your students.

Pronouns are the gendered terms we use to refer to one another (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs). Recognizing and using students' pronouns correctly, and not making assumptions about what gender they identify with based on their name or outward appearance/dress, is vital to creating an inclusive classroom.

Invite your students in the first session to share their pronouns if they are comfortable (it should be optional for students to share) and if your class size is small enough to do so; or invite students to write their preferred name and their pronouns in parenthesis if they feel comfortable, on a name card. E.g. Emily (she/her). Take note of the pronouns your students prefer. If you are comfortable doing so, state your pronouns when you introduce yourself and invite others to say theirs when participating as well. Make it clear that students can also email you, or let you know their preferred pronouns in another setting, and that there is an expectation that everyone respects and uses the correct (self-identified) pronouns of other students in the classroom.

If a student corrects you or informs you that they use different pronouns than the ones you have been using, apologize and commit to using the correct pronouns.

4. Invite students to let you know if they have any accessibility requirements

Some students will have registered with Accessibility Services, but many students do not register, even if they have accessibility needs. Invite students to share with you if they have accessibility requirements, and collaborate with the professor/instructor to accommodate the needs of students where possible.

Other items to consider:

- Consider completing Making Spaces training (to increase LGBTQ2+ allyship), Equity 101, anti-racism training, or other equity related training. A training calendar can be found on the [HREI website](#).

Conclusion:

Students learn best in an environment where they feel respected and included. These practices will help create a classroom culture that allows students to pursue academic excellence, without worrying about the erasure of their identit(ies).

If someone brings attention to an area that inclusiveness is lacking to you, it is unhelpful to be defensive or explain it away. We are all learning and it is best to own up to mistakes made, and try to incorporate what you have learned back into your work as a TA. You do not need to feel guilty – but we do all have a collective responsibility to continue learning and cultivating inclusive spaces for students in our classrooms.

Please feel free to contact the [Equity Office](#) if you have questions or concerns about creating an inclusive classroom, or for more information.

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