

# How to Address Microaggressions in the Classroom

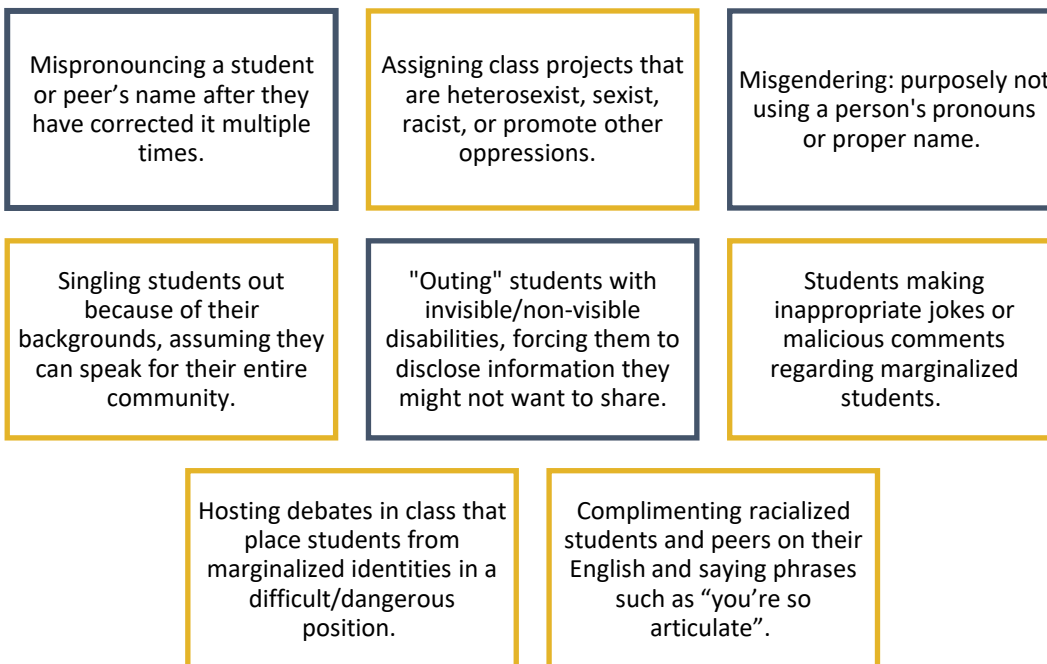
## What Are Microaggressions?

First coined in the 1970s by Dr. Chester M. Pierce, microaggressions were used to explain the subtle insults that Black communities experienced in day-to-day lives (Smith Haghghi, 2022). Since then, the term has been expanded by Dr. Derald Wing Sue to include everyday negative behaviour towards any marginalized group. Wing Sue (2007) defines microaggressions as “*brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group*” (Sue, 2007, p. 271).

Regardless of intention, our actions and words can come from [implicit bias](#). Consequently, it is important to always consider impact. Implicit biases are hard to detect in our own actions and thoughts, so being open to feedback is crucial to accountability and growth. This toolkit will begin to familiarize you with common microaggressive behaviours. As facilitators/instructors, being conscientious about microaggressions enables us to consistently fulfill our responsibility of creating safer and more welcoming spaces. For more information, [visit our website](#).

## Microaggressions in the Classroom

This is a non-comprehensive list of some common microaggressions that could occur in the classroom. Feel free to consult [the Micropedia](#) for more examples.



## How do you Address Microaggressions?

### WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE A MICROAGGRESSION

- Contemplate how you want to react (body language -rolling eyes or nothing in that moment).
- Breathe, Pause, Stay as calm as possible. However, anger is an understandable emotion; give yourself space to feel your feelings.
- If you feel comfortable and safe to do so, calmly but assertively address the person, explaining why what they said/did was harmful.
- Visit supports on campus
  - Counselling Services
  - The EDI-R Intake Form
  - Human Resources
  - WUSA
- Utilize your social support system! (Peers, colleagues, and loved ones)

### WHEN YOU WITNESS A MICROAGGRESSION

- Talk to the person who experienced the microaggression; let them know they are not alone and that the pressure to resolve the harm is not all on them alone. When we are silent, we deny what occurred.
- Return to community guidelines of discussion and dialogue.
  - Hold everyone accountable for their actions and ask for clarification.
  - Explain why the incident is problematic.
  - Support students and peers in critical reflection of the situation.
  - Encourage participation in Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-racism (EDI-R) training.
- Acknowledge the emotions in the room, both visible and invisible.
  - Ask students if they would like to stay in a class or take a break/leave.
  - Have digital resources for counselling or peer mentorship accessible.

### WHEN YOU COMMIT A MICROAGGRESSION

- If you have been called in/out regarding your actions or if you have realized the harm yourself, take accountability for your actions.
- Apologize mindfully: highlight your action and its impact, apologize, improve.
- Do not be defensive when you are called in/out.
  - Denying someone's feelings when they experience harm is invalidating.
- Take time to recognize and reflect on your own biases, behaviours, positionality, and privileges.

## References

Smith Haghghi, A. (2022, March 10). *Microaggressions: Definition, types, and examples*.

Medical News Today. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from

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