



How To Series

Co-Creation of Value

April 2013

Building and Maintaining Rapport in the Classroom

Why Rapport Matters

Rapport – (noun) a relation marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity. Merriam-Webster

Good rapport is characterized by respect, positivity, comfort, and effective communication. All of these things make teaching and learning easier and a more enjoyable experience overall. Strong rapport between instructors and students keeps the energy up throughout the semester, facilitates lively group discussions, and discourages behavioral disruptions. When rapport is good, things just *click*.

In the dynamic modern classroom, rapport cannot be an afterthought. Even the most innovative lesson plans can be rendered ineffective when an instructor does not sync with her or his students. Fortunately, techniques to build and maintain rapport are easy to implement and yield rewarding results.

This paper explores how to prepare for rapport, build it on the first day, and maintain that positive and respectful relationship during the semester and beyond. We have also taken into consideration international teaching faculty, and different challenges they may face while trying to connect with students.

Student Index Card:

Ask your students to write down their basic information. Come up with a question they could answer, too. EX: "Why are you taking this course?" or "What are your career goals?"

Prepping for and Building Rapport

Prepping for rapport happens before class even starts. Consider doing the following as you get ready for a new semester:

- In your syllabus, clearly lay out your course goals and policies, expectations, desired class dynamics (e.g., inquiry, interactivity) and contact information.
- If your class is a reasonable size (e.g., <50), print the course roster and pictures if available, start to become familiar with your students' names and faces before the first class.
- Email your class before your first meeting. Include a thematic question related to the course that you'd like them to answer. Have them email their response back before the first class. Review and discuss some of these on day one.

Everyone knows that first impressions are crucial. The first day of instruction is the perfect opportunity to build strong rapport in the classroom:

- Plan for an [ice-breaker activity](#) so that your students get to know you and each other. Use the class roster you printed out to put faces with names.
- Consider creating a "quiz" about your personal story and academic background. "Grade" the answers as a group so that the activity is engaging and memorable.
- Pass out index cards to collect information about your students. Hang on to these and reference them before you have a one-on-one meeting or reply to an email.

	HIST 101, 8AM Mon.	
Sarah Student		
Junior - Bio major		
sstudent@utk.edu		
I am taking this class as an elective because I really like history documentaries		

Maintaining Rapport

... continued

The key to maintaining rapport lies in demonstrating your passion for the topic and thoughtful concern to your students' learning. Passion is contagious and highly inspirational. Caring is highly reinforcing for building rapport. Individual attention does wonders for a student's confidence. Here are some actions to consider:

- Express your passion for topics covered and the reason for this keen interest regularly throughout the semester. Tie to student interests.
- Arrive early and stay late to chat and/or answer questions. The class for you and interaction with your students begins 10 minutes before the scheduled class time. Just get in the habit of being early.
- Use student names when calling on them. Don't hesitate to ask a name until you know it. Students appreciate the effort to know them.
- Make intentional eye contact with individual students rather than moving your eyes around class. Smile!
- Use self-deprecating humor, personal examples, and cultural references when applicable.
- Be humble and respectful.
- Treat wrong answers as an learning opportunity, encouraging students to review their logic ("That's interesting, tell me what your thinking is behind your answer.")
- Move around. Don't shield yourself with a podium.
- When a student responds, move toward them (but not too close - 5 feet and beyond is good).
- Give immediate verbal feedback to student responses. Encourage further thought. Don't skip around. Help students process their critical thinking.
- Encourage student collaboration through group work. Sit in the formed circles and listen to group discussions.
- Use review of exams as continued learning opportunities. Utilize office hours for specific student objections.

A Additional Resources

["Building Rapport"](#) University of Nebraska-Lincoln
["Building Rapport with Your Students"](#) *Faculty Focus*
["Creating Rapport in the Classroom"](#) Social Psychology Network
["Communicating Effectively with Students"](#) Texas Tech University
["Connecting with Your Students"](#) Cornell University

Reinforcing Rapport

Office hours provide a great opportunity to reinforce rapport with students, whether with an individual or with a group. Use office hours to mentor. Help students resolve questions by raising questions first and then offering alternative ways of thinking.

Hold regular office hours, keep them, and be available by appointment, but also consider holding virtual office hours once a week during the evening. This can be done using Blackboard, a D2L site, or [Google Hangouts](#).

Whether meeting students online or in person, refer to your index cards before the meeting to refresh your memory in order to make a connection to them or their interests.

For a small class, require each student to have a 15 minute conversation with you at the beginning of the semester in your office. Use this time to get to know them. This will relieve their anxiety about approaching you.

Extending Rapport

Often times instructors can make a significant difference in their students lives. Continued communication with students after a course is completed can provide significant benefit to both student and instructor. For example:

- Opportunity to continue on as a professional mentor for the student
- Ability to help forward a student's career by writing letters of recommendation
- Opportunity to work with a student on a research endeavor
- Creation of a felt loyalty that results in a long term commitment to the department (i.e., development)
- Providing an opportunity for students to serve as guest speakers and provide testimonial to the value of the course.

Contact the TennTLC for more information, workshops, or consultations at 974-3807 or tenntlc@utk.edu.
Visit our site: <http://tenntlc.utk.edu>.

Dave Schumann & Lauren McCaugherty (2013)