

Positive Communication in the Classroom

Division of Equity and Inclusion
Office of the Vice President
University of Oregon

The **Open The Front Door (OTFD)** Framework provides a useful tool for affirming positive behavior, redressing problematic behavior and evoking growth in respectful and expansive ways. When conflict arises in the classroom, ignoring and avoiding is the least effective option. Below, please find a positive communication strategy that will build community and facilitate growth for you and your students.

Observe, Think, Feel and Desire represent the four steps in the positive communication framework. By starting with observation of what occurred, the framework, the process allows both people to begin their exploration of the issue at the same place. From there, the framework provides an opportunity to share the impact of what happened in ways that can be heard and received.

Observe: *State in clear, unambiguous language what you see happening.*

Think: *Express what you think or what you imagine others might be thinking.*

Feel: *Express your feelings about the situation.*

Desire: *State what you would like to have happen.*

Applying OTFD to Affirm Positive Behavior:

I noticed (Observe) that you showed up to support your classmate just now.

I think (Think) that you are modeling caring and compassion for all of us.

That makes me as a teacher feel (Feel) good about the way that we are showing up for one another.

My hope (Desire) is that everyone in the class will look for opportunities to show support for someone else this term.

Applying OTFD to Address Awkward, Challenging or Problematic Behavior:

I noticed (Observe) that your voice is rising.

I (Think) that there are some strong reactions to what was said.

Based on our class agreement to learn together as a community, I feel (Feel) strongly that we need to explore what is going on before we move on.

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I am hoping that you can share (Desire) what you are thinking and/or feeling right now so that we can have a conversation and learn from one another.

Follow-up Conversation:

What does the comment bring up for you?

- OR -

Please help us to understand where you are coming from?

- OR -

It appears that you are upset. We care about you and your learning. Help us to understand why?

- OR -

How does this conflict relate to our class material and learning goals?

EXAMPLE 2 (Reference: Pedagogy and Micro-Resistance: A Strategy for College Classrooms, by Jess Dunn, Duquesne University, February 15, 2015.)

Observe:

"I notice that, whenever we are talking about the impact of living in a low income environment on mental health a number of you refer to Brianna." (Brianna is the only African American student in the class. She has mentioned in class, that she was inspired to go into psychology by her mother who is a neurologist.)

Think:

"I think that this might be happening because assumptions are being made about her background based on racial stereotypes that conflate socioeconomic status and race."

Feel:

"I am frustrated that Brianna continues to be spoken about in a way that is inconsistent with her lived experience and I am concerned that important aspects of what we have explored in class so far have not been attended to."

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Desire:

"I want everyone in this class to be seen as a whole and complex person and treated thoughtfully and with respect. I would also like us all to be able to apply the information and ideas that we've discussed in class to our everyday lives and interactions."

When used effectively, OTFD allows us to share and/or surface feelings, emotions and behavior in ways that affirm humanity and encourage growth.

These communications are intended to provide additional tools and strategies for responding to difficult situations in the classroom, and should be read in conjunction with all applicable UO policies including around academic freedom and discrimination complaint and response."

References:

Souza, T.J. (2016). Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: Concrete Strategies for Cooling Down Tension. In Faculty Focus Special Report: Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom. Magna Publication. Souza, T., Vizenor, N., Sherlip, D., & Raser, L.

Transforming conflict in the classroom: Best practices for facilitating difficult dialogues and creating an inclusive communication climate. In P. M. Kellett & T. G. Matyok (Eds.), Transforming Conflict through Communication: Personal to Working Relationships.