

10 Pedagogical Tips to Reduce Student Anxiety

A semester without long breaks due to the pandemic can be challenging for student's mental health. Making simple changes to your course's design can help.



Here are 10 practical suggestions for course design changes that can have a big impact. We encourage you to implement these to help all of our students.



One-word Reaction

At the start of the semester, ask students how they feel about the course in one word. Students might respond with "anxious" or "scared." This can signal your students may need some additional support. You can also use this tip at the beginning of a new week. Follow up on student concerns and assure them that you are on their team.



Communicate Expectations

Communicate expectations about the course early and often. Uncertainty about what is required or how activities will be evaluated can cause undue anxiety. Refine activity instructions and rubrics so students know how they will be graded.



Break Down Big Projects

Instead of a big deliverable, break down a large assignment into smaller deliverables throughout the term. This scaffolding can help minimize procrastination, anxiety, and provide more opportunities for feedback for improvement.



Limit Busywork

Adding assignments "just to check if students are doing the work" creates additional burdens on you and your students. Instead, consider optional or ungraded checkpoint activities that can help check for understanding.



Estimate Time

Estimate how long each required activity or assignment will take students. We recommend posting the times in Canvas to help students manage their workload.

Calculating time estimates can also help to make sure you are assigning appropriate levels of work and the work is relatively even throughout the term.



Give Study Guides

Create and share study guides for your students for major exams and assessments.

The primary advantage of a study guide is that it outlines what students need to review/learn for an exam in a reduced form. Examples include summary sheets, graphic overviews, and guiding questions.



Encourage Study Groups

Connections are particularly important right now. Encourage your students to connect with one another and create study groups.

You can facilitate this through Canvas to help students share their interest, availability, and contact info.



Know Who Can Help

When you see students that are struggling, these campus resources are available to help:

- [Caring Community Connections](#)
- [Dr. Bob Smith Health Center Counseling Services](#)
- [Family Counseling Center](#)



Check-in with Students

Create regular in-class check-ins by asking students about non-subject-matter related topics. You can ask them to share their current favorite song or food, or other fun tidbits.

Also, make a point to touch base with students that might not be participating actively in class (synch or asynch).



Be Flexible and Understanding

While you will need due dates and clear expectations, students are going through a lot right now and they may need some grace. Encourage open communication and ask students to contact you if they are struggling with class.

Ask for feedback from students early and be open to updating the course to work best for your students.