

Best Class/Worst Class

As instructors, most of us feel the need to set some rules and procedures before the start of the semester and include them in the course outline. However, many of the habits and behaviors that help create a good learning environment are more matters of shared norms than rules. The “Best Class/Worst Class” activity is a way to build a shared consensus around some of the daily behaviors that can help build—or inhibit-- cooperation and community. Early in the semester, put a simple grid like this on the board or a slide. Then lead a discussion about what students remember about the behaviors that characterized the “best” and “worst” classes they have attended in the past. If students offer generalizations like “being rude” or “caring about students,” it’s helpful to prompt them for a more specific comment by asking, “What did that look like?” If students are shy about offering ideas, they can work in small groups. Record students’ ideas, prompting for additional ideas where necessary. Feel free to add an idea or two of your own, but don’t take over the activity. Together, decide on several high priority behaviors to embrace and avoid. Circle them. Occasionally refer back to the chart—both when things are going well and not so well.

Instructor’s Actions	Best Class	Worst Class
Students’ Actions	Best Class	Worst Class