



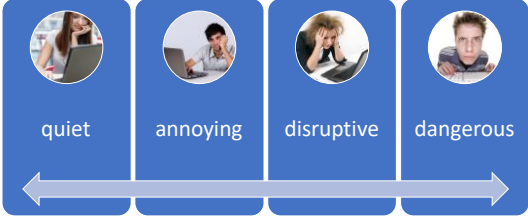
Dealing with "Difficult" Students in the Online Classroom

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It's that time of the year...

- Dying relatives
- Technology malfunctions
- Copy/paste epidemic
- Disappearing students
- Faculty "failures"
- Chronic illness


The continuum of difficulty...



quiet annoying disruptive dangerous

Defining "DIFFICULT" ...

Time-consuming	Disruptive	Annoying	Dishonest
Argumentative	Dangerous	Off-task	Overbearing
Over-achieving	Dramatic	Unmotivated	Disorganized



What "difficult" students do you often see in your classroom?


At the root of the issue...

- Situation { • Students are busy
- Priorities { • Strong emphasis on grades
- Philosophy { • Different outlook on educational process

Situational demands:

Traditional-age college students work an average of 19 hours per week... plus commitments to family, community and friends.


Reliant on technology and multitasking.



Educational priorities:

↑ grades

↓ learning




The result...

Stressed

Panicked

Desperate



Philosophical differences:

Generation	Born (approximately)	Current Age (approximately)
Baby Boomers	1946 - 1964	53 - 71
Gen X	1965 - 1980	37 - 52
Millennials	1981 - 2000	17 - 36
Gen Z	2001 - 2010	7 - 16
? iGen, NetGen ?	2011 - ?	<6

The Beloit College **MINDSET LIST** - Class of 2021

- They are the first generation for whom a “phone” has been primarily a video game, direction finder, electronic telegraph, and research library.
- **In college, they will often think of themselves as consumers, who’ve borrowed a lot of money to be there.**
- In their lifetimes, *Blackberry* has gone from being a wild fruit to being a communications device to becoming a wild fruit again.
- They may choose to submit a *listicle* in lieu of an admissions essay.
- Wikipedia has steadily gained acceptance by their teachers.
- Once on campus, they will find that college syllabi, replete with policies about disability, non-discrimination, and learning goals, might be longer than some of their reading assignments.

Understanding millennial students:

<p>Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short attention span Extremely comfortable with technology Multitaskers Knowledgeable and well-rounded 	<p>Preferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instant gratification Informal and stimulating classrooms Casual, friendly relationship with faculty
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Intensifies the challenge...



How should you deal with difficult students?

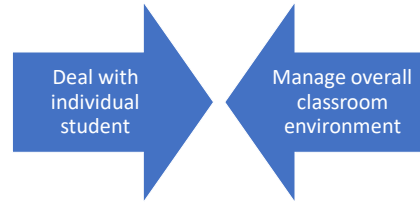


One-Size-Fits-None

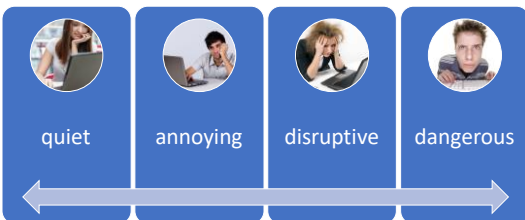
The best approach for dealing with challenging students depends upon the context of the behavior.



A balanced approach:

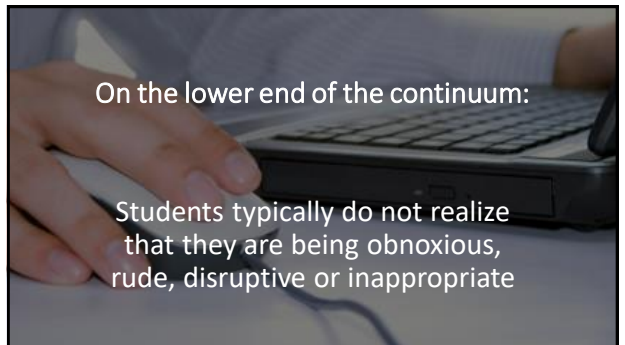


The continuum of difficulty...





On the lower end of the continuum:

Students typically do not realize that they are being obnoxious, rude, disruptive or inappropriate



Online interaction habits:


instant messaging	public chat boards
texting	social networking
email	online forums
blogs	wikis

**What should you do?
How should you deal with difficult students?**

Step #1: Create Clear Policies and Guidelines


- Behavior expectations
- Late policy
- Communication policy
- Instructor roles and responsibilities
- Student roles and responsibilities
- Academic honesty policy
- Institutional policies and procedures



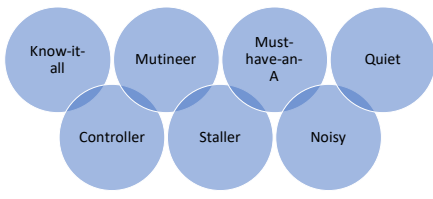
Step #2: Understand Context of Behavior

Shift your perspective:

- Remain calm
- Respond when not emotionally invested
- Focus on student intent rather than behavior
- Model appropriate behavior
- Ask questions and LISTEN
- Be aware of cultural differences
- Avoid labeling student



Step 3: Proactively Shift Focus of Behavior




(Ko & Rossen, 2004)

Know-it-all

Answers questions asked of the instructor so as to contradict rather than add perspective to the discussion.

Key:

- Focus on course content



Know-It-All: Instructor Response

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Answers for instructor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Yes, as highlighted by XXX, my professional experience confirms YYY." • "Although there may be some disagreement by scholars in the field, the general principle I explained remains the leading theory and is the one I would like you to use in this course." |
| Contradicts instructor | |

Mutineer

Complains openly to classmates about what's wrong with the class, and encourages others to do the same.

- Key:**
- **Emphasis on course policies and procedures**



Mutineer: Instructor Response

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Public complaints | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "If you have issues with this course, I welcome you to email or call me so that we can discuss your concerns." • "Please utilize the discussion threads to explore course content; if you would like to discuss course policies or other concerns, contact me privately by phone or email." |
| Encouraging others to complain | |

Must-have-an-A

Declares value of grade and belief that grade is warranted based on past performance or innate ability.

- Key:**
- **Focus on current performance**



Must-have-an-A: Instructor Response

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Criticizes difficulty of course | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Yes, the content of this course can be challenging. I am here as a resource to help you meet the expectations of the course." • "Please see the assignment directions and/or rubrics for details on grading guidelines." |
| Dissatisfied with grade | |

Quiet

Current with assignments, but rarely participates in online discussions and seems to prefer to "learn by lurking."

- Key:**
- **Emphasis on individual attention**



Quiet: Instructor Response

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| No posts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "XXX, what do you think about this theory?" • "Class, I would like to hear from each of you one this question. We can all learn more by sharing our understanding and examples." |
| Minimal interaction | |

Controller

Wants all the assignments in advance, and has to have the first and last word on everything.

- Key:**
- Focus on course schedule



Controller: Instructor Response

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Desires assignments early | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Learning in this course is cumulative; as such, you will be able to more effectively address each assignment when it is released according to the course calendar." • "I appreciate your enthusiasm for the activities in this course. In order to ensure that you have time to fully master each topic, we will all follow the course schedule." |
| Repeatedly argues or prods | |

Staller

Delays logging into the course, and always has an excuse for not getting things done in the same timeframe as other students.

- Key:**
- Emphasis on course policy and learning process



Staller: Instructor Response

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Confused | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This concerns lesson XXX. You might find pages XXX the most useful to guide your attention to the key points." • "This assignment relies on a cumulative understanding of the material up to this point. As mentioned in the previous lecture, this assignment requires you to focus your attention on XXX; review the guidelines for this assignment in the syllabus. If you have specific questions on the details of this assignment, please post your questions here." |
| Frustrated | |

Noisy

Begins new topic threads even though continuing the same topic, or rambles about tangentially related topics.

- Key:**
- Focus on redirecting to key issues



Noisy: Instructor Response


Comments irrelevant to the discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This is an interesting point...we may be able to take a closer look at this in week X. For now, let's focus on XXX." • "What you say about XXX is interesting. But, let's explore the original question a bit more, how would you respond to the comment about YYYY?"
Fails to respond to the questions posed	

Noisy: Instructor Response

Posts lack academic focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "That is an interesting point. Now, let's go a step further to show how XXX relates to YYY as discussed in the textbook." • "Great start here! Now let's take this to the next level. How does this discussion fit into the theories and concepts that we are focusing on this week?"
Comments not tied to course content	

Step 4: Individual Follow-Up

<p>Provide individual attention by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending an email to acknowledge their contributions to the course • Redirecting discussion forums to establish focus 	<p>Establish a balance between authority and overreacting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report abuse or violation of school policy/conduct code • Address concerns individually in private forum; redirect focus in public forum
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Communication strategies:

- Utilize formality
 - signifies seriousness, clarity and firmness
- Focus on the question or issue
- Do not be drawn in by personal comments or challenges
- Keep your focus on the class as a whole; fine tune individual responses from this baseline



Emphasize collaboration:

Express empathy	• Respect the student and practice active listening
Develop discrepancy	• Highlight discrepancy between where students are and where they want to be
Avoid argumentation	• Arguing with students makes them more resistant
Roll with resistance	• Rather than imposing a solution, work with student to generate one

(Ebbling & Van Brundt, 2010)



Step 5: Directly Address Problem Behavior

Difficult conversations:

1. Describe the behavior and its impacts
2. Listen to the student's perspective and response
3. Discuss appropriate behavior
4. Discuss resources to promote success
5. Reiterate or set parameters for future behaviors
6. Share consequences for noncompliance
7. Summarize the conversation
8. Inform of any follow up:
 - Document the conversation and plan
 - Decide who you will inform
 - Check in with the student

(VanBrunt & Bennett, 2012)



Step 6: Utilize Institutional Policies and Procedures

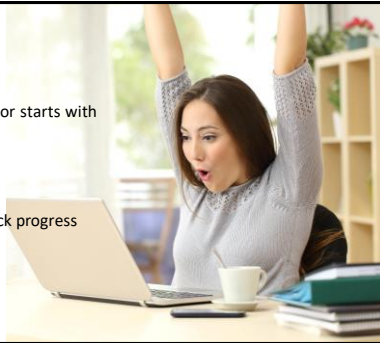
- Notify administrators
- Identify resources
- Document
- Report
- Seek support



Final Thoughts...

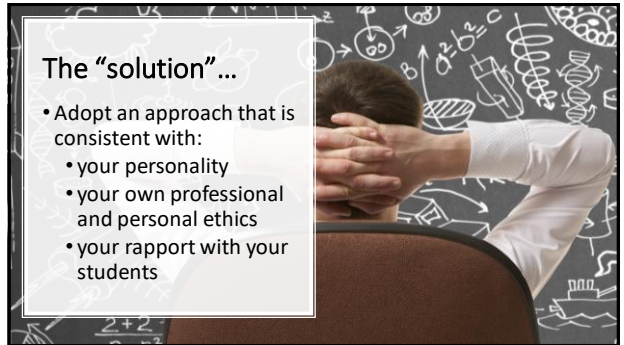
Changing students' behavior starts with changing your own

- Set expectations
- Be respectful and fair
- Reinforce policies
- Allow students to track progress
- Be organized



The "solution"...

- Adopt an approach that is consistent with:
 - your personality
 - your own professional and personal ethics
 - your rapport with your students



Principles into Practice #1

Student Email:

- Your response was less-than-helpful. Thanks for nothing. I will continue trying to figure this out on my own.

Principles into Practice #2

Post to Discussion Board:

- Is anyone else as confused by this as I am? Seriously, all this busywork is a waste of time. I take online classes because I am busy and don't have time to mess around with group projects and other meaningless activities. Don't forget about "ratemyprofessor.com" ... she isn't the only one with power here.

Principles into Practice #3

Student Phone Call:

- I just need you to work with me. My kids have been sick, I was laid off from my job and our Internet isn't working. You don't even seem to want to help me.

Principles into Practice #4

Student Email:

- Your expectations are unrealistic. This is my 6th class and I have never been graded so harshly before. I have gotten all As in my writing classes and been consistently told I am a good writer. I am doing everything you say to do and you are still looking for reasons to take away points.

Principles into Practice #5

Student Email:

- I don't deserve an F on that assignment. I didn't cheat. The Turnitin score is high because I used some of the information that I wrote for another class. That isn't plagiarism because I wrote it. You didn't say that we could re-use our own work. I need you to reconsider my score or I will be forced to contact the department chair. You are being completely unfair.

Principles into Practice #6

Phone Call from Dean:

- I received a phone call from, Sally Jones, a student in your online course. She reported that your grading is inconsistent and unfair. She is particularly concerned that you are "out to get her" and no matter what she does, you will find fault in her work.