

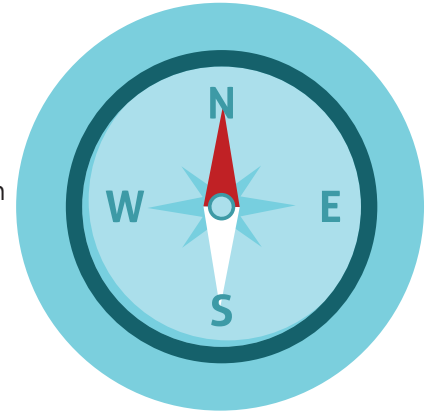
# CREATING AND USING NORMS TO BUILD EFFECTIVE CULTURE



Norms are the agreed upon rules that build a productive, self-driven, and respectful culture. These norms, especially when co-created with students, can serve as the “north star” or guiding philosophy for all that happens in a classroom. While the content is the “what” in a classroom, the norms are the “how” with respect to student engagement and collaboration.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Setting the standard for work ethic, collaboration, and communication allows you and your students to clearly diagnose and devise solutions as problems arise. When norms are co-created, students maintain ownership of the norms resulting in peer monitoring of the class culture. It is important to remember that classroom norms will evolve over time, intentionally or unintentionally, positively or negatively. Without the intentional creation and monitoring of positive, agreed-upon norms, unproductive behavior could lead to unintentional negative class culture.



## WHAT DO I DO?

Recommended steps in co-creating norms with students are as follows:

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
Form teams of three or four students and facilitate a 10 – 15 minute, low stakes collaborative challenge activity like <b>the spaghetti challenge</b> , <b>The index card tower</b> , and <b>the chopstick challenge</b> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to give simple, clear instructions so that students don't need any additional direction in order to succeed. If they ask for more clarity, refer them to a written set of instructions. It's alright if they struggle a little!</li><li>• If your chosen activity has a time limit, post or project the countdown.</li></ul>
Lead the teams in a reflection protocol that focuses on their collaboration. First, students individually reflect on “what made the team successful” and “what were the team's challenges” during the activity.  Then, teammates share with each other their individual reflections, and discuss what happened to create the successes and how obstacles were overcome.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep students in their teams so that they can discuss their reflections during the protocol.</li><li>• Modeling a sincere and substantial reflection for your students can lead to greater depth in student reflections.</li><li>• Elementary Tip: Youngest students will need to reflect as a whole group. You may be able to utilize sentence stems to promote individual or team reflection, but coming together to make sense of it all will be key for younger students.</li></ul>

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
<p>Present the concept of class norms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the analogy to rules and/or laws that we live by.</li> <li>• Provide or ask for an example of a positive norm that was illustrated by teams during the activity.</li> <li>• Elementary Tip: Use whole group readings and corresponding icons or pictures to help make norms concrete for the youngest students.</li> </ul>
<p>Each team uses their reflection and discussion to guide their group in creating a set of norms that will be offered to the whole class for review and revision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally, students can be expected to craft three to five norms.</li> <li>• Ideally, students would write these in a place—paper or digitally—that lends itself to a gallery walk or other method of sharing classwide.</li> <li>• Elementary Tip: Lower grades might produce fewer norms or work as a whole class.</li> </ul>
<p>Each team shares their norms to the class verbally or in a gallery walk and looks for commonalities among the different teams' norms. After reviewing each groups' suggested norms, as a class students condense, prioritize, and refine the norms into a clear concise list which will be posted in the room.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record the teams' norms if the share out is verbal.</li> <li>• Once the class has consolidated and come to a consensus on the list of norms, post the norms in the room for easy reference.</li> <li>• You could also have students sign the norms as a form of social contract to which everyone is agreeing.</li> </ul>

## PRIMARY GRADES CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the suggestions in the insights column for elementary adaptations, here is an idea for how this process as a whole might be modified for preliterate or very young children. Have students draw pictures of a classroom where everyone can learn. Allow students to share or run a gallery walk to see each other's pictures. Guide the class in a discussion where they use the pictures to generate a shared list of simple agreements. The agreements could then be posted on the wall with corresponding symbols as a reminder. Regular check-ins with students during morning meetings could help build understanding and practice with the norms.

## GOT TECH?

Shared digital documents like Google Docs are great collaboration tools for reflection, share outs, and editing of the norms. Websites that offer survey tools, like [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com), are a helpful way to quickly collect student responses to key ideas and words to include in the norms.

## TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS



### **Students don't come up with the appropriate quantity or quality of norms.**

When students are crafting norms, they might not meet your expectations in quality or quantity. Consider modeling how to convert an effective collaboration strategy into a norm (e.g., "In your reflection on the activity, one group mentioned that listening to each other was helpful. So, a norm for collaboration might be 'We will listen to and consider all teammates' ideas'."). Also, collaboration rubrics like those found on [bie.org](http://bie.org) can be used to provide a framework for what good collaboration looks like.



### **Norms are not taken seriously or are mocked by students.**

When students don't respect the norms, class meetings can help confront issues head-on and establish a positive classroom culture. Class meetings about culture also help you to build meaningful relationships with students.

## USING IT THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT

Norms are revisited throughout the project in order to set the tone, reflect on collaboration, and address issues. Expectations for activities, discussions, protocols, and work time are framed by reviewing the norms. An approach to do this might include asking students to give examples of how the norms would be demonstrated in the upcoming activity. Likewise, norms can be reinforced by following up after activities to reflect on how well students embodied

the norms. This could be done anonymously on sticky notes so you get more honest feedback. When issues arise and it's apparent that students have strayed from the norms, reviewing the norms with teams or the whole class reminds students of the shared expectations for the class culture. When it seems like the existing norms can't address the issue, students can propose new norms to add to the list.

Norms are also valuable resources when co-creating rubrics for success skills such as collaboration, communication, and self-management.