

# THE INNOVATORS GUIDE

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## USING RANDOM CALLING TO ALLEVIATE INSTRUCTOR BIAS

Top tips from Ben Wiggins, faculty coordinator for instruction and lecturer in Biology, on best practices to incorporate random calling for a more inclusive and equitable classroom experience.

### 1 Introducing random calling to your classroom

Explain that the goal of random calling is to create a safer space for students to speak in class. “Where everybody is equally likely to be called on, everyone is more active,” says Wiggins. “But more importantly, it really randomizes who is doing the talking”—and who the class hears from.

### 2 Create ground rules and sharing expectations

Inform students about how the process will work, and why you are using it. Explain options for how they can privately opt-out, for how long, and how they can get back on the call list.

### 3 Decide how you will randomize student names

Don't rely on yourself to randomly choose a name; instead, develop a system. Wiggins says it can be as simple as using two dice and a numbered list, or printing a randomized list that you check off in class.

### 4 Lessen anxiety

“For a small percentage of students, the heightened anxiety may go beyond helpful into something that deters their learning,” says Wiggins. Always provide an option for students to voluntarily remove (and also re-add) themselves to the list. Wiggins suggests having students email the professor to do so.

### 5 Value wrong answers

While “passing” on a question should always be an option, instructors who can create a courageous atmosphere find that this happens relatively rarely when the environment is optimized. The first time a randomly called student answers a question incorrectly is vital to setting a tone of discovery rather than accuracy. “Did you convince the student, and the rest of the class, that being wrong is a useful part of the process?” queries Wiggins. Help students learn to navigate and support their arguments. “If you do that, you'll feel the class come around with you and they'll be more engaged on more levels.”

### 6 Remind students of the benefits

Whether it's practicing public speaking and persuasive skills or making mental models transparent, connect the dots for students about the ways this learning method benefits them. “Their initial discomfort is often balanced out by the benefits,” Wiggins says. “Keep it relevant for students, if only through your own comments about process throughout class.”

*Read more about research on gender gaps in the classroom in [What is your class telling you?](#), part of the Innovators Among Us series at [uw.edu/trends/innovators](http://uw.edu/trends/innovators).*