

Tips for Encouraging Help Seeking



CSTeachingTips.org/Tips-for-Encouraging-Help-Seeking

1 Remind students about resources
to set the expectations that everyone will need help.

I hope you'll come to my office hours tomorrow at ...

2 Embrace your mistakes
to show that everyone makes mistakes.

Thanks for catching my mistake!

3 Hold help sessions in public places
to reduce power differentials and encourage attendance.

I hope you'll stop by office hours in the computer lab tomorrow.

4 Structure collaboration
to help all students develop a peer network.

You'll work with your assigned partner in class today.

5 Introduce the growth mindset
to help students reflect on their learning process.

You might be afraid to make mistakes, but mistakes are important!

6 Use Piazza for Q&A
to provide an anonymous Q&A forum.

You can always post your questions on Piazza!

7 Email students with low grades
to communicate you care and believe they can learn.

I noticed you didn't turn in the last homework assignment.

csteachingtips

1

Remind students about resources

Consider reminding students about opportunities for help at the beginning or end of every lecture. It takes only a few seconds and can increase attendance and make up for the fact that students often forget the timing and location of help.

2

Embrace your mistakes

When you make a mistake in class, acknowledge it and try to not appear embarrassed. These situations provide an opportunity to model that you can learn from mistakes and they are a normal part of computer science and the learning process.

3

Hold help sessions in public places

Many students report that going to a faculty member's office for help is intimidating. If you hold office hours in a public space like a computer lab, students can work on their homework and get help when needed. A lab can also provide more space so you can rotate around the room helping students. It can also be helpful to be able to leave at the end of your office hours without having to kick students out of your office.

4

Structure collaboration

Some of your students will start the class with a strong peer-support network. To ensure that all students have access to an informal support network, provide structured collaboration opportunities where students can get to know each other. For example, you can assign groups or require interaction between students in class. I also encourage students to exchange contact information to try to remove the social stigma of asking their peers for their contact information.

5

Introduce the growth mindset

Research by Carol Dweck and other social psychologists shows that students pursue more effective learning strategies when they see intellectual abilities as malleable (i.e., have a growth mindset) rather than innate (i.e., have a fixed mindset). Students with a growth mindset are more willing to learn from mistakes and challenge themselves. It can be helpful to tell students about this research to encourage them to adopt a growth mindset and to acknowledge that a fear of "looking stupid" is common.

6

Use Piazza for Q&A

The website Piazza.com offers a Q&A forum with minimal overhead. Students can post questions anonymously and I am often surprised how many students take advantage of this opportunity. Additionally, students can contribute answers to questions and instructors can easily see what questions haven't been answered.

7

Email students with low grades

Consider emailing students who received a low grade on an exam or homework assignment. Your email can encourage the student to make use of available resources. It can be helpful to express confidence in your student's ability to learn to motivate them and decrease the stigma of poor performance. You can use mail merge to save time without the email appearing impersonal.