

# Building Connections in the Classroom

The first day of class has passed – and your students are eager to learn. But how can we sustain that enthusiasm as the semester progresses? One meaningful route: cultivate connections with and between your students.

As an instructor, you have a unique opportunity to create a learning space that is a hub of connection and belonging, while also recognizing and acknowledging that students are returning with different levels of comfort or anxiety about being back.

In a [September 2022 Faculty Focus article](#), clinical psychologist and counsellor Stacy Roth emphasizes how kindness, compassion, and encouragement are crucial to cultivating connections. She outlines practical ways to put this into practice:

1. *Ask students, “How are you doing?”* Intentional check-ins gauge how students are doing before class starts. Periodically point them to practices and resources that help support their well-being throughout the semester. This increases student comfort in the classroom. Moreover, it enhances their curiosity about the course content. UofG’s [Wellness Education and Promotion Centre](#) is one such campus resource where students can focus on supporting each other.
2. *Allow students to get to know each other.* Encourage class engagement where students have opportunities to interact and exchange ideas around course content. Check out some strategies through the OTL’s web resources on [active learning for in-class sessions](#) or [remote courses](#).
3. *Engage students to find themselves in the process of learning.* Consider creating assignments that allow students to reflect and connect on the course content in ways that will be meaningful to them individually and gives them a sense of belonging in your course. Such assignments may help reiterate learning objectives and attune students to the process of learning. Consider OTL’s resources on authentic and alternative assessments for [in-person](#) and [remote](#) learning.
4. *Enable students to reflect and give feedback.* [Gathering mid-semester feedback](#) about six weeks into the term gives students an opportunity to reflect on their learning process and share suggestions on where they think things are working well, and how they might see ways to better connect and belong in your course. This could help you identify some areas to strengthen connection.
5. *Give students a chance to connect with you* through your in-person or virtual office hours. Consider renaming office hours to something more welcoming, such as “student hours.” Remind students how these hours enhance their university experience, not only academically, but in building connections with you as their instructor.

How has it been reconnecting with students? We would love to hear about your experiences. You can reach out to us at [otl@uoguelph.ca](mailto:otl@uoguelph.ca)

