

Teaching in Masks: Common Questions and Recommendations

Will students be able to hear me with a mask on?

Generally, most faculty and students report that instructors can still be heard through their masks. It has always been important to project when speaking to students in the classroom and this becomes even more essential while teaching with a mask.

Proximity to your students is also key. In larger rooms, when students are sitting farther away, or in larger classes with more background noise, using a microphone makes a considerable difference. Additionally, facing students, standing closer to students, speaking slowly, and articulating clearly all also help students better comprehend their instructor. Current literature also suggests that using exaggerated body language (eye movements, hand gestures, head nods, and shoulders shrugs) can improve communication while wearing a mask.

Where possible, try to avoid solely relying on talking when instructing students and use more visual aids and materials like slides and handouts. This can be especially helpful when giving instructions. Talking through written instructions can make sure all students have access to them and can refer to them as needed. Throughout the class session, pause for questions and frequently check in with students to confirm they can hear and understand you.

Pay particular attention to students who require special hearing accommodations. Accessibility should be at the forefront of your mind. Make sure to speak with these students about their situations and be willing and open to their feedback and suggestions.

Will I be able to hear my students if they are wearing masks?

Like instructors, most students report that they can still hear other students when they speak in class while wearing masks. However, the best practice for instructors is to repeat students' questions or rephrase comments for the entire class. This not only ensures that all students hear the questions being asked, but it also helps to make certain that the instructor has understood their students' comments or questions correctly.

After the 6ft social distancing guidelines were removed, students working in small groups reported they could typically hear one another apart from situations with excessive background noise. As such, when assigning small group exercises in your classroom you should ask each group to spread themselves out around the room to improve their ability to hear one another and give them with the freedom to speak louder without impacting another group nearby.

What if one of my students is not wearing a mask properly (or at all)?

Instructors may want to send a welcome announcement to students prior to the first day of classes reminding students that they will be required to wear a mask in class.

Instructors should also model proper mask etiquette as students will be more likely to follow this rule if they lead by example. As always, make sure to wear masks so that they fully cover the nose and mouth, and avoid taking masks off unless drinking water.

The Provost's office has also provided Faculty Guidance for Non-Compliant Student Behavior:

In the event that a student will not comply with social distancing or wearing of a face covering or other required behaviors in the classroom, the instructor will follow the process described below.

- Ask the student to correct their behavior. This may involve determining if there is a reason why the student is unable to comply with the request, for instance, they may not have a mask. If a solution to the problem can be easily identified, and the Instructor is able to assist the student in complying, such as directing them as to where to find a mask, they will do so.
- If the student will not correct their behavior, inform the student that they will be referred to Student Conduct, because they are not complying with the faculty member's request and the University's mask requirements.
- If the student still will not correct their behavior, the instructor should ask the student to leave the classroom.
- If the student will not leave the classroom, the instructor will call Public Safety to have the student escorted from the classroom and send a report of the incident to Student Conduct:
https://drexel.edu/studentlife/community_standards/reporting-student-misconduct/

Are some masks better to teach in than others?

When choosing a mask for teaching, instructors should keep [CDC recommendations regarding masks](#) in mind, as well as [Drexel University policy](#). Additionally, when selecting a mask for teaching you may want to make this choice based on personal preference and/or style, however, [there is some evidence that medical masks may block less sound than others](#). For courses or disciplines such as language or speech where being able to see one's mouth is more critical, the instructor and/or students should [consider using clear masks](#).

Finally, here are some additional resources that may help with mask selection:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>
- New York Times, Wirecutter: <https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/reviews/best-cloth-face-masks/>
- Inside Higher Ed Article on effectively teaching gin masks: <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/08/26/effective-ways-teach-person-mask-opinion>
- Story on using face mask brackets for teaching: <https://www.today.com/shop/face-brackets-masks-t190588>