

12 Communication Roadblocks

Roadblock	Description	Example...
Judgment Statements		
Criticizing (negative criticism)	Making a negative evaluation of the student, their actions, or attitudes.	“You’ve brought this on yourself...” “You’ve got nobody else to blame for the mess you are in.”
Name-calling (shaming, ridiculing, labeling)	“Putting down” or stereotyping the student. Prevents students from getting to know themselves and other individuals: there is no longer a person before the person - only a type.	“What a dope!” “You are just like a [insert stereotype]” “How typical, just like a [insert stereotype]”
Diagnosing	Analysing why a student is behaving as they are; playing amateur psychiatrist. Often called “playing emotional detective” where students’ are probed for hidden motives, psychological complexes and the like.	“I can read you like a book - you are just doing that because you have poor time management skills.” “Just because you were top of your class in higher school doesn’t mean you’re the best in class.”
Praising Evaluatively	Making a positive judgment of the student, their actions, or attitudes.	“You are always such a good student!” “You are a great designer!”
Sending Solutions		
Ordering	Commanding the other person to do what you want to have done. Ultimately a solution sent coercively and backed by force. Orders can imply the student’s judgment is unsound and thus can undermine their self-esteem.	“You need to write 500 words by tomorrow and send it through to me by 3:00pm. That’s my final instructions.”
Threatening	Trying to control the student’s actions by warning of negative consequences that you will instigate. The solution is sent with an emphasis on the punishment that will be forthcoming if the solution is not implemented.	“You need to do this or else...” “Stop that noise right now or I will keep the whole class after school.”
Moralising	Telling students what they <i>should</i> do. Preaching at the other. An attempt to back one’s ideas with the force of social, moral or theological authority. Often these statements contain “shoulds” and “oughts”. It can fosters anxiety, arouses resentment, can prevent honest self-expression, and invites pretense.	“You shouldn’t do that style for your drawings like that, it’s such an outdated trend.” “You should be putting all your attention onto your university work, since you’re only a student at the moment and that’s your job.”
Excessive/Inappropriate Questioning	Closed-ended questions are often barriers in a relationship; these are those that can usually be answered in a few words - often with a simple yes or no. The risk is that it becomes a conversation-stopper	“When did it happen?” “Are you sorry that you did that?” “Are you sure you tried hard enough?”
Advising	Giving the student a solution to their problem(s). In a negative context, it can be a basic insult to the intelligence of the student. It implies lack of confidence in the capacity of the student with the problem to understand and cope with the challenges.	“If I were you, I’d do this...” “That’s an easy one to solve! First of all...”
Avoiding the Other Person’s Concerns		
Diverting	Pushing the student’s problems aside through distraction.	“Oh don’t dwell on this, lets have a look at something that you have done well.” “You think that’s hard! Let me tell you what it’s like in the real world!”
Logical Argument	Attempting to convince the other with an appeal to facts or logic, usually without consideration of the emotional factors involved.	“Look at the facts, if you had actually done the readings then you know the answer to this question.”
Reassuring	Trying to stop the student from feeling the negative emotion they are experiencing.	“Don’t worry, this mark isn’t all that bad and other people did worse!” “It’s not a big deal, it’s only worth a small amount of marks and in the it’ll be alright.”

Table. 12 Communication Roadblocks (adapted from [Bolton, 1987](#))