

Featured Article

Disruptive Learners Part I: The Interrupter & Co-Pilot

[The Difficult Student](#)

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Disruptive learners interrupt the flow of the class and distract both the instructor and other students. There are four main types of disruptive learners: the Interrupter, the Co-pilot, the Class Clown and the Chatterbox.

The Interrupter

As the name implies, the Interrupter spends the duration of the training session interrupting you ... over and over and over again. Interrupters act as if they are the only students enrolled in the class. You are there to answer all of their questions, listen to their suggestions and explain any topic as long as it takes them to understand, regardless of your plans for the session or the other students' needs. Just as you begin explaining how to do something, the Interrupter has a question about something completely unrelated. You ask the students to try it one way and the Interrupter wants to know why the class isn't doing it the way her children showed her. You ask the students a question and the Interrupter always shouts out the answer before anyone else has a chance to participate.

Interrupters, and Disruptors on the whole, try the patience of trainers more than any other group of students, as they monopolize class time and behave inconsiderately throughout the training session. Everyone misses out when an Interrupter takes a seat in your class.

- Direct questions to specific students so that everyone has a chance to participate.
- If the Interrupter is asking a question that doesn't fall within the scope of the class material, express regret that you simply don't have enough time to discuss it during the session. Suggest that the student review the class list and sign up for alternative courses.
- If the Interrupter has lots and lots of questions and you offer one-on-one training, suggest that the student take one-on-one training so that you will be better able to answer the student's questions.
- Announce at the beginning of class that the timetable is going to be tight and that, unfortunately, questions will need to be kept to a minimum. But do let students know that if they don't understand something, they should let you know.
- While the Interrupter is talking, subtly busy yourself with a task so that the student gets the message that you are moving on.

The Co-Pilot

The Co-Pilot thinks that he/she is knowledgeable enough to co-lead the course. You suggest students try one method; the co-pilot suggests another. You describe your qualifications; the co-pilot feels compelled to inform everyone of his/her skills and work history. Co-Pilots, also commonly referred to as Know-It-Alls, are often teachers or retired teachers. Being in the student's chair is not easy for them and they must let everyone know that they are just as skilled, if not more skilled, than the trainer.

Co-pilots are often very challenging students for trainers. It is difficult not to take their constant "suggestions" as "criticisms". The co-pilot's lack of self-awareness and self-control can prove very frustrating to the trainer, who is trying to lead the course but whose authority and knowledge is being challenged at every turn.

- Acknowledge the co-pilot's suggestions as excellent alternatives but that for simplicity's sake you would like everyone to complete the exercises together and in the same way.
- As a pre-emptive strategy, announce at the beginning of the class that even though there are many ways to perform most online tasks that you have chosen what you feel to be some of the easiest methods for using a computer. If students choose to use an alternative method outside of the classroom, that's perfectly fine and understandable.
- If the co-pilot actually has some helpful suggestions and seems more skilled than some of the other students, use him/her as a teaching assistant and sit him/her with students who need a little extra help.
- If the co-pilot interrupts time and time again, use some of the strategies listed above for the Interrupter, the last resort being a private discussion where you discuss the problematic behaviour with the student (ensure that you begin the discussion by expressing gratitude for the co-pilot's input).
- if possible, try to use the co-pilots in your class to your advantage. It is better to keep them happy instead of alienating them.

[Continue to Part II >>](#)

References

Dealing with Monopolizing, Distracting and Withdrawing Behaviours. The Center for Teaching Excellence <<http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/teachingettes/monopolizingstudents.html>>
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