

Guidelines for the Use of Mobile Computing and Communications Devices in Classes at McGill

More and more students are using mobile computing and communications (MC2) devices in class, and some instructors and students find this inappropriate or distracting. Therefore, the APC Subcommittee on Teaching and Learning struck a work group to propose a framework for the use of MC2 devices in classes at McGill. These guidelines – based on best practices of peer institutions, a comprehensive literature review, a survey of McGill instructors and students, and extensive consultation – were unanimously endorsed by APC at its meeting of May 27, 2010.

Introduction

Instructors are encouraged to discuss their expectations about the use of MC2 devices openly with the class, and provide a statement about the nature of MC2 usage permitted, a rationale for their choice of usage permitted, and how non-compliance will be handled. Instructors are free to change their guidelines during the term, with the expectation that any changes will be discussed with students.

Students are reluctant to formally complain about behaviour by their peers that they find distracting in class; however, they should be encouraged to inform the instructor of any concerns that they may have, or that may develop over the term, about the use of such devices in class. This is not in the spirit of “getting someone in trouble,” but rather helping the instructor create an atmosphere conducive to learning for all.

Sample wording

The texts in italics below provide a range of sample wording that may be used or adapted by instructors on their course outlines and form the basis of class discussion.

I-Common to all courses

1. All McGill policies must be respected at all times; those of particular relevance are highlighted.
The use of MC2 devices must, in all cases, respect policies and regulations of the University, including in particular the following:
 1. The [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#);
 2. The [Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities](#);
 3. The [Policy on the Responsible Use of McGill IT Resources](#).
2. Due to the potential use of MC2 devices for recording and voice communication, such use is not permitted without explicit permission.
No audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.
MC2 devices are not to be used for voice communication without the explicit permission of the instructor.

II-Options for level of usage

Instructors have flexibility for establishing the level of usage they will permit in class. It is advisable to establish the permissible conditions early and explicitly. Three main options exist:

1. Allowed under specified conditions;
2. Allowed as long as not disruptive¹, and;
3. Not allowed at all.

1. **Allowed under specified conditions**

Mobile computing and communications devices are permitted in class under the following condition(s):” (choose as applicable)

- a. *As negotiated by the class; (note that an open discussion with students can help create a sense of community and contribute to ensuring individual and collective good classroom experiences.);*
- b. *When “No technology time” is not in effect;*
- c. *Only for the specified use; e.g., note taking, consulting online resources, clickers;*
- d. *In specific locations; e.g., right or left side of the room;*
- e. *On a case-by-case basis:*
 - *Each individual student obtains permission*
 - *Certain events may be exceptions to the usage generally permitted; e.g., guest speaker.*

2. **Allowed as long as not disruptive**

Mobile computing and communications devices are permitted in class insofar as their use does not disrupt the teaching and learning process.

3. **Not allowed at all**

Mobile computing or communications devices are not permitted to be used in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.

Note that the [Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities](#) must always be respected.

¹ Note that disruptive behaviour is, to some extent, situationally defined. If the behaviour is persistent and prevents the instructor and/or other students from focussing on the class work, it is deemed to be disruptive.

III-Rationales for different levels of usage

Students are more likely to respect usage permissions if they are provided with a clear rationale. There are three broad categories of rationales:

1. Respect;
2. Freedom from distraction, and;
3. Course design.

1. Respect

In support of individual and collective positive classroom experiences, there must be respect for:

- a. Fellow students;
- b. The instructor.

2. Freedom from distraction

In support of individual and collective positive classroom experiences, there must be freedom from distraction for:

- a. Fellow students;
- b. The instructor.

In addition to the potential for others to be distracted, instructors may wish to discuss with their students the potential for the students themselves to be distracted from class activities when engaging in non-class related activities on their MC2 devices.

3. Course design

The course design has intentionally been structured to allow or disallow the use of mobile computing and communications devices in clearly identified ways.

IV-Handling non-compliance

When there are issues in class, instructors should make every effort to talk with the student(s) involved, either during class or afterwards; the rationale presented for the usage permissions may provide a useful context for this discussion.

If instructors are experiencing problematic behaviours in class, they are encouraged to discuss the issue with colleagues, the departmental or unit director, the Associate Dean of their Faculty, the Dean of Students, or a member of Teaching and Learning Services.

Depending on the circumstances, non-compliance may lead to disciplinary action pursuant to the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#).