

***Hello! Goodbye!* Sharing salutations and valedictions with students in the university classroom**

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Abstract

In this opinion piece, I passionately argue that effective lecturer-student relationships at university may be nurtured through the simple sharing of salutations (greetings) and valedictions (farewells). To promote this as an integral feature of instructor practice, I offer a suite of practical strategies for reader selection/adaptation. Informed by academic literature, I encourage readers to be mindful of/responsive to select *Hello! Goodbye!* considerations so as to positively enhance lecturer connections with students at all levels and in a variety of university classroom contexts.

Keywords: Greetings, farewells, instructor-student relationships, higher education

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a surge of academic/professional interest in lecturer-student relationships in higher education (HE) (Hagenauer *et al.*, 2023) which stems from a national and international recognition of their effect on student engagement, academic performance and overall satisfaction (Bell, 2022). Traditionally held views of “*teachers ‘teaching’ and students ‘learning’*” (Meng and Kong, 2025, p.44) are being replaced by a contemporary appreciation of these relationships being based on shared “*equality, respect, trust and effective communication*” (*ibid.*, p.48). In response to this, an important question is being asked: “*How to build such a teacher-student relationship?*” (*ibid.*, p.48). My varied practice in education as an early years-primary school teacher/international trainer/academic (current) confirms my belief that respect and communication (as per the above) can be stimulated by sharing salutations and valedictions (S&V) with university students at all levels and in a variety of HE classrooms¹. Though mine is an English context, what I explore in this opinion piece has relevance to HE institutions globally.

¹ These include small lectures, seminars, workshops and tutorials.

S&V: a brief exploration

The word *salutation* is defined by Oxford Languages (2025) as “a gesture or utterance made as a greeting or acknowledgement of another's arrival or departure”. This description emphasises points at which these salutations may be expressed: at-the-start (as a welcome) and at-the-end (as a farewell). For accuracy purposes, I will use *valediction* to distinguish those ‘gesture[s] or utterance[s]’ (*ibid.*) which signal partings or exits. S&V generally fall into two main types:

- formal – when interacting with those you do not know well, e.g., an employer or someone of high authority;
- informal – when interacting with individuals you know well, e.g., friends or relatives.

A third type – semi-formal – rests between the two, offering a balance of friendliness and formality which I believe is appropriate for lecturers to embrace with their students, especially at the postgraduate taught/research level.

Instructors may communicate their greetings and farewells in various ways: written (e-mails), non-verbal (smiles) and verbal (“Hello!”); the discussion below focuses its attention on the latter two, offering illustrative examples in table 1 for reader reflection (*Which of these do I already use in my current practice? Which of these might I consider using in my future practice?*).

Verbal ²		Non-verbal ³
Salutations	Valedictions	
“Hello [everyone]!”	“Goodbye!”/“Bye [bye]!”	Smiles
“Good morning/afternoon/evening!”	“Thank you [very much]!”	Head nods
“Welcome [everybody]!”	“Safe journey home!”	Eye contact
“Hey there!”/“Hi!”	“Do look after yourself/selves!”	Bows
“Good to see you!”	“Best wishes!”	Hand actions, e.g., thumbs up, handshakes and waves
“It’s great you are here today!”	“I look forward to seeing you [all] next week/next time!”	
“How are you?”	“[Do] Take care!”	

Table 1. Verbal and non-verbal S&V: illustrative examples.

² For other examples, see Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (n.d., pp.1-3).

³ For other examples, see Puppel and Rozpendowska (2021, pp.222-232).

Though some readers may regard the content of table 1 as a collection of “*mundane and empty expressions*” (Algharabali *et al.*, 2019, p.15)/silent gestures, I firmly believe, with support from relevant literature, that instructors should never underestimate their value.

S&V: their importance

Shields-Lysiak *et al.* (2020, p.41) assert that classroom greetings from instructors (by way of example) “*offer more than a simple hello*” to their learners; they

- “*welcome students in and signal that they matter*” (*ibid.*, p.41);
- promote belonging, inclusion and socio-emotional well-being;
- build community;
- nurture an ethos of care.

Research studies empirically reinforce and extend these assertions, collectively highlighting the positive influence that S&V may have on both students and lecturers, as illustrated in figure 1.

Positively greeting students serves as “ <i>a simple, low cost, antecedent intervention, for promoting [student] engagement and reducing the risk of disruptive behaviour at the beginning of lessons</i> ” (Bowring and Toogood, 2019, p.38).	
Social interactions in the classroom, e.g., “ <i>instructors simply greeting students at the door, resulted in more interest/enjoyment in the class, and greater feelings of relatedness and belonging</i> ” (Sandstrom, 2023, p.8).	Research by Algharabali <i>et al.</i> (2019, p.15) found that “ <i>both students and teachers strongly believe that exchanging greetings [and farewells] are a crucial part of classroom interaction as [they lead] to the overall success of the relationship between them</i> ”.
Saying goodbye “ <i>represents a[n...] opportunity for valuable academic and emotional closure for both students and instructors at the end of a challenging [session]</i> ” (Styles and Polvi, 2022, p.2).	

Figure 1. The positive influence of S&V at the university level: select research findings.

Despite these benefits, I recognise both anecdotal and research evidence which suggests ‘non-greeting/non-farewell’ behaviours [my words] to be commonplace in many university classrooms: lecturers’ failing to acknowledge students upon arrival/departure, skipping personal interactions and not making eye contact before/after tutor instruction (Valestrand *et al.*, 2024). There are numerous reasons for the above, such as time and logistics, lecturer personality, individual teaching style and the perceived (negative) effect on the learning environment. To counter these behaviours and reasons, table 2 offers readers a suite of my own strategies for selection/adaptation in order to make S&V an integral feature of instructor practice.

Salutations	Valedictions
Sing “Good morning!” using different voices as select students enter the lecture hall.	Say “Goodbye!” to the whole class at the end of the taught session, this being prompted by your lecturing notes.
Offer a verbal “Welcome!” to individual students as you hand them a paper register/pen to record their seminar attendance.	Stand near to your office door as a student leaves their personal tutor meeting, saying “Bye!” in their mother tongue.
Ask “How are you doing today?” to a group of students seated round a table as you circulate the classroom, distributing tangible resources (sticky notes/pens) for the workshop.	Offer non-verbal gestures (head nods or hand waves) to students who independently say ‘Goodbye’ to you as you clear away at the end of a seminar.
Say “Hello, X [student’s name]!” as late comers enter the classroom after the teaching session has begun.	Make a point of saying “Enjoy the rest of your day/evening!” once the questions of individual students have been answered, after the hybrid lecture.
Play <i>Pass the Greeting!</i> : Greet one student verbally and say “[Your own name] says ‘Hello!’ – please pass it on!”, inviting students to greet a peer as they enter and settle in the lecture hall.	Display a ‘Goodbye’ image (static or animated, such as a GIF) as students exit the seminar space.

Table 2. Sharing S&V with students in the university classroom: strategies for readers to select from/adapt.

S&V: key considerations

I hope some readers will use the examples in table 1 in their own practice and/or embrace/adapt the strategies in table 2. They should, however, be mindful of three key *Hello! Goodbye!* considerations: preparedness, variables and preferences.

1. Preparedness: Lecturers are encouraged to plan the sharing of S&V with their students, creating time in taught sessions by setting up beforehand (wherever possible) and responding to personal reminders in their lecture notes/on presentation materials.
2. Variables: Nilsson *et al.* (2020, p.1) argue that instructors should actively recognise the following in their students:
 - a. “*social variables such as age, gender and participant roles*” (e.g., generational differences in acceptable greeting behaviours);
 - b. “*situational variables such as medium, [nation/]region and venue*” as these will affect both the greeting/farewell choices that lecturers make and the likely responses students make to them. A simple acknowledgement, like “Thanks!”, a sign of implied indifference (a shrug of the shoulders) or failure to engage (eye aversion) are each likely to have differing effects.
3. Preferences: Instructors ought to tailor their greetings/farewells to the level of formality that students may prefer in their relationship with the lecturer, e.g., “*students from Europe or Asia prefer more formal relationships, whereas Australian students appear to be more informal and open*” (Hagenauer *et al.*, 2023, p.829).

Conclusion

I have argued in this opinion piece that instructors should incorporate S&V into their practice if they wish to foster positive working relationships with their students. The sharing of S&V with students helps to nurture a more welcoming and positive classroom environment and that, in turn, enhances student engagement and well-being. I truly believe that these greetings and farewells signal that lecturers are showing respect for students, valuing them and including them and, in doing so, are contributing to a sense of belonging and community within the learning space. S&V provide opportunities for instructors to build relationships with and acknowledge individual students, especially when they know and use their names. Where/if it is not possible for lecturers to “*intentionally learn and use student names*” (Townes O’Brien *et al.*, 2014, p.114), I believe that instructors can/should offer each of their students a sincere greeting and a warm goodbye *where possible*, being ever mindful of/responsive to cultural sensitivities (Wei and Zhang, 2023).

Than (2020, p.388) suggests that “[w]hen a student perceives that he is welcomed and wanted in the classroom, he is more likely to be engaged and motivated”. I believe that the same is true of farewells. I recently received a huge round of applause from a class of predominantly international postgraduate taught students. *Why did this happen?* Prior to the last taught session, I actively sought out the nationality of each student in the class and learned how to say ‘thank you’ and ‘goodbye’ to all of them in their respective mother tongue. The surprise/joy on their faces was clear proof that “[t]aking the time to say ‘good bye’ and ‘thank you’ to students can be very effective” (Eggleston and Smith, 2002). Some readers may question the

practice described above: *How realistic is it for me to know multiple languages (even to learn a few salutations and valedictions)? Where is the time for me to find out every single student background? What if I (inadvertently) say/do 'the wrong thing' with mixed groups from a multitude of backgrounds?* If you feel daunted, a simple alternative might be to invite willing students to learn how to say 'hello', 'thank you', and 'goodbye' in a different language, verbally sharing these with their peers on an individual/group/whole class basis, as and when appropriate.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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