

EXAMPLES OF DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

The following are examples of guidelines you can distribute to students as good ground rules for classroom discussion. You may also distribute guidelines as a discussion starter and decide as a class which ones to implement, or ask students to generate ideas together during class and create a classroom contract (Example 4) that students can sign and submit.

EXAMPLE 1: Guidelines for Class Participation

1. Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. Challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
 2. Listen carefully to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should reflect that you have paid attention to the speaker's comments.
 3. Be courteous. Don't interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking.
 4. Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
 5. Allow everyone the chance to talk. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit; if you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion.
 6. If you are offended by something or think someone else might be, speak up and don't leave it for someone else to have to respond to it.
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EXAMPLE 2: Guidelines for Dialogue

1. **Confidentiality.** We want to create an atmosphere for open, honest exchange.
 2. **Our primary commitment is to learn from each other.** We will listen to each other and not talk at each other. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values. We realize that it is these very differences that will increase our awareness and understanding through this process.
 3. **We will not demean, devalue, or "put down" people** for their experiences, lack of experiences, or difference in interpretation of those experiences.
 4. **We will trust that people are always doing the best they can.**
 5. **Challenge the idea and not the person.** If we wish to challenge something that has been said, we will challenge the idea or the practice referred to, not the individual sharing this idea or practice.
 6. **Speak your discomfort.** If something is bothering you, please share this with the group. Often our emotional reactions to this process offer the most valuable learning opportunities.
 7. **Step Up, Step Back.** Be mindful of taking up much more space than others. On the same note, empower yourself to speak up when others are dominating the conversation.
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EXAMPLE 3: Ideas for Our Interactions

- Recognize and/or remember that we have different backgrounds.
 - Listen and also share. Share briefly from your own experiences when appropriate, rather than simply your positions.
 - Build on your classmates' comments. Acknowledge them, even if you disagree with them.
 - Be careful not to generalize about people.
 - Use "I" statements to state your views. For example, "I notice that when I'm with my friends we pay attention differently" is more constructive than "When you're with friends you pay attention differently."
 - Respond to what is said in class, without attributing motivation to the speaker (this can be very challenging).
 - Consider the difference between responding to express yourself and responding to get an idea across to people who have different preconceptions than yours.
 - Consider who gets left out, who is marginalized, under-represented, or erased by particular claims. So, for example, we could say, "That's an image of an ideal family," or we could say, "That may be an image of an ideal family for many middle-class white heterosexuals."
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EXAMPLE 4: Classroom Contract

The following rules and conditions apply for all discussions and conversations that take place among members of this class, both in the classroom and in outside group work for this class:

- I will respect my fellow classmates, taking into consideration that everyone comes from diverse backgrounds and different levels of educational experience.
- I will be open-minded.
- I will be open to disagreement and difference of opinion while at the same time refrain from insulting my fellow classmates.
- I will be mindful of how I present myself to the class. I will not be aggressive, judgmental, or verbally attack anyone.
- I will engage in active listening when others in the class are speaking, which includes not interrupting, turning my cell phone off, and refraining from text messaging.
- I give myself and my classmates permission to change their minds about issues over the course of the term.
- I will actively participate in the class, which means I will come to class on time, read the materials assigned, and be prepared to discuss the materials.
- I will step up and make verbal contributions during class, and I will also step back and allow others to speak after I have had my turn.

Name:

Date:

Possible additions to supplement the Guidelines suggested above:

- Try not to silence yourself out of concern for what others will think about what you say.
- If you think something is missing from the conversation, don't wait for someone else to say it; say it yourself.
- Be careful about putting other students on the spot. Do not demand that others speak for a group that you perceive them to represent.
- Ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty or discomfort.
- Share imaginative, expressive and critical thinking in class.
- Encourage disagreement with one another and with the professor.
- Be aware of different communication styles--the ways we communicate differently based on our backgrounds and current contexts--and look for ways to expand your communication tool kits.
- Know that it is okay to be emotional about issues and to name those emotions.
- Be aware of the fact that tone of voice and body language are powerful communicators. Some postures or facial expressions (e.g., crossed arms, eye rolls, loud sighs) can silence, provoke, intimidate, or hurt others. Others (e.g., facing and looking at the speaker, staying quiet, nodding) can show you are listening respectfully.
- Make eye contact with other students and refer to classmates by name.
- Keep confidential any personal information that comes up in class.

Examples 1-3 and "Possible additions" adapted from crlt.umich.edu. Example 4 from Faculty Innovation Center, UT Austin.

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