

Discussion Guidelines

<p>Overview</p>	<p>This resource offers samples of inclusive discussion guidelines. Setting up expectations for discussion with your students at the beginning of the term can be useful in creating an environment conducive to inclusivity, lively discussion, and classroom community building. Clear guidelines for discussion help establish norms in the classroom for how to handle difficult or “hot moments”, making it easier for facilitators and students to navigate socially challenging material and interpersonal conflict. Later in the term, if discussion conduct begins to deteriorate, a guidelines document can serve to remind the class or individual students of what specific guidelines are not being followed and why it is important that the class recommits to respecting the agreed upon guidelines. The instructor can cut-and-paste from some of the sample guidelines to disseminate to their students, or they can co-write the guidelines with their students as a community-building icebreaker. This resource includes guidelines appropriate to most discussion-based classes and guidelines that are specifically geared toward classes and workshops in which diversity and justice will be prominent themes of discussion.</p>
<p>Goals</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To help instructors and students generate inclusive discussion guidelines that will strengthen the classroom learning community and help students feel brave enough to participate. 2) To provide vetted guidelines that instructors have used to great success in their classrooms.
<p>Implementation</p>	<p>Students might benefit from a framing reading (such as this one on brave spaces) or a video and follow-up discussion before being asked to generate guidelines as a class. Consider having students pair off and reflect on moments in the classroom when they felt included and motivated to participate in discussion and moments when they felt excluded and demotivated to participate. Have them discuss with a partner what the conditions were for each experience (i.e., why they felt included or excluded) and what guideline they could generate based on those experiences. Then have them share the guidelines they generated with the class and write them on the board or in a shareable document projected for the class to see. Students should have access to the guidelines in some form throughout the course.</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Students who are not accustomed to discussion-based classes might struggle with generating guidelines. A framing reading and some examples of guidelines to accompany this activity may help them formulate some thoughts. 2) Students may need to be reminded of the guidelines. Consider in advance how you will approach students who do not adhere to the guidelines.

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Discussion Guidelines

Any of the following sets of guidelines or 'ground rules' could be distributed to students or used to start a conversation with students about expectations for participation and interaction that will foster an environment of mutual respect and collaborative inquiry. Many instructors also find it useful to engage students in generating guidelines as a class. This resource guide provides 7 examples:

- 1) Guidelines for Class Participation from the CRLT GSI Guidebook
- 2) Guidelines for Dialogue/Community Expectations from the UM Program on Intergroup Relations
- 3) Guidelines and Ideas for Our Interactions from a UM Faculty Member
- 4) Guidelines for STEM Courses
- 5) Guidelines for Language Courses
- 6) Multicultural Ground-Rules for Discussion from Dr. Ruby Beale, adapted by the Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan
- 7) Possible Additions to Guidelines 1-6 from a group of faculty members

Example 1 – Guidelines for Class Participation

- 1) Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own.
- 2) When you disagree, challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
- 3) 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.
- 4) Be courteous. Do not interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Be aware of messages you may be communicating with your body language.
- 5) Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
- 6) Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. 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.

- 7) If you are offended by something or think someone else might be, speak up and do not leave it for someone else to have to respond to it.
- 8) Recognize that we are all still learning. Be willing to change your perspective and make space for others to do the same.

Example 2 – Guidelines for Dialogue/Community Expectations

- 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.

Example 3 – Guidelines and Ideas for Our Interactions

- 1) Recognize and/or remember that we have different backgrounds.
- 2) Listen and share. Share briefly from your own experiences when appropriate, rather than simply your positions.
- 3) Build on your classmates’ comments. Acknowledge them, even if you disagree with them.
- 4) Be careful not to generalize about people.
- 5) 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.”
- 6) Respond to what is said in class, without attributing motivation to the speaker (this can be very challenging).

- 7) Consider the difference between responding to express yourself and responding to get an idea across to people who have different preconceptions than yours.
- 8) 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, heterosexual people."

Example 4 – Guidelines for STEM Courses

- 1) **Be aware of how much you are contributing to in-class discussions.** Try not to silence yourself out of concern for what others will think about what you say. If you have an idea, do not wait for someone else to say it; say it yourself. If you tend to contribute often, give others the opportunity to speak.
- 2) **Listen respectfully.** Do not interrupt, engage in private conversations, or turn to technology while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language.
- 3) **Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems.** If you are uncertain about someone else's approach, ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work.
- 4) **Take pair work or small group work seriously.** Remember that your peers' learning partly depends upon your engagement.
- 5) **Be careful about how you use humor or irony in class.** Keep in mind that we do not all find the same things funny.
- 6) **Make an effort to get to know other students.** Introduce yourself to students sitting near you. Refer to classmates by name and make eye contact with other students.

Example 5 – Guidelines for Language Courses

- 1) **Understand that we are bound to make lots of mistakes in this class,** as anyone does when learning a new language. Take risks and support others in their risk-taking.
- 2) **Be aware of how much you are contributing to discussions** and share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have an idea, do not wait for someone else to say it; say it yourself. If you tend to contribute often, give others the opportunity to speak.
- 3) **Listen respectfully.** Do not interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language. Comments that you make (whether asking for clarification, sharing critiques, or expanding on a point) should reflect that you have paid attention to the previous speakers' comments.

- 4) **Take pair work or small group work seriously.** Remember that your peers' learning is partly dependent upon your engagement.
- 5) **Make an effort to get to know other students.** Introduce yourself to students sitting near you. Refer to classmates by name and make eye contact with other students.
- 6) **Respect others' right to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own.** Be open to hearing their perspectives. Be open to changing your perspectives based on what you learn from others. Be okay with disagreement.

Example 6 – Multicultural Ground-Rules for Discussion

- 1) Our primary commitment is to learn from each other, from course materials, and from our work. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, values, scholarly orientations, and experience.
- 2) We acknowledge that sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination (religion, age, ability, language, education, size, geographic location, etc.) exist and may surface from time to time.
- 3) We acknowledge that one of the meanings of sexism, classism, racism is that we have been systematically taught misinformation about our own group and members of devalued groups (this is true for both dominant and dominated group members). The same is true about elitism and other forms of prejudice or bias – we are taught misinformation about others and ourselves.
- 4) We will try not to blame people for the misinformation we have learned, but we hold each other responsible for repeating misinformation or offensive behavior after we have learned otherwise.
- 5) Target group members should not be blamed for their oppression.
- 6) We will assume that people are always doing the best they can, both to learn the material and to behave in non-biased and multi-culturally productive ways.
- 7) We will share information about our groups with other members of the class, and will not demean, devalue, or “put down” people for their experiences or lack of experiences.
- 8) We will actively pursue opportunities to learn about our own groups and those of other groups, yet not enter or invade others' privacy when unwanted.
- 9) We each have an obligation to actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls which prohibit individual development, group progress and cooperation, and group gain.
- 10) We want to create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. Members of the class may wish to make a comment verbally or in an assignment that they do not want repeated outside the classroom. Therefore,

the instructor and participants will agree not to repeat the remarks outside the session that links a person with his/her identity.

- 11) We will challenge the idea or the practice, but not the person.
- 12) We will speak our discomfort.
- 13) Are there other ground rules that the class would like to add...?

Example 7 – Possible Additions to Guidelines 1-6

- 1) Try not to silence yourself out of concern for what others will think about what you say.
- 2) If you think something is missing from the conversation, do not wait for someone else to say it; say it yourself.
- 3) Be careful about putting other students on the spot. Do not demand that others speak for a group that you perceive them to represent.
- 4) Be careful about how you use humor or irony in class. Keep in mind that we do not all find the same things funny.
- 5) Ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty or discomfort.
- 6) Share imaginative, expressive, and critical thinking in class.
- 7) Encourage disagreement with one another and with the professor.
- 8) 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.
- 9) Know that it is okay to be emotional about issues and to name those emotions.
- 10) 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.
- 11) Make eye contact with other students and refer to classmates by name.
- 12) Keep confidential any personal information that comes up in class.