

Hot Moments

<p>Overview</p>	<p>This resource guide provides strategies for responding to “hot moments”: the sudden eruption of tension and conflict in classroom discussion. Hot moments often occur when a well-intentioned student says something that is politically charged and personally offensive to some members of the class or even upsetting to the instructor. These moments can derail the conversation, make the classroom environment toxic, and can be harmful to students if not handled appropriately. This handout gives concrete strategies that instructors have found to be successful in transforming hot moments into opportunities for learning.</p>
<p>Goals</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To help instructors prepare in advance for how they will handle conflict in the classroom. 2) To provide a number of resources instructors can use to address a hot moment.
<p>Implementation</p>	<p>These strategies presented in this resource guide are best reviewed multiple times to prepare yourself with a selection of approaches that can be implemented in the class when difficult moments arise.</p>
<p>Challenges</p>	<p>When a comment is particularly harmful, turning a hot moment into a teachable moment can potentially neglect the harm done to some students. While depersonalizing the conflict can give students space from that harm, it is sometimes important to also give space for acknowledging the harm done.</p>

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What is a Hot Moment?	A ‘Hot moment’ is a sudden eruption of tension or conflict within the classroom.
General Ideas to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think ahead about how you might handle difficult classroom dynamics — and what aspects of your course content might produce them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How might you handle such a moment? • If tensions arise, do acknowledge them, in the moment or later. • Be flexible with your plans: if students are intensely attuned to an issue, let it have the time and attention it needs. Use the intensity to facilitate students’ learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How can you take advantage of it as an opportunity to advance student learning?
Know Yourself	<p>Know your biases, know what will push your buttons and what will cause your mind to stop. Every one of us has areas in which we are vulnerable to strong feelings. Knowing what those areas are in advance can diminish the element of surprise. This self-knowledge can enable you to devise in advance strategies for managing yourself and the class when such a moment arises. You will have thought about what you need to do in order to enable your mind to work again.</p> <p>—Lee Warren (Derek Bok Center, Harvard), “Navigating Difficult Moments in the Classroom”</p>

Specific Strategies to Consider

Take a Moment	If tensions arise, let yourself take a moment to decide whether to address the issue immediately in the classroom, take it up separately with individual students, or raise it in the next class meeting. Count silently to 10 before speaking or reacting.
Save it for Later	If you feel unprepared to deal with a question, comment, or topic in the moment, mark it as something the class will come back to at the next meeting – and then raise it at the next meeting when you feel more prepared.
Refer to Class Discussion Guidelines	Remind students of your class discussion guidelines. If you have not already established them, propose a few key ones to guide the conversation moving forward out of the ‘hot moment’—e.g., no personal attacks, no interrupting, openness to hearing a range of perspectives.
Write Down Thoughts	Give students some time to gather their thoughts: allow them to write individually about the perspective, topic, or exchange in question before discussing it as a group. You might ask them to connect it to course materials or concepts. Writing can be especially helpful when

	<p>students respond to tension with silence. You could ask them to consider, “Why is this topic so difficult to discuss?” or “What do you feel like you can’t say aloud right now?” You might collect such anonymous writings to help you make a plan for returning to a topic productively the next class.</p>
<p>Clarify Student Comments</p>	<p>Where appropriate, seek to clarify student comments that have sparked tension. Often students say inadvertently insulting or marginalizing things when they are genuinely struggling to understand a new perspective or feel the intellectual discomfort of having their familiar views challenged. If you think a comment is coming from such a place of cognitive struggle, you might give the student a chance to explain the questions or confusions behind their remark: “What do you mean by X?” Or “I heard you saying Y; is that what you meant to say?”</p>
<p>Depersonalize</p>	<p>Try to depersonalize insensitive or marginalizing statements. You can model for students how to acknowledge a comment’s potential insult or devaluing of other perspectives in ways that critique the statement and not the speaker: e.g., rather than “X’s comment,” you can refer to “the proposal that such-and-such...what does it leave out?” Or you might speak of the effect of “these words,” without attributing motive to the speaker: “When I hear these words, I respond like this...” You can also depersonalize by acknowledging, when appropriate, that a widely-held view has been raised: “Many people share this perspective. What might their reasons be?” And then: “And why might others disagree or object to this position?”</p>
<p>Provide a Basis for Common Understanding</p>	<p>Provide a basis for common understanding by establishing facts and questions about the topics raised in the tense moment. You can share key information yourself or invite students to do so. You might write categories on the board (“what we know,” “what is disputed,” “what we want to know more about”) and elicit items for each category, either individually or from the whole class. Such a conversation can also be a time to distinguish different sorts of statements—facts, evaluative comments, personal opinions, assertions, evidence—and acknowledge how difficult it can sometimes be to make such distinctions, especially when emotions are running high.</p>
<p>Validate Student Contributions</p>	<p>When appropriate, validate student contributions. You might say, “Thank you for raising that perspective. It’s widely held, and you provide us an opportunity to talk about it—and for me to explain why we’re challenging such a perspective in this class.” Or “You’re clearly thinking very seriously about this topic and raising important questions we need to think carefully about.”</p>
<p>Connect Comments to Course Material and Learning Goals</p>	<p>Find a way to connect student comments meaningfully to course material or learning goals. Does the course focus on writing skills? The moment could be an opportunity to discuss the critical importance of the words we choose or assumptions we make. Does your course focus on the use of evidence to test hypotheses? Perhaps this is a moment to think together about evidence in a different context. Is it a course where you have emphasized trial and error as an important process in the pursuit of knowledge? If so, you can highlight in a hot</p>

	moment that mistakes can often be critical learning opportunities—if we reflect upon and learn from them.
Share Anonymously	Use index cards or small sheets of paper to let all students share anonymously a brief response to the topic or tension that has erupted. You can read these aloud right away or take them out of class to have some time to analyze them as a whole—and share what you learned in the next class.
Facilitate a Dialogue	Ask the class as a whole, “What just happened here?” and facilitate a dialogue about the topic and/or the class dynamics, encouraging them to share their perspectives and ask respectful questions of one another.
Reflect Individually or Collectively	After discussing intense issues, guide students to reflect individually and/or collectively on the issues raised and the perspectives they heard on these issues.
Talk Outside of Class	Talk outside of class with the students most directly involved in the moment, to show your commitment to their success in the course and to help them learn from the experience.
Connect with your Support Network	Connect with your own support network, especially if you felt targeted or personally affronted by whatever emerged in your classroom.
Additional Resource	Read “ How to Lead Uncomfortable Class Discussions ” by Alexandra Sedlovskaya
Citation	Adapted for use by The Center for Research on Language and Teaching, University of Michigan.