

Using Civil Discourse

While communicating your ideas with others, the following are “best practices” to follow to create a civil discourse, or a discussion that is both respectful and productive. These are also great tips in constructing a college-level academic paper, also!

- **Construct an argument that includes both reasoning and evidence.**¹ In other words, be clear about how you are making your assertion and support it with the best facts you can find. Stating both reasoning and evidence furthers the discussion and challenges us to come up with more solid reasoning and better evidence.
- **Separate the person from the problem.**² Focus on the issues and avoid personal attacks. Thoughtful people can come to opposite conclusions.
- **Find common ground.** When working within a group, it may be difficult for all members to agree on one correct method of carrying out an intended goal. Stylistic differences and opposing viewpoints can potentially lead to conflict if not properly managed. The key here is to remain focused on that common goal and work to incorporate different ideas and voices in an effort to get to a “yes” answer from all parties involved.
- **Consider the difference between the intent and impact of what you say and do.** When you communicate with people, the “**intent**” of your words or actions may not be understood as you intended it to be. The “**impact**,” or the way in which what you said was understood, will influence the behavior of the other person. Have you ever experienced a misunderstanding with a friend or classmate over something that you felt you had clearly communicated? Did you ever have an unexpected impact on a person with whom you were communicating and had no idea why? You may have said something that you intended to mean one thing, yet to the person who heard it, it may have had a very different impact.
- **If speaking from your own experience, use “I” statements.** Experience is a great teacher and you have a lot of knowledge from those experiences that can make very valuable contributions in class and out. But it is important to realize that others will have very different experiences that are equally valuable. By using “I” statements that acknowledge your experience, you create statements that avoid making others’ experiences seem less valid.
- **Keep an open mind.** As you persuade others of your point-of-view, allow yourself to carefully consider any opposing ideas. You must recognize that as you are free to express your views in a civil manner, do not encroach upon the right of others to do the same.
- **When you disagree, consider the non-verbal ways of showing respect:**

Do: listen actively, nod, and make eye contact. Express your opinions without personalizing.

Do not: interrupt, shout, raise your voice, stare, glare, roll your eyes, point, or get in someone’s space.