

Best Practices for Participating in Design Studios

The design studio model is an exploratory, collaborative exercise that reflects the expertise of every person in this room, whether that knowledge is gained through academic credentials or lived experience. We are committed to respecting and elevating all voices in an open and authentic exploration of today's topic of discussion. We recognize that such a goal requires a degree of intimacy between participants, and in addition to building the relationships between and across this cohort, we have created a list of principles to help cultivate the positive energy and culture of the design studio.

This living document is intended to help document best practices for participating in design studios, and is open to continual revision based on feedback from organizers, facilitators, and participants.

1. Raise all voices. Who is contributing? Don't dominate the conversation, deliberately make space for quieter participants to offer insights. Discussing new ideas is exciting! Let's foster enthusiasm while bringing others along.

2. Be real. No one can be right all the time and even our best efforts will never be unalloyed. Embrace it! That's when you'll discover the real value of collaboration. Fellow travelers offer perspective. Perspective offers moral realism. Moral realism offers a clear-eyed view of the challenges that lie before us and the work left to do.

3. Listen deeply. Deep listening is a skill—one often missing in competitive environments. It's hard to hear and absorb without immediately critiquing and revising. Progress takes collective wisdom. Collective wisdom takes empathy. Empathy takes really getting what others are offering—their intentions, stories, desires and vision.

4. Embrace uncertainty. We don't always know where we're going. That can be uncomfortable. But it's honest. It's honest because often there are no ready-made answers. Let's embrace uncertainty and live at the limits of understanding. The key is knowing when to say "I don't know" or "I don't understand." Achieve collective clarification through curiosity and conversation.

5. Exercise imagination and let it exercise you. Though valuable, imagination isn't a "thing" you have. It's a process you undergo. Imagination makes the invisible visible—including who we become when we create together. This means we need to exercise imagination and let it exercise us. What work is imagination doing in and through us? How is the thing we're trying to change, actually changing us? And what might that tell us about the value of what we're up to—or not? Imagination begins with openness and receptivity: a dynamic exchange between ourselves and our work.

6. Speak your mind, from your heart. Self-work takes critical recognition and patient empathy. Privilege shapes what we feel, think, believe, say, and do. Let's all unschool. Notice where privilege intersects and compounds. Attend to how it shows up—explicitly and implicitly. And

when it is time to “call out,” speak your mind, but from your heart—being honest about your own conditions and limitations.

7. FrieNDA policy. Sharing, listening, creating, and connecting can be a vulnerable experience. Embracing uncertainty and honesty means risking openness; venturing tentative answers can be deeply personal. Mutual respect means holding conversations in trust, and attribution calls for consent.

8. Play! Embrace the fun! Remember: play generates joy; joy animates insight. So doodle, move, and stretch. We are our bodies and creativity should feel good.