

How to Participate in Respectful Political Conversations

Being respectful during political conversations is based on your ability to listen to, respond to and leave room for others, as well as your ability to contribute relevant thoughts and experiences to the discussion.

Respectful Participation: In a large online event we all need to be mindful that others may want to participate just as much as we do. Please where possible leave room for others to share their thoughts or ask questions. The intent of this event is to make it fun and engaging as well as educational. At the same time you should not criticise others for asking a question whose answer seems obvious to you. We all bring a different wealth of knowledge to any situation. What may be common knowledge to you could be utterly foreign to someone else. But remember it is just as possible for the opposite to be true.

Respectful Speech: For most of us, it is a struggle to recognize our false assumptions and our hurtful behavior. Most people occasionally say something that assumes everyone else is like themselves. These remarks can make people who are present feel ignored and left out, and they can make it seem that we are describing or theorizing about everyone's experience when we are not. Learning to be more inclusive, more aware, and/or more modest in our statements is a process. *Therefore, although we all expect each other to avoid stereotyping or prejudiced behavior, we cannot expect moral and political perfection- nor should we claim to have it ourselves.*

Respectful Critique: Please feel free to criticize points of view, beliefs, opinions, statements, behavior, institutions, and social patterns. Please avoid criticizing and/or personally attacking your classmates and the instructor. For example, say, "I think what you just said is racist, because..." and not, "You are racist." Better even than labeling language or behavior as sexist, racist, privileged, et cetera is to state your disagreement or objection, following with an explanation of why you feel what you do.

Critiquing others in this fashion allows them to rethink their own statements better than if they were forced to identify with what they have said. Changing or defending a statement is a much smaller matter, more easily done, than defending one's honor or intelligence.

Respectful Assumptions: During discussions, please give everyone the benefit of the doubt. This means that if there is a more intelligent, interesting, plausible, or charitable interpretation you can give to what someone said, or a good idea you can derive from it, please do so. It makes discussion much more fruitful, since we can then discuss interesting ideas rather than people's mistakes/weaknesses in expressing themselves.

Respectful Disagreement: Know that you are welcome to express disagreement with anything said, using the guidelines outlined above, which *includes* disagreeing with anything the instructor says. None of the aforementioned will require you to sit there and silently accept what a person says as incontrovertible or indisputable, especially should you have evidence to refute the assertion being made.