Rules for Social Minds

“Rules of a Society”
which met once a week, for their improvement in useful knowledge and for the promoting of Truth
and Christian Charity
John Locke
(1690)

“The rules for a tasteful dinner party...”
from Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View
Immanuel Kant
(1797)

“How we worship”
Santa Fe Friends Meeting (Quakers)
(~2000)

“The Futurist Manifesto”
F. T. Marinetti
(1909)

“Civility” WP:CIVIL
Wikipedia
(2004--)

“Rationalist taboo”
RationalWiki
(2007--)

“Learning Through Conversation”
from materials for the St. John’s College Summer Classics Seminars
Stephen R. Van Luchene
(2015)
RULES OF A SOCIETY.

Which met once a week, for their improvement in useful Knowledge, and for the promoting of Truth and Christian Charity.

I.

That it begin at six in the evening, and end at eight; unless a majority of two thirds present, are inclined to continue it longer.

II. That no Person be admitted into this Society, without the suffrage of two thirds of the parties present, after the person desiring such admission, hath subscribed to the Rules contain'd in this Paper, and answer'd in the affirmative to the following Questions:

1. Whether he loves all Men, of what Profession or Religion soever?
2. Whether he thinks no person ought to be harmed in his Body, Name, or Goods, for mere Speculative Opinions, or his external way of Worship?
3. Whether he loves and seeks Truth for Truth's sake, and will endeavour impartially to find and receive it himself, and to communicate it to others?

III.

That no Person be admitted occasionally, without a good testimony from some of the Society that knows him, and he answering in the affirmative to the above-mention'd Questions.

IV. That every Member in his course, if he please, be Moderator; and the Courts here mean, is that of their Surnames, according to the Alphabet; whose care must be to keep good Order, to propose the Question to be debated, recite what may have been said to it already, briefly deliver the sense of the question, and keep the parties close to it; or, if he please, he may name one to be Moderator for him. The Question for the ensuing conference, to be always agreed, before the company departs.

V.

That no Person or Opinion be unhandsomely reflected on; but every Member behave himself with all the temper, judgment, modesty, and discretion he is master of.

VI.

That every Member place himself to the left hand of the Moderator, in order, as he

RULES OF A SOCIETY.

he happens to come in; and in his turn speak as plainly, distinctly, and concisely as he can to the Question proposed, directing his discourse to the Moderator.

VII.

That no more than one Person speak at once; and none object, till it come to his turn to speak.

VIII.

That the Question having gone round, if the time will permit, and the company pleases, it may be discoursed again in the same order; and no weighty Question to be quitted, till a majority of two thirds be satisfy'd, and are willing to proceed to a new one. That when a Controversy is not thought by two thirds of the company, likely to be ended in a convenient time, then those two thirds may dismiss it, and, if they please, another Question may be propos'd. That two thirds of the company may adjourn the ordinary subject in question, for good and sufficient reasons.

IX. That
IX.

That no Question be propos'd, that is contrary to Religion, civil Government, or good Manners; unless it be agreed to debare such Question, meritly and only the better to confute it.

We whose Names are here under-written, proposing to our selves an improvement in useful Knowledge, and the promoting of Truth and Christian Charity, by our becoming of this Society: do hereby declare our approbation of, and consent to the Rules before written.

FINIS.

INDEX.

INDEX.

INDEX.

INDEX.

INDEX.
The rules for a tasteful dinner party that animates the company are:
a) to choose topics for conversation that interest everyone and always provide someone with the opportunity to contribute something appropriate, b) not to allow deadly silences to set in, but only momentary pauses in the conversation, c) not to change the topic unnecessarily or jump from one subject to another; for at the end of a dinner party, as at the end of a drama (and the entire life of a reasonable man, when completed, is a drama), the mind inevitably busies itself recalling the various episodes* of the conversation; and if it can discover no connecting thread, it feels perplexed and realizes resentfully that it has not advanced in culture but regressed. — If a topic is entertaining, we must almost exhaust it before going on to another one; and if the conversation comes to a standoff, we must know how to slip some related topic into the group, without their noticing it, as an experiment. In this way one individual in the group, unnoticed and unenvied, can undertake to guide the conversation, d) Not to let a spirit of wrangling arise or persist, either in ourselves or in the other members of the group.

* or, with reference to the drama, "acts" [Acte].

ON THE APPETITIVE POWER

since the conversation should not be business but only play, we should rather avert any such seriousness by putting in a suitable jest. e) If a serious clash cannot be avoided, carefully to maintain such control over ourselves and our affects that mutual respect and benevolence always shine forth — here the tone of the conversation is more important than its content (we must not shout or be arrogant) — so that no guest goes home from the gathering alienated [Entzweier] from any of his fellow guests.

No matter how insignificant these laws of refined humanity⁴⁰ may seem, especially in comparison with pure moral laws, anything that promotes sociability, even if it consists only in pleasing maxims or manners, is a garment that dresses virtue to advantage, a garment to be recommended to virtue in more serious respects too. The cynic’s purism and the anchorite’s mortification of the flesh, without social well-being, are distorted figures of virtue, which do not attract us to it. Forsaken by the graces, they can make no claim to humanity.
Santa Fe Friends Meeting
under care of Inter-Mountain Yearly Meeting

Santa Fe Friends Meeting
630 Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico, (505) 983-7241

Link to Other Meetings Nationwide

All are welcome at Meeting for Worship each First-Day (Sunday)
9:00 & 11:00 AM on Canyon Road
or
10:30 AM in south Santa Fe

Santa Fe Friends Meeting welcomes you to worship with us and to take part in our activities.

630 Canyon Road: Meets for silence-based worship each First Day from 9 to 10 AM and from 11 to 12 noon. First Day School meets at 11 AM. No other childcare is available. No parking is provided, but parking is always available on Camino Escondido nearby (see map).

South Santa Fe Quaker Worship Group: Meets at 10:30 AM every First Day (Sunday) at Quaker House.

Los Alamos Worship Group: Contact Marie Andrew (662-7530) for the location.

How we worship

We follow the "unprogrammed" style of worship. That means that we do not employ a pastor to lead our services. Attenders should expect to enter quietly and take any seat. The Meetingroom is entered through the kitchen door which faces the garden, and on in to the Meetingroom, through the library. Seats face the center. Some Friends may arrive early to sit in silence and quiet their thoughts (centering down) before the start of Meeting for Worship.

In our worship we try to keep an expectant attitude, waiting for the "still small voice" of God.

Occasionally someone in Meeting will feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit to give a vocal message. Friends are urged to wait until they are sure that the prompting is genuine and then speak loudly enough that all can hear. Since we believe that "that of God" is within every person, we listen carefully to each message, seeking together for the truth. Sometimes the reason for a message may be unclear, even to the speaker, but we often find out later that it "speaks to the condition" of another listener. It is our custom that speakers be brief (not continuing beyond what they feel they are required by Spirit to say), and that ordinarily they speak no more than once, not dialoguing with each other. Also it is our custom that a respectful period of silence follow each message.

Occasionally an entire Meeting for Worship is spent in silence. The silence is spent in prayer or meditation. Friends often report that they have been enriched by meeting in the silence, or alternatively that a spoken message had a meaning for them. We have no single style of meditation, except that we expect it to be a group experience. Many of us find that worship is most rich if we sit quietly with feet on the floor, hands folded, and head bowed in expectant silence. Friends are urged to come to meeting without prepared materials, without a plan to speak, but also with an expectation that it may turn out that they are prompted to speak.

Children

During the school year we have an active First Day School program, and we welcome visitors. In the summer, child care activities are usually offered. In either case, children come into meeting for the first 10 or 15 minutes, and then assemble in the First Day School classroom for activities and snack. Children are also welcome to remain with their families in meeting for the entire hour.

Following Meeting for Worship

At approximately 12:00 noon, the Clerk or another appointed member gives a signal of closure (rise of Meeting) by shaking the hand of a person sitting near them. All are invited to shake hands and share greetings. Newcomers will be invited to introduce themselves, and often everyone in the room introduces themselves as well. Announcements usually take about 5-10 minutes.

Refreshments

Then, at about 12:15, everyone is invited to have hot drinks and whatever snacks have been set out. This is also a social time when you can meet your fellow worshipers.
We have been up all night, my friends and I, beneath mosque lamps whose brass cupolas are bright as our souls, because like them they were illuminated by the internal glow of electric hearts. And trampling underfoot our native sloth on opulent Persian carpets, we have been discussing right up to the limits of logic and scrawling the paper with demented writing.

Our hearts were filled with an immense pride at feeling ourselves standing quite alone, like lighthouses or like the sentinels in an outpost, facing the army of enemy stars encamped in their celestial bivouacs. Alone with the engineers in the infernal stokeholes of great ships, alone with the black spirits which rage in the belly of rogue locomotives, alone with the drunkards beating their wings against the walls.

Then we were suddenly distracted by the rumbling of huge double decker trams that went leaping by, streaked with light like the villages celebrating their festivals, which the Po in flood suddenly knocks down and uproots, and, in the rapids and eddies of a deluge, drags down to the sea.

Then the silence increased. As we listened to the last faint prayer of the old canal and the crumbling of the bones of the moribund palaces with their green growth of beard, suddenly the hungry automobiles roared beneath our windows.

"Come, my friends!" I said. "Let us go! At last Mythology and the mystic cult of the ideal have been left behind. We are going to be present at the birth of the centaur and we shall soon see the first angels fly! We must break down the gates of life to test the bolts and the padlocks! Let us go! Here is they very first sunrise on earth! Nothing equals the splendor of its red sword which strikes for the first time in our millennial darkness."

We went up to the three snorting machines to caress their breasts. I lay along mine like a corpse on its bier, but I suddenly revived again beneath the steering wheel — a guillotine knife — which threatened my stomach. A great sweep of madness brought us sharply back to ourselves and drove us through the streets, steep and deep, like dried up torrents. Here and there unhappy lamps in the windows taught us to despise our mathematical eyes. "Smell," I exclaimed, "smell is good enough for wild beasts!"

And we hunted, like young lions, death with its black fur dappled with pale crosses, who ran before us in the vast violet sky, palpable and living.

And yet we had no ideal Mistress stretching her form up to the clouds, nor yet a cruel Queen to whom to offer our corpses twisted into the shape of Byzantine rings! No reason to die unless it is the desire to be rid of the too great weight of our courage!

We drove on, crushing beneath our burning wheels, like shirt-collars under the iron, the watch dogs on the steps of the houses.

Death, tamed, went in front of me at each corner offering me his hand nicely, and sometimes lay on the ground with a noise of creaking jaws giving me velvet glances from the bottom of puddles.

"Let us leave good sense behind like a hideous husk and let us hurl ourselves, like fruit spiced with pride, into the immense mouth and breast of the world! Let us feed the unknown, not from despair, but simply to enrich the unfathomable reservoirs of the Absurd!"
As soon as I had said these words, I turned sharply back on my tracks with the mad intoxication of puppies biting their tails, and suddenly there were two cyclists disapproving of me and tottering in front of me like two persuasive but contradictory reasons. Their stupid swaying got in my way. What a bore! Pouah! I stopped short, and in disgust hurled myself — vlan! — head over heels in a ditch.

Oh, maternal ditch, half full of muddy water! A factory gutter! I savored a mouthful of strengthening muck which recalled the black teat of my Sudanese nurse!

As I raised my body, mud-spattered and smelly, I felt the red hot poker of joy deliciously pierce my heart. A crowd of fishermen and gouty naturalists crowded terrified around this marvel. With patient and tentative care they raised high enormous grappling irons to fish up my car, like a vast shark that had run aground. It rose slowly leaving in the ditch, like scales, its heavy coachwork of good sense and its upholstery of comfort.

We thought it was dead, my good shark, but I woke it with a single caress of its powerful back, and it was revived running as fast as it could on its fins.

Then with my face covered in good factory mud, covered with metal scratches, useless sweat and celestial grime, amidst the complaint of staid fishermen and angry naturalists, we dictated our first will and testament to all the living men on earth.

**MANIFESTO OF FUTURISM**

1. We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness.
2. The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity and revolt.
3. Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy and slumber. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist.
4. We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.
5. We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurled along its orbit.
6. The poet must spend himself with warmth, glamour and prodigality to increase the enthusiastic fervor of the primordial elements.
7. Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man.
8. We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed.
9. We want to glorify war — the only cure for the world — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman.
10. We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.
11. We will sing of the great crowds agitated by work, pleasure and revolt; the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals: the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and the workshops beneath their violent electric moons: the glutinous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; factories suspended from the clouds by the thread of their smoke; bridges with the leap of gymnasts flung across the diabolic cutlery of sunny rivers: adventurous steamers sniffing the horizon; great-breasted locomotives, puffing on the rails like enormous steel horses with long tubes for bridle,
and the gliding flight of aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds.

It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries.

Italy has been too long the great second-hand market. We want to get rid of the innumerable museums which cover it with innumerable cemeteries.

Museums, cemeteries! Truly identical in their sinister juxtaposition of bodies that do not know each other. Public dormitories where you sleep side by side for ever with beings you hate or do not know. Reciprocal ferocity of the painters and sculptors who murder each other in the same museum with blows of line and color. To make a visit once a year, as one goes to see the graves of our dead once a year, that we could allow! We can even imagine placing flowers once a year at the feet of the Gioconda! But to take our sadness, our fragile courage and our anxiety to the museum every day, that we cannot admit! Do you want to poison yourselves? Do you want to rot?

What can you find in an old picture except the painful contortions of the artist trying to break uncrossable barriers which obstruct the full expression of his dream?

To admire an old picture is to pour our sensibility into a funeral urn instead of casting it forward with violent spurts of creation and action. Do you want to waste the best part of your strength in a useless admiration of the past, from which you will emerge exhausted, diminished, trampled on?

Indeed daily visits to museums, libraries and academies (those cemeteries of wasted effort, calvaries of crucified dreams, registers of false starts!) is for artists what prolonged supervision by the parents is for intelligent young men, drunk with their own talent and ambition.

For the dying, for invalids and for prisoners it may be all right. It is, perhaps, some sort of balm for their wounds, the admirable past, at a moment when the future is denied them. But we will have none of it, we, the young, strong and living Futurists!

Let the good incendiaries with charred fingers come! Here they are! Heap up the fire to the shelves of the libraries! Divert the canals to flood the cellars of the museums! Let the glorious canvases swim ashore! Take the picks and hammers! Undermine the foundation of venerable towns!

The oldest among us are not yet thirty years old: we have therefore at least ten years to accomplish our task. When we are forty let younger and stronger men than we throw us in the waste paper basket like useless manuscripts! They will come against us from afar, leaping on the light cadence of their first poems, clutching the air with their predatory fingers and sniffing at the gates of the academies the good scent of our decaying spirits, already promised to the catacombs of the libraries.

But we shall not be there. They will find us at last one winter's night in the depths of the country in a sad hangar echoing with the notes of the monotonous rain, crouched near our trembling aeroplanes, warming our hands at the wretched fire which our books of today will make when they flame gaily beneath the glittering flight of their pictures.

They will crowd around us, panting with anguish and disappointment, and exasperated by our proud indefatigable courage, will hurl themselves forward to kill us, with all the more hatred as their hearts will be drunk with love and admiration for us. And strong healthy Injustice will shine radiantly from their eyes. For art can only be violence, cruelty, injustice.
The oldest among us are not yet thirty, and yet we have already wasted treasures, treasures of strength, love, courage and keen will, hastily, deliriously, without thinking, with all our might, till we are out of breath.

Look at us! We are not out of breath, our hearts are not in the least tired. For they are nourished by fire, hatred and speed! Does this surprise you? it is because you do not even remember being alive! Standing on the world's summit, we launch once more our challenge to the stars!

Your objections? All right! I know them! Of course! We know just what our beautiful false intelligence affirms: "We are only the sum and the prolongation of our ancestors," it says. Perhaps! All right! What does it matter? But we will not listen! Take care not to repeat those infamous words! Instead, lift up your head!

Standing on the world's summit we launch once again our insolent challenge to the stars!

(Text of translation taken from James Joll, *Three Intellectuals in Politics*)
Civility is part of Wikipedia's code of conduct and one of its five pillars. The civility policy describes the standards expected of users and provides appropriate ways of dealing with problems when they arise. Stated simply, editors should always treat each other with consideration and respect. They should focus on improving the encyclopedia while maintaining a pleasant editing environment by behaving politely, calmly and reasonably even during heated debates.

Wikipedia's civility expectations apply to all editors during all interactions on Wikipedia, including discussions at user and article talk pages, in edit summaries and in any other discussion with or about fellow Wikipedians.

Contents

Cooperation and civility
  - Avoiding incivility
  - Edit summary dos and don'ts

Incivility
  - No personal attacks or harassment

Identifying incivility
  - Assume good faith

Dealing with incivility
  - Dispute resolution
  - Removing uncivil comments
    - Different places, different atmospheres
    - Apologising: It's OK to say sorry
    - Blocking for incivility

See also

Notes

Further reading

Cooperation and civility

This page documents an English Wikipedia policy.
It describes a widely accepted standard that all editors should normally follow. Changes made to it should reflect consensus.

This page in a nutshell:

- Participate in a respectful and considerate way.
- Do not ignore the positions and conclusions of your fellow editors.
- Present coherent and concise arguments, and refrain from making personal attacks; encourage others to do the same.

Conduct policies

- Aspersions
- Block evasion
- Civility
- Clean start
- Consensus
- Dispute resolution
- Edit warring
- Editing policy
- Harassment
- No personal attacks
- Ownership of content
- Sock puppetry
- Username policy
- Vandalism

Dispute resolution (Requests)

- Tips
  - Assume good faith
  - Use etiquette
  - Be civil
Differences of opinion are inevitable in a collaborative project. When discussing these differences some editors can seem unnecessarily harsh, while simply trying to be forthright. Other editors may seem oversensitive when their views are challenged. Faceless written words on talk pages and in edit summaries do not fully transmit the nuances of verbal conversation, sometimes leading to misinterpretation of an editor’s comments. An uncivil remark can escalate spirited discussion into a personal argument that no longer focuses objectively on the problem at hand. Such exchanges waste our efforts and undermine a positive, productive working environment. Resolve differences of opinion through civil discussion; disagree without being disagreeable. Discussion of other editors should be limited to polite discourse about their actions.

Editors are expected to be reasonably cooperative, to refrain from making personal attacks, to work within the scope of policies, and to be responsive to good-faith questions. Try to treat your fellow editors as respected colleagues with whom you are working on an important project. Be especially welcoming and patient towards new users who contribute constructively, but politely discourage non-constructive newcomers.

Avoiding incivility

Incivility – or the appearance of incivility – typically arises from heated content disputes.

- **Explain yourself.** Insufficient explanations for edits can be perceived as uncivil. Use good edit summaries, and use the talk page if the edit summary does not provide enough space or if a more substantive debate is likely to be needed.
- **Be careful with user warning templates.** Be careful about issuing templated messages to editors you’re currently involved in a dispute with, and exercise caution when using templated messages for newcomers (see [Wikipedia:Please do not bite the newcomers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Please_do_not_bite_the_newcomers)). Consider using a personal message instead of, or in addition to, the templated message.
- **Try not to get too intense.** Passion can be misread as aggression, so take great care to avoid the appearance of being heavy-handed or bossy. Nobody likes to be bossed about by an editor who appears to believe that they are “superior”; nobody likes a bully.
- **Avoid editing while you’re in a bad mood.** It does spill over. (See [Editing under the influence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Editing_under_the_influence) and [No angry mastodons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_angry_mastodons)).
- **Take a Real-Life check.** Disengage by two steps to assess what you’re about to say (or have just said). Asking yourself “How would I feel if someone said that to me?” is often not enough, many people can just brush things off. To get a better perspective, ask yourself: “How would I feel if someone said that to someone I love who cannot just ‘brush it off’?” If you would find that unacceptable, then do not say it. And, if you have already said it, strike it and apologise.
- **Be professional.** Just because we are online and unpaid does not mean we can behave badly to each other. Petty much nowhere where people working together to do something are no supposed to get into punch-ups in the newsroom because they disagree about how something is worded or whose turn it is to make the cut. Nor are volunteers working at the animal rescue centre allowed to start screaming at each other over who left ferrets in the filing cabinet or the corn snake in the cutlery drawer. In fact, there’s pretty much nowhere where people working together to do something good are allowed to get into fist-fights, shouting matches, hair-pulling or name-calling; the same principle applies here.
- **Avoid name-calling.** Someone may very well be an idiot, but telling them so is neither going to increase their intelligence nor improve your ability to communicate with them.
- **Avoid condescension.** No matter how frustrated you are, do not tell people to “grow up” or include any language along the lines of “if this were kindergarten” in your messages.
- **Avoid appearing to ridicule another editor’s comment.** Even if you see the comment as ridiculous, he or she very probably doesn’t, and expressing ridicule is likely only to defend and antagonise, rather than helping.
- **Be careful with edit summaries.** They are relatively short comments and thus potentially subject to misinterpretation or oversimplification. They cannot be changed after pressing “Save”, and are often written in haste, particularly in
stressful situations. Remember to explain your edit especially when things are getting heated; to avoid personal comments about any editors you have disputes with; and to use the talk page to further explain your view of the situation.

**Edit summary dos and don'ts**

See also: Help:Edit summary § Always provide an edit summary, and Help:Edit summary § How to summarize

Review your edit summaries before saving your edits. Remember you cannot go back and change them.

**Do**

- Be clear about what you did, so that other editors can assess it quickly
- Use neutral language.
- Be calm.

**Don't**

- Make snide comments.
- Make personal remarks about editors.
- Be aggressive.

**Incivility**

Incivility consists of personal attacks, rudeness and disrespectful comments. Especially when done in an aggressive manner, these often alienate editors and disrupt the project through unproductive stressors and conflict. While a few minor incidents of incivility that no one complains about are not necessarily a concern, a continuing pattern of incivility is unacceptable. In cases of repeated harassment or egregious personal attacks, then the offender may be blocked. Even a single act of severe incivility could result in a block, such as a single episode of extreme verbal abuse or profanity directed at another contributor or a threat against another person.

In general, be understanding and non-retaliatory in dealing with incivility. If others are uncivil, do not respond in kind. Consider ignoring isolated examples of incivility, and simply moving forward with the content issue. If necessary, point out gently that you think the comment might be considered uncivil and make it clear that you want to move on and focus on the content issue. Bear in mind that the editor may not have thought he or she was being uncivil; Wikipedia is edited by people from many different backgrounds, and standards vary. Take things to dispute resolution (see below) only if there is an ongoing problem that you cannot resolve.

This policy is not a weapon to use against other contributors. To insist that an editor be sanctioned for an isolated, minor incident, to repeatedly bring up past incivility after an individual has changed their approach, or to treat constructive criticism as an attack, are in themselves potentially disruptive, and may result in warnings or even blocks if repeated.

**No personal attacks or harassment**

Main page: Wikipedia:No personal attacks

See also: Wikipedia:No legal threats

Editors are expected to avoid personal attacks and harassment of other Wikipedians. This applies equally to all Wikipedians: it is as unacceptable to attack a user who has a history of foolish or boorish behaviour, or even one who has been subject to disciplinary action by the Arbitration Committee, as it is to attack any other user. Wikipedia encourages a positive online community: people make mistakes, but they are encouraged to learn from them and change their ways. Personal attacks and harassment are contrary to this spirit, damaging to the work of building an encyclopedia, and may result in blocks.
Identifying incivility

It is sometimes difficult to make a hard-and-fast judgement of what is uncivil and what is not. Editors should take into account factors such as (i) the intensity and context of the language/behaviour; (ii) whether the behaviour has occurred on a single occasion, or is occasional or regular; (iii) whether a request has already been made to stop the behaviour, and whether that request is recent; (iv) whether the behaviour has been provoked; and (v) the extent to which the behaviour of others need to be treated at the same time.

The following behaviours can contribute to an uncivil environment:

1. Direct rudeness

   (a) rudeness, insults, name-calling, gross profanity or indecent suggestions
   (b) personal attacks including racial, ethnic, sexual, disability-related, gender-related and religious slurs, and derogatory references to groups such as social classes or nationalities
   (c) ill-considered accusations of impropriety
   (d) belittling a fellow editor including the use of judgemental edit summaries or talk-page posts (e.g. "that is the stupidest thing I have ever seen", "snipped crap")

2. Other uncivil behaviours

   (a) taunting or baiting: deliberately pushing others to the point of breaching civility even if not seeming to commit such a breach themselves. All editors are responsible for their own actions in cases of baiting; a user who is baited is not excused by that if they attack in response, and a user who baits is not excused from their actions by the fact that the bait may be taken.
   (b) harassment, including Wikihounding, bullying, personal or legal threats, posting of personal information, repeated email or user space postings
   (c) sexual harassment
   (d) lying
   (e) quoting another editor out of context to give the impression they hold views they do not hold, or to malign them

In addition, lack of care when applying other policies can lead to conflict and stress. For instance, referring to a user's good-faith edits as vandalism may lead to their feeling unfairly attacked. Use your best judgement, and be ready to apologize if you turn out to be wrong.

Assume good faith

The assume good faith (AGF) guideline states that unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, editors should assume that others are trying to help, not hurt the project.

The guideline does not require that editors continue to assume good faith in the presence of obvious evidence of intentional wrongdoing. However, do not assume there is more misconduct than evidence supports. Given equally plausible interpretations of the evidence, choose the most positive one.

Dealing with incivility

1. First of all, consider whether you and the other editor may simply have misunderstood each other. Clarify, and ask for clarification.
2. Consider the possibility that something you said or did wrongly provoked a defensive, irritated or fed-up response. Be prepared to apologise for anything which you could / should have done better (if an awful lot of people seem to be getting frustrated with you, the problem may be with you.)
3. Even if you're offended, be as calm and reasonable as possible in your response. Until there is clear evidence to the contrary, assume that the offense was unintended.
4. Explain, clearly but kindly exactly what you felt was uncivil. Sometimes it helps to let the other editor know how their edit made you feel. Editors are not mind-readers. (That made me feel...“is much less likely to incite more anger or resentment than "Your post was...".)
5. Ask them to strike out an uncivil comment, or re-word it calmly and neutrally if they have not already done so by this point.
6. No matter how much you're being provoked, resist the temptation to snap back. It never works; it just makes things worse. Strive to become the editor who can't be baited.

7. If none of this is working, and the other person is not damaging the project or being uncivil or unkind to other editors either walk away or request dispute resolution from uninvolved editors.

8. In "emergency" situations, where the other editor needs to be stopped in their tracks to avoid causing serious disruption or needs a fast and strong wake-up call, file a report at the administrator "Incidents" noticeboard. Bear in mind the risk of being hoist by your own petard if you yourself are guilty of policy violations. Please also read the ANI Advice first.

**Dispute resolution**

See also: [WP:CONDUCTDISPUTE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:CONDUCTDISPUTE)

In a case of ongoing incivility, first decide if anything needs to be done. Confronting someone over a minor incident – particularly if it turns out that you misinterpreted what they meant – may produce more stress and drama than the incident itself. Consider your own behaviour; and, if you find you have been uncivil, apologize to him or her instead.

In escalating order of seriousness, here are the venues you may use for dispute resolution if the relevant page's talk page is insufficient:

- **User talk page.** If some action is necessary first consider discussing it on that user's talk page. Be careful not to escalate the situation, and politely explain your objection. You may also wish to include a diff of the specific uncivil statement. If you are in active dispute with the user consider offering an olive branch to them instead.

- **Third opinion.** This forum can be used to request outside input from an uninvolved user regarding the problem. Like many Wikipedia:Dispute resolution processes, it is limited to encyclopedia content disputes.

- **Administrators' noticeboard (ANI).** The Administrators' noticeboard is intended to report and discuss severe incidents of misconduct that require intervention by administrators and experienced editors.

- The last step – only when other avenues have been tried and failed – is the Arbitration Committee, who will scrutinise all sides involved in the dispute and create binding resolutions.

**Threats of violence** (including death threats and suicide threats) should be reported immediately by e-mail to the Wikimedia Foundation at emergency@wikimedia.org; see [WP:VIOLENCE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:VIOLENCE) for more on this. For legal threats, bigoted attacks or other hateful speech, and other cases where immediate action is required, use the Administrator's Noticeboard Incidents page to contact the site's admins.

**Removing uncivil comments**


Where the uncivil comment is yours, any of these options will help to reduce the impact:

- Where someone is unintentionally offended at your comment, calmly explain what you meant.

- **Strike it out** (using `<s>` HTML strikes out tag `</s>`), to show publicly that you withdraw the comment.

- Quietly remove it, or rewrite the comment to be more civil – Usually only a good idea if you think better of it before anyone objected to it. If someone has already reacted, you should acknowledge the change in a quick comment after the changed text, for instance: *Comment removed by author*

- Simply apologize. This option never hurts, and can be combined well with any of the others. Even if you feel the thrust of your words is true, or that they are misunderstanding what you meant, you can still apologize.

In the event of rudeness or incivility on the part of another editor, it may be appropriate to discuss the offending words with that editor, and to request that editor to change that specific wording. Some care is necessary, however, so as not to further inflame the situation. It is not normally appropriate to edit or remove another editor's comment. Exceptions include to remove obvious trolling or vandalism, or if the comment is on your own user talk page. Derogatory comments about another contributor may be removed by any editor.

A special case is outing, that is, revealing personally identifiable information about another editor that they have not revealed themselves and probably do not want known, such as their name, phone number or address. These should be immediately reverted, then an oversighter should be contacted to remove the information from the edit history, so that it cannot be found by anyone else
later. This applies whether or not the information is correct, as to confirm the information is incorrect by treating it any differently gives the outer useful information. Wikipedia:Outing has full information.

Different places, different atmospheres

Article talk pages should be, on the whole, considered to be professional workspaces. They're places to talk about how to improve the article, and to discuss the article (though it's OK for conversations to wander into related areas, or go more into depth than the article does, as that helps with research and gives ideas on improvement). But an editor's talk page is more like their kitchen; it's more informal, and (within reason) it's up to them what happens in there. Clearly, just like in a real kitchen, it's no more acceptable to stick a knife in someone than it is in the office. Personal attacks are not acceptable anywhere, but expect users' own talk pages to have a much more informal atmosphere than article talk pages.

Apologising: It's OK to say sorry

See also: Wikipedia: Apology

Disputes, and even misunderstandings, can lead to situations in which one party feels injured by the other. There's no loss of face in apologising. We all make mistakes, we all say the odd hurtful thing, we all have bad days and bad moments. If you have a sneaky feeling you owe someone an apology, offer the apology. Apologising does not hurt you.

Remember, though, that you cannot demand an apology from anyone else. It will only get their back up and make it either less likely to happen, or to be totally insincere if you do get an apology. Never be too proud to make the first move when it comes to saying sorry. That kind of "pride" is destructive. An apology provides the opportunity for a fresh start, and can clear the air when one person's perceived incivility has offended another.

Blocking for incivility

See also: Blocking policy: Cool-down blocks

Blocking for incivility is possible when incivility causes serious disruption. However, the civility policy is not intended to be used as a weapon and blocking should not be the first option in most cases.

1. Be sure to take into account all the relevant history. Avoid snap judgments without acquainting yourself with the background to any situation.
2. Think very hard of the possible merits and why other avenues of approach before you take action. Sanctions for civility violations should only happen when nothing else would do. Poorly considered civility blocks have at times worsened disputes and increased disruption. Remember that sanctions may be more applicable under another heading (disruption, personal attack, tendentious editing or harassment).
3. Civility blocks should be for obvious and uncontentious reasons, because an editor has stepped over the line in a manner nearly all editors can see. In cases where you have reason to suspect this would not be the case — cases where there is reason to believe that taking admin action against someone who was uncivil would be an uncontentious (or nearly so) prospect — it is expected that discussion will be opened on the matter at WP: ANI, before any admin action is taken. Benefits derived from long or controversial civility blocks should be weighed against the potential for disruption caused by block reviews, and unblock requests.
4. Users should be clearly warned, in most circumstances, before being blocked for incivility and should be allowed sufficient time to retract, refactor or explain incivil comments. Even experienced contributors should not be blocked without warning. Exceptions to this may include users who make egregious violations or threats, or who have received multiple warnings.

This is not to say that blocking for incivility should not or cannot happen, but immediate blocking is generally reserved for cases of major incivility, where incivility rises to the level of clear disruption, personal attacks, harassment or outing. As with other blocks, civility blocks should be preventative and not punitive.

See also

- How to Win Friends and Influence People (book)
- Meta: Don't be a jerk
Notes

2. Administrators should try to follow *The Principle of Least Drama* when given a choice between several ways of dealing with a problem, pick the one that generates the least drama.
3. "the law and its fulfillment, namely punishment, are directed essentially to the future, not to the past. This distinguishes punishment from revenge, for revenge is motivated by what has happened, and hence by the past as such. All retaliation for wrong by inflicting a pain without any object for the future is revenge, and can have no other purpose than consolation for the suffering one has endured by the sight of the suffering one has caused in another. Such a thing is wickedness and cruelty and cannot be ethically justified." – Arthur Schopenhauer *The World as Will and Representation* Vol. I, § 62.

Further reading


---

### Wikipedia key policies and guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>✔️ Verifiability · No original research · Neutral point of view · What Wikipedia is not · Biographies of living persons · Image use · Wikipedia is not a dictionary · Article titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔️ Notability · Autobiography · Citing sources · Identifying reliable sources (medicine) · Do not include copies of lengthy primary sources · Plagiarism · Don’t create hoaxes · Fringe theories · Patent nonsense · External links · Portal namespace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>✔️ Civility · Consensus · Editing policy · Harassment · Vandalism · Ignore all rules · No personal attacks · Ownership of content · Edit warring · Dispute resolution · Sock puppetry · No legal threats · Child protection · Paid-contribution disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔️ Assume good faith · Conflict of interest · Disruptive editing · Do not disrupt Wikipedia to illustrate a point · Etiquette · Gaming the system · Please do not bite the newcomers · Courtesy vanishing · Responding to threats of harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deletion</td>
<td>✔️ Deletion policy · Proposed deletion (Biographies · Books) · Criteria for speedy deletion · Attack page · Oversight · Revision deletion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement</td>
<td>✔️ Administrators · Banning · Blocking · Page protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>✔️ Article size · Be bold · Disambiguation · Hatnotes · Talk page guidelines (Signatures) · Broad-concept article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>✔️ Manual of Style (Contents) · Accessibility (Understandability) · Dates and numbers · Images · Layout · Lead section · Linking · Lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>Categories, lists, and navigation templates · Categorization · Template namespace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project content</th>
<th>✔️ Project namespace (WikiProjects) · User pages (User boxes) · Shortcuts · Subpages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WMF</th>
<th>✔️ List of policies · Friendly space policy · Licensing and copyright · Privacy policy · Values · FAQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- List of all policies and guidelines (✔️ List of policies · ✔️ List of guidelines) ·
  - Lists of attempts in creating fundamental principles

---

### Essays on Wikipedia civility (nutshell)

#### The basics
- How to be civil · Maintaining a friendly space · Negotiation · Accepting other users · Enjoy yourself · Expect no thanks · Thank you · Apology · Truce · Divisiveness · Encouraging the newcomers · Relationships with academic editors · High-functioning autism and Asperger's editors · Obsessive Compulsive Disorder editors

#### Philosophy
- A weak personal attack is still wrong · Advice for hotheads · An uncivil environment is a poor environment · Be the glue · Civility warnings · Deletion as revenge · Failure · Forgive and forget · It's not the end of the world · Nobody cares · Most people who disagree with you on content are not vandals · Old Fashioned Wikipedian Values · Revert notification opt-out · Shadowless Fists of Death! · Staying cool when the editing gets hot · The grey zone · The last word · There is no Divine Right Of Editors · Most ideas are bad · Nothing is clear · The rules of polite discourse · There is no common sense · Wikipedia is not about winning · Writing for the opponent

#### Dos
- Argue better · Assume good faith · Assume the assumption of good faith · Assume no clue · Avoid personal remarks · Avoid the word "vandal" · Beyond civility · Call a spade a spade · Candor · Deny recognition · Desist · Discussing cruft · Drop the stick and back slowly away from the horse carcass · Encourage full discussions · Get over it · How to lose · Imagine others complexly · Just drop it · Keep it down to earth · Mind your own business · Say "MOBY"

#### Don'ts
- Civil POV pushing · Don't accuse someone of a personal attack for accusing of a personal attack · Don't be a fanatic · Don't be a griever · Don't be an ostrich · Don't be ashamed · Don't be inconsiderate · Don't be obnoxious · Don't be prejudiced · Don't bite the newcomers · Don't call a spade a spade · Don't call the kettle black · Don't call things cruft · Don't come down like a ton of bricks · Don't create attack pages · Don't cry COI · Don't drink the consensus Kool-Aid · Don't eat the troll's food · Don't engage in cyberbullying · Don't fight fire with fire · Don't give a fuck · Don't insult the vandals · Don't remind others of past misdeeds · Don't spite your face · Don't take the bait · Don't template the regulars · Don't throw your toys out of the pram · POV railroad · No angry mastodons (just madmen) · No, you can't have a pony

### WikiRelations
- WikiBullying · WikiCrime · WikiHarassment · WikiHate · WikiLawyering · WikiLove · WikiPeace

### About essays
- The difference between policies, guidelines and essays · Don't cite essays as if they were policy · Quote your own essay · The value of essays

---

**Essay directory**
Rationalist taboo

From RationalWiki

**Rationalist taboo** is the name coined by Eliezer Yudkowsky of Less Wrong for a technique which tries to overcome ambiguity and seek clarity in a discussion by restricting your use of language.[1] It specifies that the participants make one or more of the vague terms in a discussion—like "freedom" or "abortion"—a taboo word that temporarily cannot be said: more precise descriptions must instead be used.[2] It is important to note that simply using a synonym does not suffice: the goal of the rationalist taboo is to prompt speakers to carefully define the actual content that might be otherwise disguised by the tabooed word. For example, it is meaningless to argue about whether or not a particular sentiment is "racist," unless both speakers agree on the exact nature of "racism." Making "racist" a taboo word encourages speakers to describe the specific offense entailed, rather than arguing over the validity of a vague label.[3]

The rationalist taboo is one of a variety of techniques applied by the Less Wrong crowd in their attempts to work around perceived shortcomings inherent to both language and human nature. In this case, the target is the imprecision found in frequently-used and poorly-defined words, which allows entire conversations to occur without any real engagement even if both participants have open minds.

Yudkowsky describes the technique as follows:

> When you find yourself in philosophical difficulties, the first line of defense is not to define your problematic terms, but to see whether you can think without using those terms at all. Or any of their short synonyms. And be careful not to let yourself invent a new word to use instead. Describe outward observables and interior mechanisms; don’t use a single handle, whatever that handle may be.[1]

**Contents**

- 1 Rationale
  - 1.1 Defining terms
  - 1.2 Critical thinking
- 2 Worked example
  - 2.1 Sound
  - 2.2 It works!
Rationale

The rationalist taboo comes from the importance of precision in arguments, and also from the need to avoid unproductive arguments from semantics and definitions. Anyone who has ever spent time "discussing" or "debating" on the internet may well recognize the situation where instead of discussing an issue, you actually end up discussing a definition instead. Perhaps Bill Clinton's infamous "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is" was taking this to extremes, but whether it be "democracy," "rationalism," or "reality," it's important to know exactly what words mean and then stick to this convention. The simple fact at play here is that a word is not the same as a thought, and a word itself is quite meaningless without such an agreed upon definition—the most important part here being "agreed upon." Thoughts map onto certain words, but unless both parties have the very same map, their thoughts will not sync up and the discussion can go absolutely nowhere. The rationalist taboo proposes that completely avoiding these words that are the root cause of this mapping error is a technique that can be used to increase the productivity of a discussion.

The point, from a "Yudkowskian" perspective, is to guide people to discussing things in terms of their observational qualities (what we expect to see and experience from them) rather than in terms of just their labels and learned behaviour. It enforces people to visualize details and describe what is really there, often as if you're seeing something for the first time, rather than use a less well defined mental shortcut.\[4\] It's not too dissimilar to the artistic tip of "drawing what you see".

This isn't just important from the viewpoint of precision, one of the most useful aspects is that it removes deep emotional attachment to certain terms. It is easy to effectively commit emotional blackmail on an opponent by questioning why they wouldn't be for something like rationality, feminism, freedom or democracy—because these words are almost universally considered to be good things that you should agree with. Tabooing these terms frees anyone from the need to unquestioningly agree and focus on what is actually meant. It prevents this emotional blackmail aspect, allowing someone to critically evaluate an idea without having to avoid being labelled as "anti".

Defining terms

Defining complex terms in advance has long been part of the normal "tool kit" of philosophical and rationalist debating. For example, Scott Clifton, operating under the YouTube name Theoretical Bullshit, made a similar point underlining the importance of this in his 'Treatise on Morality'.\[5\] Here he took great pains in defining his terms for "good" and "evil": stating that if anyone was to disagree with his definitions it would be okay, and he would just find some other random and arbitrary combination of vowels and consonants to represent his ideas. As if to illustrate how much emotional attachment and preconceived notions of a word can control people, one of Clifton's critics seemed to miss this point when describing the death penalty as not a form of murder—despite Clifton clearly defining the idea he wanted to convey that did define the death penalty as a form of murder. Yudkowsky's formulation of the rationalist taboo goes one step further than this traditional
methodology, stating that defining terms in advance isn't a necessary exercise if you can substitute the controversial word with a more precise definition throughout. This avoids the emotional attachment issue that can prevent people from accepting a definition given in advance.

**Critical thinking**

Tabooing certain words also acts as a critical thinking exercise for oneself. This is a more subtle application and is only slightly related to the idea of precise communication between people, but it is an extremely important aspect. Often, an argument can end up relying on buzzwords and jargon to support it — Yudkowsky wrote a similar piece discussing the idea of "applause lights," where a term is not really being used to convey anything other than for an audience to applaud it. This can indicate that perhaps even the person proposing the argument hasn't really understood what they mean, or why they mean it, and so might not have the best and most correct reasoning they can be capable of. By removing the vague terms and forcing people to exemplify their ideas, the rationalist taboo comes in useful for crystallizing arguments that would otherwise be too reliant on ambiguous or broad terms to be meaningful.

**Worked example**

**Sound**

In the old metaphysical proverb "if a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?", there seems to be a paradox between whether a tree does something, or not. By tabooing the word "sound", clarification can be made in both the question and the responses - and what people infer from the word "sound" is dissolved. People can realise that disagreement of "it does make a sound" and "it doesn't make a sound" are, in fact, illusions caused by this.

The reason tabooing "sound" would work in this case is that the alternative is to form some kind of *argumentum ad dictionarium*, where people argue based on definitions. I.e., "if you define sound like this, then yes." - "but if you define sound like this, then no." This would lead to a disagreement over a definition, rather than efficiently resolving the conflict by dissolving the primary problem.

This very generic example has a wide range of applications - it can be quite good to bring up in arguments about whether Pluto is a planet. Simply add a taboo on the word "planet" and you quickly realise that pages and pages of internet debate has been generated over, quite literally, *nothing*.

**It works!**

Take the assertion that "prayer works." Although applied more generally to anything that can be said to "work" (such as most alternative medicine), this specific example can have an alarming number of connotations associated with it, and often leads to disagreements between skeptics and believers. A skeptic will ask for the proof that prayer works, while a believer asserts it works on faith and can't be measured by science and proof. So, what if these were removed and rephrased? "Prayer" is an easy one to deal with, as it's simply "appealing to a deity." This doesn't accomplish much but it does serve to differentiate prayer from forms of meditation and self-belief. It would focus our attention on the purported mechanism of action, rather than mere introverted self-belief that could cause prayer to "work" regardless of whether it is based on bullshit.
What about "works"? This is perhaps the key point in the argument. People have a vague notion of what "works" means, but in the context of prayer it may need to be expanded upon. A skeptic would suggest "produces results" — this helps raise the issue of what these results are. They would have to be measurable results, certainly, as results that can't be measured are hardly results at all. Even this might cause conflict; what are "results," what can be measured? So that too can be tabooed to produce a further and a few more levels can be added until we hit a more detailed statement such as "appealing to a deity produces a change that is out of our direct control, that is in line with our expectations that come from what we asked the deity for." This leaves us with a more precise statement, free from the very simplified notion of what "works" means, although it is considerably wordier. It can even be compared with reality. The question is, does a believer come to the same conclusion when they say "prayer works," and can it be reconciled with the precise term generated by tabooing "prayer works" from a skeptical perspective?

Is it rape?

This slightly "controversial" example could almost certainly benefit from this technique. In recent years many politicians and public figures have argued "is it rape?" as a way of excusing acts, or adding additional qualifiers rather haphazardly to confuddle the issue. Instead, consider the rationalist taboo approach to "rape" as a word itself. Someone then can't excuse some acts by redefining them; and the question "is it rape?" needs to be approached differently.

In this case, the question would be most readily replaced with "was informed consent exchanged?" Here we have something far more concrete to ask; and something far more closely related to whether it is moral or not (in fact, most people would agree this is the question that determines right or wrong). If the answer is "no", then there is no way to really excuse an act based on it being forcible, legitimate, or honest.

Oh, it was forcible consent wasn't exchanged?

Terms of art

While controversial or flexible definitions in philosophical discussions can benefit greatly from the rationalist taboo, it's not always necessary or even desirable to do in all cases for practical reasons. This is the case with a term of art, an agreed upon definition designed to reduce ambiguity in discussions because it is assumed that all parties hold the relevant information to decode that word with precision; where a party does not often leads to not even wrong circumstances. For example, the second law of thermodynamics has a set definition and a set implication that all relevant scientists agree upon. Substituting the four words "second law of thermodynamics" with anything less than a full textbook of information could lead to increased ambiguity, as the nuances and caveats are removed, and doing this for every mention of the phrase would be just plain inefficient. However, closer to the spirit of the technique, putting a rationalist taboo on certain terms of art can test if someone has actually understood them properly to show that they're not just using the words as uncritical jargon.

See also

- E-Prime
- Less Wrong

References
The Conversation

The style of teaching and learning at St. John's is often described as conversational. The conversation is cooperative and respectful, not competitive. Discussion is meant to pursue questions that are of general interest to the participants. We also speak of what we do as learning together through shared inquiry. We strive to build something together that is not the exclusive property of anyone at the table. Participants both teach and learn from one another.

Classes typically begin with an opening question from the tutor (as all our faculty members are called). Often the opening question will set the direction for the entire conversation, but not always.

Participants enter the conversations freely and as the spirit moves them. The success of our classes depends almost entirely on what participants bring to the table. Contributions can be of many kinds: some will address the question directly; others will offer adjustments to the suggestions of their fellow participants. Sometimes it is useful to reformulate a question on the table or to ask for a clarification of someone's point. At times it is appropriate to bring the conversation back to the text under discussion.

Since all the views presented are assumed to be under construction, it is good to speak up when an idea is just beginning to take shape and not wait until it is fully worked out. Our work is concerned more with exploring interpretations than defending or attacking them.

The Books

Readings are assigned for each of our class sessions. Our working assumptions are that the reading has something to teach us and that participants have read the text thoroughly. This usually means carefully reading the material at least twice.

What, precisely, we are to learn from the book is discovered by the participants and the tutor working together. Participants pursue their own questions and their own ways of reading the books. We ask only that comments, observations, and questions return to the text for support and clarification.

This commitment to the centrality of the text helps give the conversation shape and keeps it from becoming diffuse or deteriorating into merely personal reflection.

The Tutor

The tutors' work is to assist with the learning of others while continuing to learn themselves. They neither lecture nor do they merely facilitate conversations. They guide the conversation, sometimes steering it in a particular direction, sometimes listening and letting it take its own course, and occasionally, steering it around an unpromising detour.

The Classes

Classes are of two basic types, seminars and tutorials. For seminars, the reading assignments are usually longer and the conversation addresses more sweeping issues. Seminars are either co-led by two tutors or led by one tutor. Tutorials tend to treat shorter reading assignments with more attention to detail and the careful unfolding of an argument. In tutorials, the conversation tends to be more highly structured by the tutor.

Rules

Of course, there are no firm rules. A few suggestions about accepted classroom manners, however, may be in order:

1. Participants need not raise a hand or be recognized by the tutor to speak. Jump right in at the end of someone else's statement. It takes some practice to figure out just when to do this and how to do it gracefully.

2. Each person will not speak for the same amount of time, but it is important that everyone contribute something.

3. Succinct comments are more effective than protracted diatribes. Speak briefly. Make it easy for others to build on your ideas.

4. Listening is at least as important as speaking. Connecting ideas makes for interesting conversation.

5. Asking questions is an important form of participation.

6. Challenging the ideas of others or offering modifications of them is perfectly in order as long as it is done respectfully and in the service of seeking truth. Our conversation is not a debate. Participants are not trying to win something or beat someone.

7. As much as possible, participants refer only to books the group has read together. Trumping the conversation with a reference to a recent scholarly article, a fair tactic in graduate schools, is considered bad form.

8. Even in serious conversation—especially in serious conversation—a sense of humor is a wonderful thing.

—Stephen A. Van Luchene (November 2015)