

Very Short Guide to Constructive and Respectful Academic Discussions¹

Tutorials and seminars are meant to promote constructive discussion. It is important when sharing views and arguments that you respect your peers by acknowledging their contributions, allowing everyone an opportunity to contribute and show respect over sensitive topics. Here's some things to keep in mind.

I. Respect

1. Be nice.
2. Don't be incredulous, roll your eyes, make faces, laugh at a participant, or start side conversations.
3. Don't present objections as flat dismissals (leave open the possibility that there's a response).
4. Don't speak over others, especially toward the beginning of an exchange (there's more room for back and forth with interruption later, but it's always good to let people get their point out first).
5. It's good to acknowledge your interlocutor's insights as well as those of previous contributors.

II. Constructiveness

1. Objections are fine, but it's also always okay to build on a speaker's project. Even objections can often be cast in a constructive way, and even destructive objections can often be usefully accompanied by a positive insight suggested by the objection.
2. If you find yourself thinking that the project is worthless and there is nothing to be learned from it, think twice before asking your question.
3. There's no need to keep pressing the same objection (individually or collectively).
4. Do ask questions about other discussants' ideas or arguments. Ask to clarify if you do not comprehend everything, or ask how they would respond to a certain counter-argument.
5. Do think of the best possible ways to defend your interlocutor's position, even if their defense is not sufficiently strong enough in your estimation.

III. Inclusiveness

1. Don't dominate the discussion.
2. Try not to let your question (or your answer) run on forever. Raise one question per question (follow-ups developing a line of thought are okay, but questions on separate topics can wait).
3. It's OK to ask a question that you think may be unsophisticated or uninformed.
4. Don't use unnecessarily offensive examples.

If you are interested in exploring how to make classrooms more inclusive, you can visit our webpage: <http://stirlingbus.com/map/>, where you can find useful resources.

It is worth remembering that there can be reasonable disagreement about the guidelines. If you have any thoughts on the guidelines or if you just need to talk to someone, you're always welcome to contact the Minorities and Philosophy chapter of St Andrews and Stirling Philosophy graduate programme: mapuk.sasp@gmail.com. If you'd like to report something you can contact the Equality & Diversity office of the university (diversity@st-andrews.ac.uk) and/or the Equality Diversity Officer of your department.

¹ Adapted from *NYU guidelines for respectful philosophical discussion* that can be found at <https://as.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/as/departments/philosophy/climate/initiatives/nyu-guidelines-for-respectful-philosophical-discussion.html>.