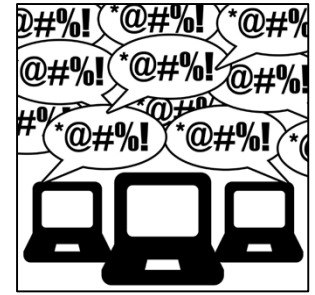




# Difficult Conversations Strategies for Civil Discourse

Planning • Facilitating • Managing



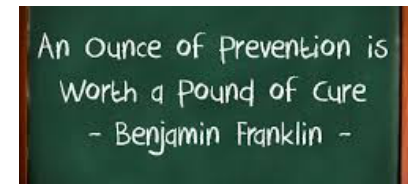
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## Strategy 1: Planning ahead

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**If there is a chance** that controversial topics or ideas will be discussed, plan to establish ground rules for the discussion. In class, an instructor can present ground rules and work with students to accept or modify these guidelines or norms for conduct during the discussion. Some suggestions include the following:

- Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
- Respect one another's views.
- Criticize ideas, not individuals.
- Commit to learning, not debating.
- Avoid blame and speculation.
- Avoid inflammatory language.



It is important that students agree on the ground rules before discussion begins.\*

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## Strategy 2: Facilitating with tools

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**If your subject matter involves** examining or discussing racial, political, religious or other sensitive issues, utilize and help students implement facilitation tools such as:

- discussion norms or guidelines – can be co-created and implemented by students and faculty
- dialog protocols and structures – “round robin” and “talking stick” protocols give equal opportunity for students to talk and respond to others and ideas
- quick writes – allows individuals to process their thinking before speaking
- the “Five-minute Rule” – structure for making marginalized perspectives visible
- the “Fishbowl” – structured whole class discussion for complex issues



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## Strategy 3: Managing a crisis

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**If you find yourself in a discussion that is out of control or threatens learning ...**

- step back, let the situation cool off, buy yourself time to think
- acknowledge the speaker or tension and redirect the conversation:  
*“Thank you for that comment, does anyone else have another perspective on...”*  
*“For now, let’s agree to disagree on (this topic)” ... , transition to a different activity or topic, do a quick write, take a 5 min break... , and revisit it on...*
- Return to the conversation on a different day or offer to meet with students outside of class after you have had a chance to assess the situation and consult with colleagues and/or university resources:
  - Case Manager, Student Affairs, 916-278-6060
  - Faculty Mentors, Center for Teaching and Learning: 916-278-5945; [ctl@csus.edu](mailto:ctl@csus.edu)



# Civil Discourse Resources and References

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## Strategy 1: Planning ahead

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- **Guidelines for Discussion of Racial Conflict and the Language of Hate, Bias, and Discrimination**, University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, *More extensive list and explanation of norms*  
<https://www2.humboldt.edu/diversity/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20Discussion%20of%20Racial%20Conflict%20and%20the%20Language%20of%20Hate%20-%20Univ%20of%20Michigan.pdf>
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## Strategy 2: Facilitating with tools

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### Theory and Context

- **Challenging Conversations**, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Humboldt State University, *Wealth of practical articles, papers, and videos describing and demonstrating facilitation strategies and frameworks*  
<https://www2.humboldt.edu/diversity/faculty-resources/challenging-conversations>
- **Teaching Controversial Issues**, Center for Faculty Excellence, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2004. *Discusses student developmental theory and uses it to build guidelines for classroom discussion, critical thinking and facilitating “structured controversy”.*  
[https://www2.humboldt.edu/diversity/sites/default/files/Teaching\\_Controversial\\_Issues-Center\\_for\\_Faculty\\_Excellence-UNC\\_Chapel\\_Hill.pdf](https://www2.humboldt.edu/diversity/sites/default/files/Teaching_Controversial_Issues-Center_for_Faculty_Excellence-UNC_Chapel_Hill.pdf)
- **Inclusive Practices for Managing Controversial Issues**, The University of Queensland, Australia, *Strategies and tips for managing controversial issues in teaching including a self-reflective review that could be used to assess classroom climate and instructor preparation.*  
[http://www.uq.edu.au/teach/cdip/docs/strategy\\_manageControversy.pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/teach/cdip/docs/strategy_manageControversy.pdf)

### Tools

- **Small Group Discussion Protocols**, Dakin Burdick, Center for Teaching Excellence, Endicott College, 2011  
<https://pharmacy.unc.edu/files/2015/06/Appendix-B-Discussion-Protocols.pdf>
  - **Instructional Toolbox**, Sacramento State, Center for Teaching and Learning, <http://www.csus.edu/ctl/downloads/052313toolbox%20of%20instructional%20strategies2013.docx>
  - **Protocols and Resources**, Expeditionary Learning, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.  
[https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/appendix\\_protocols\\_and\\_resources.pdf](https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/appendix_protocols_and_resources.pdf)
  - **Quick Write**, Description, Purpose, and Directions, PCG’s Center for Resource Management, 2006,  
[http://nrhs.nred.org/www/nred\\_nrhs/site/hosting/Literacy%20Website/Literacy%20Strategy%20Templates/Quick\\_Write\\_description.pdf](http://nrhs.nred.org/www/nred_nrhs/site/hosting/Literacy%20Website/Literacy%20Strategy%20Templates/Quick_Write_description.pdf)
  - **the “Five-minute Rule”** – Handbook for Facilitating Difficult Conversations in the Classroom, Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding, page 6  
<https://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/Centers/Democratic/Documents/Handbook%20for%20Facilitating%20Difficult%20Conversations2.pdf>
  - **the “Fishbowl”**, Rationale and Procedure, <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/fishbowl>
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## Strategy 3: Managing a crisis

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- **Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom**, Dereck Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University, 2000, *Practical advice on how to manage our students and ourselves in moments of conflict including how to turn difficult encounters into learning opportunities.*  
<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html>