

Communication Guidelines for Sensitive Political Discussions

WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

- Each person participating in the discussion should follow the communication guidelines. These can be modified to the participants' needs upon consensus of the group in question.
- Make sure that everyone knows the rules and restate them when needed. - Aiming for a respectful atmosphere.
- Foster a culture of empathy and active listening: do not interrupt; listen to understand the other person fully, rather than to respond.
- Paraphrase to make sure that you are receiving the intended message that your conversation partner is communicating and ask questions if any information is unclear.
- Fact based information: Share and consult different reliable sources for information.
- Give space and acknowledge everyone's emotions.
- Everyone should have space to speak and this space must be fairly shared (e.g. avoid monologues using a timer).
- Everyone should listen to other voices without interrupting nor judging. - Error friendliness with accountability and willingness to admit mistakes. - Decide on which information is confidential (e.g. Anonymity of participants, sharing private experiences, etc.).
- Identify areas of agreement or shared values to build on common ground.

WHAT WON'T BE TOLERATED

- Any form of discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, origin, race, religion, neurological-cognitive diversity, disability, social and economic status.
- All types of violence, including insults, mobbing and harassment. - The denial of experiences and the invalidation of other people's feelings. - Avoid blaming and making judgements. The arguments can be debated but personal attacks won't be accepted.
- Misuse of power and privilege: Differences of opinion should not lead to further consequences inside and outside of the discussion spaces. - Manipulation of information.
- Repeated violation of rules and boundaries.

SELF AND COLLECTIVE CARE

- Remember that you are free to leave or to move if you don't want to participate or if you feel uncomfortable.
- Observe the room: Confirm the wellbeing of participants during the discussions.
- Use trigger warnings.
- Self-reflect before and after the session.
- Pay attention to the tone of your voice and mind your body language. -

- Ask for the other people's needs and communicate yours clearly. -
- Encourage a return to the main topic and avoid personal attacks. -
- Acknowledge existing privileges.
- Address structural/institutional hierarchies in the room (e.g.: inform when people from various university status groups or external parties are present in a discussion).
- Allocate a specific time for discussion and incorporate breaks if necessary. -
- Open the space for giving and receiving feedback.
- If possible, create moments to discharge, indulge, and have informal meetings after the discussions to strengthen your collective bonds, in a less formal and more human sense without talking about the conflict.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF ESCALATION

- Take a break.
- Observe and trace the reason for the escalation.
- Identify and talk about the feelings that arose during the conversation. -
- Ask for the needs of parties who are affected by the escalation. - Engage in efforts for a solution that is beneficial for all parts.
- Give a chance to continue at another time or stop at all (agreement on disagreement).
- Respect if the people affected need time alone.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF BOUNDARIES VIOLATION

- Agree on a signal to de-escalate, slow down or stop disruptive behaviour before starting the process – for example a specific word or tone. - Restate rules for discussion, remind the existing boundaries.
- Politely but clearly set boundaries if the discussion becomes disrespectful. - Point out which limits are being infringed.
- Give the benefit of the doubt and make sure that there is no misunderstanding.
- Consideration will be given to the needs of the affected person. - The focus will not be on punishment or exclusion, but on restoration of the harm.
- The person who crossed the boundary will be given the opportunity to make amends.
- Depending on the degree of the boundary violation, a third party may be called in to assist with the case.
- It is advisable to involve all participants when proceeding with decisions that concern them all.
- If necessary, delegate a neutral party to mediate.

These guidelines are a collaborative effort born out of a two-day communication workshop in which UdK Berlin students representing diverse perspectives and experiences collectively crafted guidelines to create an inclusive space for dialogue, where every voice is heard and respected.