

Ground Rules for Respectful Discussion

- 1. Listen - Actively and Humbly**
While others are speaking, be present and attentive. Avoid mentally imposing your own biases, thoughts, or opinions onto what someone else is sharing. If you paraphrase what someone else said, verify with them afterwards that you have correctly interpreted their words: “Did I get that right?”
- 2. Share the air**
Be mindful of how much you and those around you are speaking. If you find yourself dominating the conversation, please step back; if you have not spoken much, feel encouraged to step up.
- 3. Lean into discomfort**
Learning only happens when you leave your comfort zone. Try to translate discomfort into constructive questions.
- 4. Be aware of privilege and power**
Think about how your identity and status affect how you speak and listen to others.
- 5. Use “I” statements**
Speak from your own experiences and avoid generalizing; respect that others’ experiences and expertise will differ from your own.
- 6. Critique ideas, not individuals**
Focus criticism on ideas, refrain from personal attacks or comments on individuals.
- 7. Intent ≠ Impact**
Recognize that unintended harm is still harm.
- 8. “Ouch”, “oops”**
If you feel uncomfortable or hurt by something that is said, you can say “ouch.” In response, the speaker should simply say “oops” and step back to allow the other person to explain what bothered them, if they feel so inclined.
- 9. Commit to learning, not debating**
Comment in order to share information, not to persuade.
- 10. The “Both/And” Rule**
Think “both/and” rather than “either/or.” Acknowledge that binaries are incomplete; leave room for complexity and avoid oversimplification.
- 11. Tolerate and teach; don’t shame and blame**
Be patient with, rather than critical of, individuals’ unfamiliarity with issues.
- 12. Access the space as you need**
Please make yourself comfortable in our discussion space. You are welcome to sit in chairs, sit or lie on the floor, stand, rock, flap, spin, move around, and step in and out of the room.
- 13. Use the Parking Lot and the Safe Space**
If a discussion gets off track, feel free to “park it” and return to it later. Relatedly, if you feel uncomfortable with participation at any moment, you are welcome to remove yourself.

Adapted from STSci’s Ground Rules for Respectful Discussion