

Gender Equity in the Classroom and Beyond

Establishing Groundrules

for Interaction in the Classroom



This is an example of language you might consider using in a syllabus, especially for courses that will be discussion-based. You can also have students develop their own agreed-upon rules for interaction in the classroom: this could be done in the first session, then typed up and distributed to the class.

We will use these ground rules to ensure both the quality and equity of discussion. We will all benefit from discussions that are thoughtful and spirited: this classroom is a place where you can be passionate about the subject, but we do not want our conversations to descend into arguments. We also want to be sure that everyone has a chance to be heard, and that we are working together toward a greater understanding of the material, rather than contributing disjointed pieces.

- Listen actively and attentively.
- Ask for clarification if you are confused.
- Do not interrupt one another.
- Challenge one another, but do so respectfully. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests. You should grant the same courtesy and respect to the people with whom you disagree that you would want for yourself.
- Critique ideas, not people.
- Do not offer opinions without supporting evidence.

- You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.
- Avoid put-downs (even humorous ones).
- Take responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
- Build on one another's comments; work toward shared understanding.
- Always have your book/readings in front of you.
- Do not monopolize discussion.
- Speak from your own experience, without generalizing.
- Students bring lots of interesting experiences to the classroom, and you are encouraged to bring up your experience when it is relevant to class discussion (and when you feel comfortable doing so). Everyone's personal experience deserves respect. But if you bring up your own experience in class, please recognize that it becomes a public topic for discussion. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation.
- If you are offended by anything said during discussion, acknowledge it immediately.
- Consider anything that is said in class strictly confidential.