



Respectful Dialogue and Debate: Principles and Practices

The University of British Columbia has responsibility for and is committed to providing its students, staff and faculty with an environment dedicated to excellence, equity and mutual respect. When engaging with others in dialogue or debate, consider the following basic principles and practices:

- Listen respectfully insofar as possible.
- Practice active listening, instead of thinking only about what you are waiting to say next.
- Speak for yourself, and let others speak for themselves.
- Instead of putting words in another person's mouth, ask the other person to clarify: "What did you mean?" Sometimes disagreement is based on a misunderstanding of another person's actual point of view.
- Practice the ability to disagree with an idea without attacking the speaker.
- Belittling, humiliating comments are major impediments to dialogue.
- Highly inflammatory language can cause people to stop listening.
- Try to avoid "conformity bias" and "group-think."
- Play thoughtfully with metaphors; sometimes they stimulate helpful insights.
- Analogies can be helpful; keep in mind that analogies are never perfect.
- Oversimplifying complex issues can aggravate and deepen differences.
- Generalizing formulations about an individual or a group of people, such as "you always..." or "all __ think that..." are probably untrue.
- Lengthy speeches or monologues are antithetical to productive dialogue.
- Everyone shares responsibility for a productive dialogue, even if there is a designated "facilitator."
- Pay attention to sharing speaking time and not repeating ideas.
- Communication styles are not uniform; these differences might be socially conditioned, such as physical proximity, volume of speech, pauses.
- Sharing a language does not always mean equivalent levels of fluency.
- Words convey different meanings to different individuals, even when they share a common language. Try asking: "How are you using the word ___?"
- Avoid cutting off dialogue prematurely, but consider taking a break to lower the temperature.
- Because ideas from multiple perspectives and knowledge domains can deepen and broaden understanding of complex issues, seek to make connections between diverse ideas.
- Try asking genuine questions, rather than only rhetorical questions.
- Try to respond to the thread of a conversation before starting a new thread.
- Building on ideas enables a dialogue to go deeper.
- Don't be afraid to disagree; disagreements can lead to teachable moments.