



STUDENTS UNITE DISCOURSE CLUB

A startup guide for leaders & students

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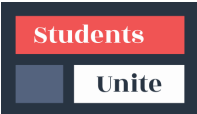
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Level 1 — Mission Statement & Meeting Agendas

[Name of School's] Discourse Club

PRESERVING RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVING CONVERSATIONS

MISSION STATEMENT

The [Name of School] Discourse Club provides students with the opportunity to develop excellent communication and relationship skills in a fun, non-judgmental, interactive, and supportive environment. Our goal is to focus on our own personal development while seeking to enhance and improve our overall school climate.

Promotional flyer

[NAME OF SCHOOL'S] DISCOURSE CLUB

Preserving Relationships and Improving Conversations

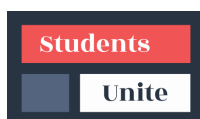
Tired of frustrating conversations that go nowhere? Afraid of being called names for sharing an opinion? Fed up with feeling awkward and tongue-tied? Want to improve the speech climate at our school?

JOIN [NAME OF SCHOOL'S] DISCOURSE CLUB!

We'll learn and practice proven communication skills and have fun discussing interesting topics and different ideas. Our goal is to develop the kinds of conversational skills that will enhance all your interactions and improve your relationships, while developing your logical reasoning ability. Our club is fun, supportive, non-judgmental and open to all. You can be as involved as you want to be . . . or simply sit back and listen.

Keep your views AND Keep your friends!

For more information, contact:



MEETING #1 AGENDA

Go over the Discourse Club Mission

Discourse Club Goals

Help students make and keep friends
Provide a supportive opportunity for students to practice effective communication skills
Personal self-improvement
Knowledge enrichment in logical reasoning and the First Amendment Enhance overall school climate and build school spirit
Improve conflict-resolution abilities
Increase interpersonal empathy

Our values

More speech, not enforced silence.
Respect others even if you disagree with them.

The 5 Levels of a Discourse Club

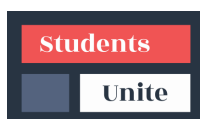
Mastering Small Talk
Understanding the First Amendment
Logical Reasoning and Debate
Handling Disagreements
Wisdom to Guide You

Badges you can earn [upcoming]

The First Amendment - Philosophy
The First Amendment - History
The First Amendment - Law
Logical Reasoning
Debate

Skills you will learn, practice, and develop:

“Small” talk and basic manners
The First Amendment (Understand the law and the reasoning behind it)
Logical reasoning (Be like Plato or Socrates!)
“Big” talk (Handling disagreements and holding your own in important debates)
Tools for handling emotional reactions and personal attacks.
Philosophical wisdom on when to speak up and when to bite your tongue.



Rules

We're here to have fun and make friends, above all.

We're not here to "win" and no one will "lose."

We're each focused on individual personal development.

We're not here to judge others or to put anyone down.

You can opt out of a discussion at any time.

Anyone can join at any time or stop coming at any time. It's voluntary.

If you leave but want to come back later, that's great.

You don't have to participate. You can just hang out and listen.

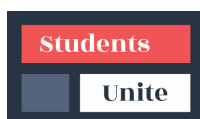
In a debate, we consider ideas, not people. We may reject or dismiss an idea, but never a person. If someone forgets this, we can remind them politely.

Conclude with an Icebreaker Activity and offer the optional reading.

OPTIONAL READING FOR MEETING #1

Discourse Clubs are organized around the following seven principles:

1. **The Liberal Principle:** "checking of each by each through public criticism is the only legitimate way to decide who is right" (Jonathan Rauch, p. 6). This means that, in order to learn, students must actually want to learn. More than that, to discern the truth, students must engage in rigorous, thoughtful discussion. And they must be willing to civilly and respectfully analyze the ideas of others.
2. **The Fallibility Principle:** Students must be willing to civilly and respectfully analyze their own ideas with humility. No individual is infallible. And the path to truth-finding begins with oneself. Individuals must be willing to grapple with, and challenge, their own dearly held beliefs.
3. **The Knowledge Principle:** $2+2 = 4$. While all individuals are fallible, truth does exist. But it may only be discovered via rigorous analysis. To prove something is true, skeptical individuals must try to disprove their claims. Truths only become accepted as such, after they survive numerous attempted (and failed) debunkings.
4. **The Boundless Principle:** The conversation is never over. It may be postponed, but the opportunities for continued analysis are endless and should be recognized as such. This means that discussions are not meant to be contests between people. They are meant to be perpetual contests of ideas. After all, the "winner" of today's debate might be the "loser" of tomorrow's.
5. **The Civility Principle:** The goal is increased interpersonal understanding, not social ostracization. Disprove and dismiss ideas, not people. Thus:



- Replace ad hominem attacks and name calling with thoughtful counterarguments.
 - Allow others to speak — and actually listen to their words.
 - Engage civilly and respectfully.
 - Remember that discussions are meant to be productive conversations, not rancorous call out sessions.
6. **The Viewpoint Neutrality Principle:** Politics may be discussed in these clubs, but the clubs themselves must remain nonpartisan. Students are encouraged to share their political beliefs, but they do not speak for the clubs when they do so. And club discussions should not be limited to political rhetoric. Club discussions can — and should — include small talk and casual conversations about nonpartisan subjects.
7. **The Self-Improvement Principle:** Remember the end goal and remain focused upon it: learn to communicate more effectively and to think more rigorously. Build interpersonal confidence. And become a more effective defender of “the way of inquiry.”

[source: Kindly Inquisitors by Jonathan Rauch]

Meeting #2 Agenda

Review the Club mission, goals, and rules.

Open with an Icebreaker activity

Cover the Embarrassing Stories discussion questions

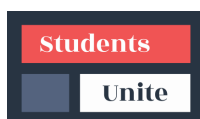
If time allows, move on to “Appropriate Conversations for Different Kinds of People”

Meeting #3 Agenda

Review the Club goals and rules.

Open with an Icebreaker activity.

Review Embarrassing stories and Appropriate Conversations



Move on to Small Talk activities.

Meeting #4 Agenda

Open with an Icebreaker activity

Show the civil discourse presentation

Read and discuss the civil discourse statement

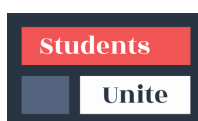
Meeting #5 Agenda (optional)

Open with an Icebreaker activity

Review and discuss the 7 Discourse Club principles

FIRE'S DISCOURSE CLUBS ARE ORGANIZED AROUND THE FOLLOWING SEVEN PRINCIPLES

8. **The Liberal Principle:** “checking of each by each through public criticism is the only legitimate way to decide who is right” (Jonathan Rauch, p. 6). This means that, in order to learn, students must actually want to learn. More than that, to discern the truth, students must engage in rigorous, thoughtful discussion. And they must be willing to civilly and respectfully analyze the ideas of others.
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10. **The Knowledge Principle:** $2+2 = 4$. While all individuals are fallible, truth does exist. But it may only be discovered via rigorous analysis. To prove something is true, skeptical individuals must try to disprove their claims. Truths only become accepted as such, after they survive numerous attempted (and failed) debunkings.
11. **The Boundless Principle:** The conversation is never over. It may be postponed, but the opportunities for continued analysis are endless and should be recognized as such. This means that discussions are not meant to be contests between people. They are meant to be perpetual contests of ideas. After all, the “winner” of today’s debate might be the “loser” of tomorrow’s.



12. **The Civility Principle:** The goal is increased interpersonal understanding, not social ostracization. Disprove and dismiss ideas, not people. Thus:

- Replace ad hominem attacks and name calling with thoughtful counterarguments.
- Allow others to speak — and actually listen to their words.
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13. **The Viewpoint Neutrality Principle:** Politics may be discussed in these clubs, but the clubs themselves must remain nonpartisan. Students are encouraged to share their political beliefs, but they do not speak for the clubs when they do so. And club discussions should not be limited to political rhetoric. Club discussions can — and should — include small talk and casual conversations about nonpartisan subjects.

14. **The Self-Improvement Principle:** Remember the end goal and remain focused upon it: learn to communicate more effectively and to think more rigorously. Build interpersonal confidence. And become a more effective defender of “the way of inquiry.”

[source: Kindly Inquisitors by Jonathan Rauch]

Ongoing possible activity: Ask for stories of any good or difficult conversations in the past week. Discuss how things could have gone better. Remind them that being in the Discourse Club is about personal improvement and not about correcting or finding fault with others.

Reminder that you will likely be adding (and losing) members throughout the course of running a club, so you will likely need to go back and recover past material to bring new members up to speed. This is a great opportunity to get older, longer-standing club members involved in leadership and teaching roles.

LEVEL 2 MEETING AGENDAS

MEETING #1

Begin with an Icebreaker Activity

Ask students: What does the First Amendment mean to you? Discuss

Survey:

What is your feeling when you hear the words “free speech?”

Positive

Negative

Neutral

Take the [First Amendment Quiz](#)

Share “3 Reasons Free Speech is Important” Presentation.

MEETING #2

Icebreaker Activity

Watch the Philosophy of Free Speech presentation

Share thoughts on the videos and philosophy of free speech.

Remind club members of club mission, rules, and values, if necessary

Hand out copies of Finding Your Voice Comic

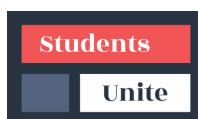
MEETING #3

Icebreaker Activity

Remind club members of club mission, rules, and values

Discuss Free Speech comic. You can read it aloud. There is an accompanying lesson plan at thefire.org/comic (and you can order more copies or read it online there.)

View the Free Speech, Power, and Censorship Slides on the History of Free Speech presentation and discuss.



MEETING #4

Icebreaker Activity

Watch video on the Limits of Free Speech

Share Presentation on the Law and Free Speech

Share video on Black Armbands and Mary Beth Tinker

Follow-up Survey - What have you learned about the First Amendment that surprised you?

What is your feeling when you hear the words “free speech?”

Positive

Negative

Neutral

Retake [First Amendment Quiz](#)

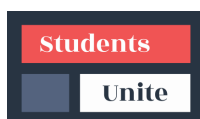
- Learn about the [First Amendment](#) and why it’s important.
- To learn more, visit Thefire.org/curriculum.

Other resources:

[YouTube video](#) about Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsberg’s unlikely friendship

Ongoing possible activity: Ask for stories of any good or difficult conversations in the past week. Discuss how things could have gone better. Remind them that being in the Discourse Club is about personal improvement and not about correcting or finding fault with others.

Reminder that you will likely be adding (and losing) members throughout the course of running a club, so you will likely need to go back and recover past material to bring new members up to speed. This is a great opportunity to get older, longer-standing club members involved in leadership and teaching roles.



LEVEL 3 MEETING AGENDAS

MEETING #1

Advisor: Review Helping Students Build Comfort with Debate and Civil Dialogue

Icebreaker Activity

Watch Powerpoint on Debate and Opposing Views

Remind students of Club Mission, Values, and Rules

Share the Disagreement Pyramid and Discuss

Share the Emotional Temperature Document and Discuss


MEETING #2

Icebreaker activity


Review the Disagreement Pyramid and Emotional Temperature Documents

Ask for stories of any good or difficult conversations in the past week. Discuss how things could have gone better. Remind them that being in the Discourse Club is about personal improvement and not about correcting or finding fault with others.


Chili Pepper Exercise - We have provided lists of possible debate topics. Hand out some of these and have students rate different topics according to how “hot” they might be. Here’s a guide to use:

 = a topic that causes minimal sensitivity but still provokes debate

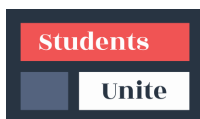
This is a category that you, as a leader and facilitator, may have to think about and brainstorm individually. Conversations that are generally in the “Yellow” and “Red” categories may be “Green” conversations in the context of your group, and vice versa

 = a topic that invokes slight sensitivity and emotional investment

Examples: University fund allocations, Environmental issues, Hate speech, Privacy and the government, healthcare

 = a topic that causes great sensitivity, possible emotional discomfort through disagreement

Examples: Immigration, Racial injustice, criminal justice,



Have students discuss: what makes a topic spicy? How can you tell?

(See Topic Escalation Guide for more discussion on this)

MEETING #3

Go over How to Form a Good Argument

Select a topic that students agree is mild and non-threatening, such as “Coke vs. Pepsi”

Ask for volunteers to prepare and debate the topic. Debaters should always receive a round of applause and possibly some sort of tangible acknowledgement like a bookmark, pen, or other token or esteem.

Ask for stories of any good or difficult conversations in the past week. Discuss how things could have gone better. Remind them that being in the Discourse Club is about personal improvement and not about correcting or finding fault with others.

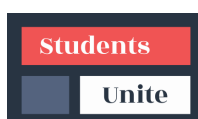
MEETING #4

Move on to Logical Fallacies, Cognitive Biases, and the card games as time and interest permits.

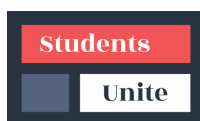
You may wish to assign club members a different logical fallacy or cognitive bias to learn and report on to other club members, since there are so many to learn that no one student will be able to remember them all.

Continue practicing debate and logical reasoning moving up or down the chili pepper scale as indicated by student comfort level and willingness.

Incorporate the Ideological Turing Test and Switching Sides when possible. Gently remind students of club rules, values, and mission as needed.



Reminder that you will likely be adding (and losing) members throughout the course of running a club, so you will likely need to go back and recover past material to bring new members up to speed. This is a great opportunity to get older, longer-standing club members involved in leadership and teaching roles.



Different Topics

- Never discuss politics or religion/tell spicy jokes in “mixed” company = good or bad advice?
- Appropriate Small Talk
- Discussions
- Debate
- Comfortable vs. Uncomfortable topics • Safe vs. “Risky” Topics

DEBATE/DISCUSSION TOPICS

Resolved: The benefits of First Amendment protection of offensive speech outweigh the harms.

Resolved: Those with unpopular opinions should self-censor to avoid offending others.

Resolved: Majority opinion should determine the scope of acceptable topics for discussion.

Resolved: Those who hold the majority of opinion have the right to silence those with alternative views.

Resolved: It is acceptable to prevent someone from speaking if you disapprove of their views.

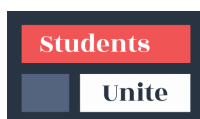
Resolved: The most sensitive person in the room should have the right to determine the limits of discussion for a group.

Resolved: Teachers should use trigger warnings before assigning potentially upsetting material.

Resolved: Potentially-upsetting material should not be allowed in a high school classroom.

Resolved: Freedom of speech must include the license to offend. Resolved: The school dress code violates students' freedom of speech.

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce its restrictions on legal immigration to the United States.



Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase funding and/or eligibility for one or more of the following: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid enrollment.

Resolved: The United States ought to provide a universal basic income.

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its funding and/or regulation of elementary and/or secondary education in the United States.

Resolved: Bakers, florists, or other vendors should be required to provide services for events they oppose on moral or religious grounds.

Resolved: In the United States, non-human animals ought to have legally protected rights.

Resolved: Wealthy nations have an obligation to provide development assistance to other nations.

Resolved: In the United States, national service ought to be compulsory.

Resolved: NCAA student athletes ought to be recognized as employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Resolved: A just government ought to prioritize civil liberties over national security.

Resolved: The United States ought to guarantee the right to housing.

Resolved: Countries ought to prohibit the production of nuclear power. Resolved: Immigration ought to be recognized as a human right.

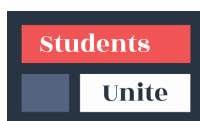
Resolved: The United States ought to promote democracy in the Middle East.

Resolved: In the United States, private ownership of handguns ought to be banned.

Resolved: Just governments ought to ensure food security for all citizens. Resolved: Inaction in the face of injustice makes individuals morally culpable.

Resolved: In a democracy, voting ought to be compulsory.

Resolved: Individuals have a moral obligation to assist people in need.



Resolved: In the United States, juveniles charged with violent felonies ought to be treated as adults in the criminal justice system.

Resolved: The United States government has a moral obligation to afford the same constitutional rights to all people on United States soil.

Resolved: Public high school students in the United States ought not be required to pass standardized exit exams to graduate.

Resolved: Public and private colleges and universities in the United States ought not restrict any constitutionally protected speech.

Resolved: The benefits of First Amendment protection of anonymous speech outweigh the harms.

Resolved: In the United States, students should be guaranteed two years of free tuition to a community or technical college.

Resolved: On balance, the benefits of genetically modified food outweigh the harms.

Resolved: Cyberbullying should be a criminal offense.

Resolved: The government should provide free lawyers to poor persons who are involved in civil lawsuits as either plaintiffs or defendants.

Resolved: All students in high school and college should have to undergo periodic drug testing in order to participate in extracurricular activities.

Also:

Resolved: Police should be permitted to frisk for guns all people whom they stop for legitimate reasons.

Resolved: Evidence that is discovered as a result of unconstitutional police activity should be admissible in criminal trials.

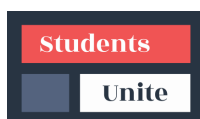
Resolved: The Electoral College should be abolished.

Resolved: Caucuses should be replaced with primaries in all states.

Resolved: Winner-take-all elections for Congress should be replaced with a system of proportional representation.

Resolved: All states must use an instant run-off system in elections for federal office.

Resolved: The filibuster should be abolished.



Resolved: Political gerrymandering violates the Constitution

Resolved: Except when acting in immediate self-defense, the United States military may not engage in combat overseas without the explicit consent of Congress.

Resolved: Except when acting in immediate self-defense, no agent of the United States government may kill a United States citizen overseas unless the citizen has been convicted of a crime and sentenced to death.

Resolved: The President shall be limited to a single, 6-year term.

Resolved: Congress may overrule decisions of the Supreme Court by a 2/3 vote of each house.

Resolved: Government discrimination based on LGBT status violates the Equal Protection Clause.

Resolved: Closed primaries should be banned.

Resolved: Corporations and labor unions should not be permitted to donate money to political campaigns, including campaigns supporting or opposing ballot initiatives.

Find more debate topics at <https://www.speechanddebate.org/topics/>

Tim's ideas in order of "uncomfortableness". I'm purposefully not writing these ideas as formal debate topics because I want the students to realize that choosing the values to evaluate are up to them. Instead I'll phrase these topics like "Resolved Pepsi is better than Coke." The fact that "better" is vague is intentional. The students have to decide themselves what they're arguing about and try to come to a mutual understanding.

Are they going to debate whether Pepsi tastes better, is a better company, cooler company, cooler ads, more responsible business practices? The list is endless.

Which is better:

Pepsi vs Coke

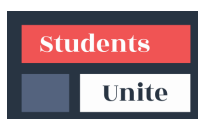
Marvel vs DC

PC vs Mac

iPhone vs Android

Summer vs Winter

Mountains vs Beach



2% vs Skim
Kirk vs Picard

Topics to avoid unless the students have reached a certain level

Pro life vs pro choice
Immigration
(Sadly) most political topics

LEVEL 5 MEETING AGENDAS

MEETING #1

Icebreaker activity

Ask students if people have ever given them any advice on when to speak up, when to be quiet, and how to be polite. List their answers on the board.

Share the list of wisdom to guide you with students, asking them to highlight or copy down any quotes that resonate personally with them. Discuss.

Continue practicing debate and logical reasoning moving up or down the chili pepper scale as indicated by student comfort level and willingness.

MEETING #2

Icebreaker activity

Share the (long) article: Sticks and Stones: Coping with Offensive Speech and Discuss. You may wish to share only an excerpt.

Ask for stories of any good or difficult conversations in the past week. Discuss how things could have gone better. Remind them that being in the Discourse Club is about personal improvement and not about correcting or finding fault with others.

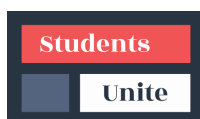
MEETING #3+

Icebreaker Activity

Continue practicing debate and logical reasoning moving up or down the chili pepper scale as indicated by student comfort level and willingness.

Ask for stories of any good or difficult conversations in the past week. Discuss how things could have gone better. Remind them that being in the Discourse Club is about personal improvement and not about correcting or finding fault with others.

Reminder that you will likely be adding (and losing) members throughout the course of running a club, so you will likely need to go back and recover past material to bring new members up to speed. This is a great opportunity to get older, longer-standing club members involved in leadership and teaching roles.



Wisdom to Guide You

Talking with other people can be challenging. Even with all of the skills and practice that comes from participating in the Discourse Club, you are going to encounter situations where you're still not 100% sure what the "right" thing is to do or to say. Should you speak up? Should you sugar-coat the truth? Should you remain silent?

There is a lot of folk wisdom and other sayings and proverbs that can help you to make these decisions. Ultimately, it's up to you how you will converse with other people, and as you do, your skills for handling disagreements will further develop. Remember that the people who become very skilled and capable in their interactions with others often rise to the top in organizations! They are often greatly admired and sought out by others.

Read through these sayings and pieces of advice and highlight the ones that "speak" to you or that you particularly like or agree with.

Look back over your list.

Do any of your highlighted sayings contradict each other? How will you decide which one to apply in which setting?

Can you think of any other pieces of similar advice you've been given? Do you have any advice or suggestions of your own to add?

Are there any sayings that you don't understand? Discuss with a classmate or your teacher to try to make sense of it.

Which ones do you disagree with?

Do you recognize the names of any of the people who are quoted?

Pick your favorite of all the sayings and write it in your datebook, or on your phone, so that you will see it often and remember it. This will help you to commit it to memory and to start applying it in your life regularly.

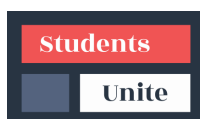
The Rotary Club's 4-way test before speaking:

Is it necessary? Is it kind? Is it helpful? Is it fair to all involved?

Three may keep a secret if two of them are dead.

The only thing necessary for evil to flourish is for good people to do [say?] nothing.

We can agree to disagree



Think before speaking

If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all

Buddhists believe in "right speech," which means always being accurate and not saying more or less than what actually happened.

The Golden Rule: Treat others the way you'd like to be treated

Don't talk about religion or politics in "mixed" company.

Reasonable people can disagree.

I don't agree...but will defend your right to say it. Reasonable people can disagree and part friends.

"He who would live in peace and ease must not speak all he knows or judge all he sees." —Ben Franklin

Would you rather be right or would you rather be happy?

You have 2 ears, but only one mouth

Exhausting someone in argument is not the same as convincing him

Sometimes silence is the best way to win an argument

Discussion is an exchange of knowledge; argument an exchange of ignorance.

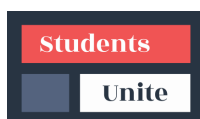
"A state of society where men may not speak their minds cannot long endure." — Winston Churchill

The thing I hate about an argument is that it always interrupts a discussion.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." - Thomas Jefferson

You don't have to attend every argument you're invited to. Let your friend be wrong. — James Lindsay

Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect. — Mark Twain



“Never argue with stupid people. They will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience.” — Mark Twain

“It’s hard to win an argument with a smart person, but it’s damn near impossible to win an argument with a stupid person.” — Bill Murray

“Never hold discussions with the monkey when the organ grinder is in the room.” — Winston Churchill

“A fanatic is someone who won’t change his mind and won’t change the subject.” — Winston Churchill

“If you would win a man to your cause first convince him that you are his sincere friend.” — Abraham Lincoln

“Quarrel not at all. No man resolved to make the most of himself can spare time for personal contention. Better give your path to a dog than be bitten by him.” — Abraham Lincoln

“When I’m getting ready to reason with a man I spend one third of my time thinking about myself and what I am going to say — and two thirds thinking about him and what he is going to say.” — Lincoln

“I am rather inclined to silence, and whether that be wise or not, it is at least more unusual nowadays to find a man who can hold his tongue than to find one who cannot.” — Lincoln

Never argue when you're winning.

“The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.” — Dale Carnegie

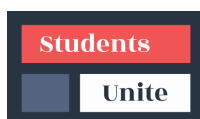
The most important thing in an argument, next to being right, is to leave an escape hatch for your opponent, so that he can gracefully swing over to your side without too much apparent loss of face. — Sydney J. Harris

I'd rather lose an argument to you, than lose you to an argument. The better part of valor is discretion.

“Beware of entrance into a quarrel, but being in’t, Bear’t that the opposed may beware of thee.”
William Shakespeare

“Arguments are to be avoided: they are always vulgar and often convincing.” — Oscar Wilde

That awkward moment when you're in a middle of an argument & you realize you're wrong.



2 Timothy: Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

Proverbs 15:1: A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 20:3 It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

Proverbs 29:22 An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

2 Timothy 2:23-24 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.

"Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened." — Winston Churchill

"If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time—a tremendous whack." — Winston Churchill

"The greatest lesson in life is to know that even fools are right sometimes." — Winston Churchill

"I have never developed indigestion from eating my words." — Winston Churchill

"The freedom of speech of private individuals includes the right not to agree, not to listen and not to finance one's own antagonists...It is forgotten that the right of free speech means the freedom to advocate one's views and bear the possible consequences, including disagreement with others, opposition, unpopularity and lack of support. The political function of 'the right of free speech' is to protect dissenters and unpopular minorities from forcible suppression — not to guarantee them the support, advantages and rewards of a popularity they have not gained." — Ayn Rand

"Mr. Montag, you are looking at a coward. I saw the way things were going, a long time back. I said nothing. I'm one of the innocents who could have spoken up and out when no one would listen to the 'guilty,' but I did not speak and thus became guilty myself. And when finally they set the structure to burn the books, using the firemen, I grunted a few times and subsided, for there were no others grunting or yelling with me, by then. Now, it's too late." — The fictional character Faber, speaking in Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451

“We need not to be let alone. We need to be really bothered once in a while. How long is it since you were really bothered? About something important, about something real?” — Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

Please provide feedback and constructive suggestions on ways we can improve this material.
(reward)

What other sayings or wisdom guides you in your interaction with others? Never wrestle with a pig. You’ll both get dirty and the pig likes it.

“You’ll never get where you’re going if you stop to throw stones at every dog that barks.” — Winston Churchill

“Give thy thoughts no tongue...Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice/Take each man’s censure, but reserve thy judgment.” (Polonius to Laertes, *Hamlet* Act 1, Scene 3.)

“Do not throw your pearls before swine. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.” (Matthew 7:6.)

“If you disagree with somebody, you want to be able to state their case better than they can. And at that point you’ve earned the right to disagree with them. Otherwise you should keep quiet.”

— Charlie Munger, Warren Buffett’s business partner (see this article)

“The man who can hold forth on every matter under debate in two contradictory ways of pleading, or can argue for and against every proposition that can be laid down—such a man is the true, the complete, and the only orator.”

— Roman Orator Cicero (see this article)

“I have yet to find a more efficient and reliable way to probe the depths of a person’s knowledge and seriousness about an issue than asking them to explain the other side’s perspective.

— Entrepreneur Ben Casnocha (see this article)

“If you can’t imagine how anyone could hold the view you are attacking, you just don’t understand it yet.”

— Philosopher Anthony Weston in *Rulebook for Arguments* (see this article)

“When you think you can nail someone with your argument, take a breath & see if you can phrase it as a face-saving question.” — Career Coach Marty Nemko

Desiderata

Go placidly amid the noise and haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender
be on good terms with all persons.
Speak your truth quietly and clearly;
and listen to others,
even the dull and the ignorant;
they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons,
they are vexations to the spirit.
If you compare yourself with others,
you may become vain and bitter;
for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as
well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing
fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs;
for the world is full of trickery.
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is;
many persons strive for high ideals;
and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself.
Especially, do not feign affection.
Neither be cynical about love;
for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years,
gracefully surrendering the things of youth.
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with
dark imaginings.
Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.
Beyond a wholesome discipline,
be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe,
no less than the trees and the stars;
you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God,
whatever you conceive Him to be,
and whatever your labors and aspirations,
in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.
Be cheerful.
Strive to be happy.

FIRE's Discourse Clubs are organized around the following seven principles:

The Liberal Principle: "checking of each by each through public criticism is the only legitimate way to decide who is right" (Jonathan Rauch, p. 6). This means that, in order to learn, students must actually want to learn. More than that, to discern the truth, students must engage in rigorous, thoughtful discussion. And they must be willing to civilly and respectfully analyze the ideas of others.

The Fallibility Principle: Students must be willing to civilly and respectfully analyze their own ideas with humility. No individual is infallible. And the path to truth-finding begins with oneself. Individuals must be willing to grapple with, and challenge, their own dearly held beliefs.

The Knowledge Principle: $2+2 = 4$. While all individuals are fallible, truth does exist. But it may only be discovered via rigorous analysis. To prove something is true, skeptical individuals must try to disprove their claims. Truths only become accepted as such, after they survive numerous attempted (and failed) debunkings.

The Boundless Principle: The conversation is never over. It may be postponed, but the opportunities for continued analysis are endless and should be recognized as such. This means that discussions are not meant to be contests between people. They are meant to be perpetual contests of ideas. After all, the "winner" of today's debate might be the "loser" of tomorrow's.

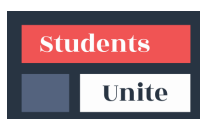
The Civility Principle: The goal is increased interpersonal understanding, not social ostracization. Disprove and dismiss ideas, not people. Thus:

Replace ad hominem attacks and name calling with thoughtful counterarguments.

Allow others to speak — and actually listen to their words.

Engage civilly and respectfully.

Remember that discussions are meant to be productive conversations, not rancorous call out sessions.



The Viewpoint Neutrality Principle: FIRE is nonpartisan. So too are FIRE's Discourse Clubs. Of course, politics may be discussed in these clubs, but the clubs themselves must remain nonpartisan. Students are encouraged to share their political beliefs, but they do not speak for the clubs when they do so. And club discussions should not be limited to political rhetoric. Club discussions can — and should — include small talk and casual conversations about nonpartisan subjects.

The Self-Improvement Principle: Remember the end goal and remain focused upon it: learn to communicate more effectively and to think more rigorously. Build interpersonal confidence. And become a more effective defender of “the way of inquiry.”