

# Ground Rules for Respectful Discussions

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Sources: STScI's Diversity in Astronomy and Invision Reading groups, Inclusive Astronomy 2015, the Banneker Institute, & Lydia X. Z. Brown

## 1. Lean into discomfort

Talking about racism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, and ableism is not easy - but learning only happens when you leave your comfort zone. Try to translate discomfort into constructive questions.

## 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. Be aware of privilege and power

How does your identity and status affect how you speak and listen to others? If you belong to an overrepresented group, please be even more careful not to dominate the discussion.

## 4. 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?"

## 5. Use "I" statements

Speak from your own experiences and avoid generalizing; respect that others' experiences and expertise will differ from your own. If you are discussing a friend or co-worker's experience, avoid sharing their name or any identifying information.

## 6. The Vegas Rule

Maintain confidentiality. What happens here, stays here; what is learned here, leaves here.

## 7. Intent ≠ Impact

Recognize that unintended harm is still harm.

## 8. Ouch, "oops"

An important part of social justice conversations is making - and learning from - mistakes. 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. The "Both/And" Rule

Think "both/and" rather than "either/or." Acknowledge that binaries are incomplete; leave room for complexity and avoid oversimplification.

## 10. Tolerate and teach; do not shame and blame

Be patient with, rather than critical of, individuals' unfamiliarity with issues.

## 11. 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.

## 12. 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.

