

# Checklist for creating psychological safety to facilitate challenging discussions

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This document serves as a checklist of considerations for faculty and TAs to create a sense of psychological safety to facilitate productive challenging discussions.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Review the checklist and reflect on how you will plan to incorporate or address these elements in your course discussions.

### What is psychological safety?

Psychological safety is the belief that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking. Participants feel able to share their relevant ideas, questions, or concerns without being judged in a gratuitous way.

### Setting the stage for the discussion

* Have I acknowledged that discussions are complex and difficult?
* Have I clarified and defined terms that will be referenced during the discussion?
* Have I pointed out that being present and engaged is necessary for subsequent improvement?
* Have I emphasized that an aspect of learning is to take risks?

### Emphasizing the purpose of the discussion

* Have I clarified how this discussion relates to the course material or a societal event?
* Have I articulated clearly why this discussion matters, why it makes a difference, and for whom?
* Have I addressed what is at stake if we do not have this discussion?

### Invite participation in the discussion

* Have I emphasized that we can always learn more?
* Have I been clear that the discussion topic requires everyone to be humble and curious?
* Have I made sure that people know that I don't think I have all the answers?

### Proactive inquiry during the discussion

* How often do I ask probing or clarification questions?
* How often do I ask questions of others, rather than just expressing my perspective?
* Do I ask an appropriate mix of questions that invite diverse perspectives?
* Do I find and cultivate mutual purpose between those who hold opposing viewpoints?
* Do I have structures that ensure an environment for open dialogue, e.g. discussion guidelines?
* Have I created a plan to elicit ideas from all students?
* Can I identify the warning signs that indicate safety and dialogue are at risk?

### Responding Productively

* Do I have techniques to bring people back into dialogue when there is a conflict?
* Have I listened thoughtfully, signaling that what is being said is heard?
* Do I acknowledge the speaker for sharing the idea or question?
* Do I offer support or clarification to guide the next steps?
* Do I respond to violations of discussion etiquette in a timely and appropriate manner to influence future behavior?

#### Adapted from

Edmondson, A. C. (2019). The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth (1st edition). Wiley.

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