

# NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS



## ANTICIPATE

Before the semester begins, review your syllabus and assignments for any topics that might lead to heated conversations. Do not eliminate them. But do anticipate a more tense discussion on those days.

## ESTABLISH NORMS EARLY

Take time at the beginning of the class to establish classroom discussion norms. Let the students help create them. Revisit these norms regularly and revise as needed.

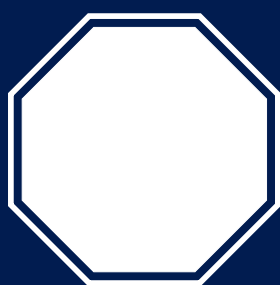


## BUILD COMMUNITY

Create opportunities for the entire class (including the instructor) to get to know one another. When students have a strong sense of who others are in the classroom, they will feel more comfortable and perhaps more careful with their words.

## ACKNOWLEDGE CONFLICT

Do not ignore a tense moment in the classroom. Openly acknowledge it to your students. Try to use language that lets students elaborate such as "It seems..." or "I've noticed..."



## STOP IF IT GETS TOO HEATED

If the conversation has reached an impasse, stop the class. Let everyone take a deep breath. Give them time to free-write about the exchange. Invite them to take a quick stretch break and walk around the building.

## REVISIT THE CONVERSATION

If there are lingering concerns from an exchange, don't be afraid to revisit the situation. If it is relevant to the course, try to use the difficult discussion as a learning tool.



DIFFICULT DIALOGUES CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
TRANSFORMATION!

CHECK OUT OUR INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY  
HANDBOOK FOR MORE SPECIFICS.