

# Good Practice Guidelines

## How to read this document

The aim of these guidelines is to inspire and encourage members of the Oxford community to consider practices that might help facilitate a welcoming and inclusive academic community in Oxford. The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive but are offered as a suggested starting point for faculty members and students to reflect on ways to improve their own teaching and learning methods and styles. Each guideline is derived from industry model guidelines developed by the British Philosophical Association, the Society for Women in Philosophy, the British Society for the Philosophy of Science, the University of Michigan, and the Philosophy and Geography Faculties at the University of Oxford. A group of students and faculty in Jurisprudence created this document to raise awareness of issues of diversity and inclusivity in the Oxford community.<sup>1</sup> We welcome feedback on any guideline and plan to review this document regularly.

The principle that underwrites these guidelines is that each of us can be the change that will make our community as excellent and welcoming as it can be.

The guidelines cover the following topics:

- Seminars and classes
  - Guidelines for tutors/facilitators
  - Guidelines for student participants
- Conferences and Guest Lectures/Seminars
  - Guidelines for chairing discussions
  - Guidelines for audience questions
  - Guidelines for organisers

## Seminars and Classes

### Guidelines for tutors and facilitators

Graduate classes are a flagship feature of our teaching.

The guidelines below, together with those in the next section, are aimed at improving classroom dynamics:

#### 1. Opening the seminar

- Please endeavour to use the Faculty-endorsed checklist for making your syllabus as inclusive as possible.
- Many of our graduate seminars are significantly oversubscribed beyond enrolment numbers. Try to secure a room with plenty of seating.

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- The aims of each seminar meeting should be clear at the outset. These aims might be to have an interesting discussion of a complex issue or to make some headway in understanding a difficult idea. Try to keep discussion on track so that these aims are achieved.
- Set the right tone by explaining that the aim is not just critical but collaborative. The challenge for participants is not only to identify weaknesses in arguments but to think creatively about how to fix them. Crucially this does not mean that agreement should be achieved. If a flaw in an argument cannot be fixed, identify what can be learnt from it.
- Do provide manageable reading lists. Long reading lists are fine and often helpful, but for particular seminar sessions, please indicate a directed amount of reading that will be discussed during that session.
- Unless the class is too large, ask each participant to introduce themselves, and do your best to remember their names. Try to pronounce students' names and use gender pronouns as you are directed to by the student.

## 2. Fostering good discussion

- Encourage and seek participation by all who might wish to participate, including the more hesitant. Wait a few seconds for more hands to be raised after asking questions, rather than calling on the first person with their hand up. Look out for those seeking to join the conversation, e.g. by raising their hand or trying to catch your eye.
  - Be judicious about whose contributions you choose. You can explicitly say to a student who speaks often something like 'hold on, you have said a lot already in this discussion, let's see what the others have got to say.'
- Allow students appropriate time to make points. Ask quiet students follow up questions on their contributions. If a student makes a short contribution, ask them to expand on it in some way.
- Don't fall into insider-talk with more knowledgeable students, and if a student attempts this then give other participants the background knowledge required to understand the discussion.
- Encourage questions of clarification.
- Don't be dismissive or interrupt inappropriately and don't allow others to do so. Discourage adjectives like 'absurd' and 'ridiculous' as well as *ad feminam/hominem* remarks.
- Likewise, be courteous, respectful, and constructive. Acknowledge good points made by students, unless they repeat a point that was already made, in which case, attribute it. Recall that implicit biases may affect whom you choose to praise and try to be equitable in whom you praise/criticise. Acknowledge your own fallibility where appropriate.
- Encourage students to address themselves directly to other students rather than to the tutor, especially when responding to a comment made by another student. Doing so not only fosters politeness but also fosters the habit of listening carefully to other students.

When a student asks you a question about the material, you might ask the student what they think. If they are stumped, ask the others to help out before providing your own input.

- Treat students as individuals rather than representatives of some self-identification category, such as 'Asian', 'person with a disability', or 'LGBTQ'. Address questions about specific jurisdictions or countries to the whole class. Nationality should not be used as a proxy for knowledge about a particular region, country or jurisdiction.
- Consider using structured discussions as a means of encouraging more students to participate. Many students find it helpful to have summaries of the main points of a discussion immediately after the discussion. It may also be helpful to offer a summary of all the main points discussed at the end of the class.
- Other ways of structuring an inclusive discussion include: limiting the number of times a student may contribute to the discussion, requiring each student to participate in some way, such as by raising a prepared question on the reading, and asking students to present a short presentation on some aspect of the reading.

### **3. Ending the seminar**

- Encourage feedback on the running of the class.
- Try to ascertain why certain students do not participate, especially in a small class, and meet with them outside of the class to try to encourage them to participate in class.

## **Guidelines for student participants**

Guidelines for class participation can be designed by the tutor/facilitator or devised in collaboration with students.

The following guidelines for students' conduct can foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaborative inquiry.

- Respect others' rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. Challenge or criticize the idea, not the person.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying even when you disagree with what is being said. Comments that you make (asking for clarification, sharing critiques, expanding on a point, etc.) should show that you have paid attention to the speaker's comments.
- Be courteous. Don't interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking.
- Support your statements. Use evidence and provide a rationale for your points.
- Allow everyone the chance to talk. If you have much to say, hold back and listen to what others can teach you. You can always make a written note of your own points for revision purposes. If you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute to the discussion. Speaking up improves your experience within the classroom, helps you remember your best thoughts, and permits you to hear what counterarguments others may have.

- If you are offended by something or think someone else might be, speak up but try to do so in a way that does not put people on the defensive. One useful way to insert a pause in a discussion is to say 'I feel uncomfortable about what was just said'. This may then allow the class to go on to discuss the difficult topic in a respectful way.
- If you find yourself dissatisfied with student participation in the class, approach the convenor and offer your input as to how student participation could be improved.

## Conferences and Guest Lectures/Seminars

Many of the guidelines applicable to teaching are equally applicable to creating conference discussions that are inclusive.

### Guidelines for chairing discussions

The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the conference discussion is both welcoming and productive. They have the authority to cut off questioners whose questions or comments are aggressive in tone or overly long. Any questioners aggrieved by such treatment can be referred to these guidelines.

- Ensure that no member of the audience contributes without first being granted permission to do so. In particular, ensure that nobody is interrupted or talked over. Some audience members may need more time to formulate their thoughts than others.
- Allow for a short break (3-5 minutes) between the talk and the Q&A. This gives all participants a chance to gather their thoughts, formulate questions, and/or discuss questions with neighbouring colleagues.
- Exercise discretion concerning the order in which you call on questioners and enforce any preannounced system of priority. There is some [evidence](#) that if the first question is asked by a woman or person from an underrepresented group, the Q & A session will be more open and inclusive.
  - Put at the top of the queue those who do not normally speak or who may benefit from support (e.g. graduate students, or people sitting at the back who may lack confidence). It is the norm at many institutions to allow graduate students to ask the first three questions during the Q&A.
  - Be proactive against abuse of the hand-finger system, if it is in operation. Intervene if a 'finger' (follow-up) question is not relevant to the present discussion, and recategorize it as a 'hand' (new point) question.
  - Do not allow insistent questioners to ask a second or follow-up question if others have not already spoken.

## Guidelines for audience questions

- Keep your question short. Some explanatory background, preamble or context may be needed, but – if it is – the sentence containing your question itself should be succinct. A presenter cannot remember a paragraph-long question, nor can they adequately address several points in the short time they have to respond to each question. If you have a lengthier contribution, approach the speaker after the event or send your question to them in an email.
- When asking a question, be mindful of your own motivations for doing so. Do you think your question will assist the presenter and, if so, to a significant degree? If possible, can you reframe your question constructively?
- If you are unsure whether your question has merit, you might try it out on your neighbour during the break. As a neighbour, assist others in devising constructive questions.
- Do not be afraid to ask clarificatory questions, or to acknowledge your own ignorance on a topic. In other disciplines where co-authorship is common, academic excellence is not perceived as a zero-sum game. Remember collaboration may be more generative than competition.
- Consider praising or thanking the presenter in a sincere way ('thank you for your [excellent] talk' sounds perfunctory), especially if you have reason to think the speaker would benefit (e.g. they are a graduate student). The effect of praise, especially if given by the first audience member to speak, can set a respectful tone for the discussion that follows.
- Read the room and try to anticipate what effect your question may have on others' willingness to engage in the discussion. For example, there is often relief and more hands after the first person raises their hand. Conversely, there is often a palpable tiredness in the room following runaway Q&As.
- Be mindful of your body language, which can often signal boredom, distraction or impatience even when words do not.
- Seek permission from the Chair before you ask follow-up questions.

## Guidelines for organisers

### 1. Before the conference

- Be as inclusive as is reasonable in invitations to the conference. Pay special attention to local scholars who have expertise in the relevant topics and be sure to include them if possible. A more detailed guide can be found at [https://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/about/equality-diversity/190522\\_Inclusive\\_Conference\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/about/equality-diversity/190522_Inclusive_Conference_Guide.pdf).
- For the majority of scholars with disabilities, caring duties and other particularised needs, it is possible to provide in advance the kind of information that will enable them to attend – and, importantly, be confident in advance that they will be accommodated – without making them feel obliged to disclose their needs. Asking relevant individuals to volunteer their needs can signal that they are not welcome or cause unnecessary embarrassment; it also imposes an additional workload on them. This information should be provided from the time

of the Call for Papers. The guidance on the British Philosophical Association website gives a template/checklist of information to include: [https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BPA\\_SWIP-Guidelines-for-Accessible-Conferences-1.pdf](https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BPA_SWIP-Guidelines-for-Accessible-Conferences-1.pdf)

- For those disabilities that cannot be feasibly accommodated in advance, signal a willingness to do your best to accommodate them. Bear in mind that disabilities come in diverse forms, and that disabled people are not only wheelchair users and those with sensory impairments, but also those with “invisible” disabilities that may be less obvious, such as fluctuating energy levels, mental health issues, or dyslexia.
- If it is an invitation-only conference (rather than an open call for papers), be aware that the first names you think of are overwhelmingly likely to be from a group without historical disadvantage and/or within your social group. If the speakers or contributors are to be more diverse, you need to work a little harder. For example, there is a good chance that you are only thinking of famous women scholars, while considering much less famous men. That is, you may well be setting the bar higher for women. Consider inviting some less famous women than those who first come to mind. Women are often at lower-prestige institutions, in lower ranked jobs. If there really are not many women in your field, perhaps consult with them first about dates. A new and useful [resource](#) for searching for underrepresented scholars in philosophy by expertise, location, and self-identification status, can be found at the American Philosophical Association webpage.
- Offer funding for travel and other conference costs where possible. State whether funding is available for delegates whose needs incur additional costs, such as aids, equipment, or childcare.
- Include a short break between each talk and the Q&A period if talks are longer than 45 minutes.
- If possible, have a quiet room available for rest, prayer, breastfeeding and/or taking medication.
- Encourage speakers and presenters to make their material accessible to all participants. Guidelines hosted on the British Philosophical Association website provide more information as to what this entails: [https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BPA\\_SWIP-Guidelines-for-Accessible-Conferences-1.pdf](https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BPA_SWIP-Guidelines-for-Accessible-Conferences-1.pdf)
- If there is a conference website, do your best to ensure that it is accessible. See further <https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/> and <https://webaccess.berkeley.edu/resources/tips/web-accessibility>

## 2. During the conference

- Make sure you are familiar with disabled access routes to and from key venues.
- Provide refreshments like coffee and water.
- Make sure that you know what to do in the event of an emergency (e.g. a fire), including any disability-specific guidance (e.g. regarding wheelchair users during a fire).
- Make sure you know how to operate equipment such as microphones and hearing loops.