

# Interacting with Your Peers

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to learn collaboratively in your courses by practicing cultural sensitivity and respectful class discussion. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

## 1. Practicing Cultural Sensitivity

It's important for students in diverse classrooms to practice **cultural sensitivity**. Practicing cultural sensitivity means:

- Being aware that your perspective is just one in the diverse set of perspectives that contribute to your class.
- Conducting yourself in a manner that is considerate of and respectful toward other perspectives you might encounter in your classroom.

Being culturally sensitive is not the same as being afraid you're going to offend someone; a culturally sensitive student is actively empathetic toward fellow classmates and attuned to the whole of the classroom community.

If you work to develop your cultural sensitivity it will not only deepen your perspective by inviting you to think critically about your own prejudices, but it will help to foster more productive interactions with your peers.

## HOW TO “KEEP AN OPEN MIND”

**EXPECT** that you will encounter **DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES AND IDEAS**.

**REMEMBER** that **A PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE** is formed by all of their **LIFE EXPERIENCES**.

When you need to **DISAGREE**, do it with **KINDNESS AND RESPECT**.

**LISTEN** to what others have to say, then **THINK ABOUT IT**.

**DON'T JUDGE OR CRITICIZE** others for having **DIFFERENT VIEWS**.

➔ **EXAMPLE** You are reading a novel in your literature class, and there is a character in the book who behaves in a way that is at odds with your values. A number of vocal students in the class don't seem to share your beliefs and opinions about the character. You are considering speaking up because you want your values to be represented and respected in the discussion. Should you say something?

It depends. For instance, does your opinion include a value judgment about the behaviors you oppose? Might those students that don't oppose those behaviors have a different set of values? Might they, in fact, participate in or support the participation in the behaviors you are opposed to?

Basically, you want to be sure before expressing your opinion that you are being respectful of your classmates and any perspectives that you don't share. Cultural sensitivity involves taking thoughtful measure of a situation.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Cultural Sensitivity

The act of practicing empathy and respect for others, regardless of their background and how they differ from you. When you practice cultural sensitivity, you are not changing who you are or what you believe; instead, you are simply withholding the judgment that someone else is wrong because they don't share the same perspective. Students who do this contribute to a harmonious and productive classroom environment, whether online or in person.

## 2. Contributing to Class Discussion Respectfully

Contributing to class discussion respectfully is a great way to participate in your class and help build a sense of community. But, how do you know you are being respectful?

First, before expressing your personal opinion about an issue raised in class, make sure it is an appropriate

time and venue in which to express it. Your opinion is often welcome, but be mindful of the moment—what the purpose of the assignment or lesson is and how your opinion might impact the focus of the course.

Next, take care to express your thoughts in a manner that doesn't include assumptions or value judgments regarding other cultures and perspectives. Your opinion is valued but not at the expense of anyone else's. Even if you don't intend any disrespect, thoughtless or careless comments can negatively impact your classroom community.



## SUMMARY

You can **practice cultural sensitivity** by expressing your perspective in class while being respectful of those who may have different perspectives. To **contribute to class discussions respectfully**, you must determine if it's the right time and place to do so.



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