

# CIVIL DISCOURSE

Civil Discourse is about being able to show respect for others. When discussing topics use “I” statements, when you are unsure, clarify what you heard, respectfully hear and listen to differing points of view. It is important to realize that what you say and what people understand you to have said may be different and recognize that people can disagree. Always speak for yourself not others.

“Recognize a person’s right to advocate ideas that are different from your own, discuss policies, politics, issues and ideas, not people and disagree without being disagreeable.”

<http://groups.msn.com/WhatsNews/civildiscourse.msnw>

## General Guidelines Toward Civil Discourse Especially Online

- “Recognize a person’s right to advocate ideas that are different from your own
- Discuss policies, politics, issues and ideas, not people
- Disagree without being disagreeable
- Use civil and helpful, not hurtful language
- Respectfully respond to differing points of view
- When unsure of what another person means by what they have written, ask for clarification
- Realize that what you write and what people understand you have said may be different. Be patient and explain yourself again if other posters misinterpret your meaning
- Recognize that sometimes people can and must agree to disagree
- If you are not sure what you are about to say is civil, find another way to say it or let it go
- Reliance on labels for groups of people is often the first step toward the negative. Whenever possible, avoid them. They rarely add to the quality of any discussion”

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## Communication Guidelines

1. First, do no harm. Your words have consequences – be sure they are the right ones.
2. Do not babble. Know what you want to say and say it.
3. If you do not know what you are talking about, stop talking.
4. Focus more on informing people than impressing them. Use everyday language.
5. Never say anything you are not willing to see printed on tomorrow’s front page.
6. Never lie. You won’t get away with it.
7. Don’t make promises you cannot keep.
8. Don’t use “no comment.” You’ll look like you have something to hide.
9. Don’t get angry. When you argue with the media, you always lose. And lose publicly.
10. Don’t speculate, guess, or assume. When you don’t know something, say so.

Taken from: “Communicating in a Crisis, Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials”, Washington State Department of Health, 2002.

*Handout provided by Student Conduct 210-458-4720 — [www.utsa.edu/conduct](http://www.utsa.edu/conduct)*

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