

Faculty of Philosophy Guidelines for Discussion in Teaching and Research

One of the great joys of our subject involves talking philosophy together, learning through discussion, and making genuine progress in philosophy by working through philosophical problems together. This is vital for our teaching, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and equally for our research. This document sets out some basic norms for respectful and fruitful philosophical discussion which the Faculty expects all teaching staff, researchers and students to honour. These guidelines apply to discussion-oriented teaching seminars, research seminars, discussion groups, logic classes, reading groups, colloquia and conferences, whether in person or online. The session leader or designated chair is responsible for making sure that the session is run in a respectful manner towards all taking part. In order to facilitate open discussion, the default expectation is that discussion sessions are not recorded. In some special circumstances they may be recorded, provided there is permission from the session leader/chair and participants, in line with Faculty and University recording policies.

The general aims should be to (i) foster a co-operative rather than competitive environment for discussion; (ii) encourage open-minded exploration of ideas, without losing focus on the key issues, recognizing also the value of having one's ideas questioned and challenged, in a collaborative spirit; (iii) encourage participation by all members in the group, actively trying to overcome barriers that might inhibit some participants. The Faculty supports the University's expectation of open, constructive and peaceable dialogue across diverse viewpoints:

The University expects all staff and students to receive and respond to intellectual and ideological challenges in a constructive and peaceable way. The University instils the capacity for critical engagement in its students, allowing them to engage with a wide range of viewpoints and to listen, dissect, analyse, reason, adjudicate, and respond to those viewpoints.

<https://www.governanceandcompliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/university-statement-freedom-speech>

The Faculty has adopted the Good Practice Scheme of the British Philosophical Association, and is committed to facilitating broad participation in discussion. Teaching session leaders, and chairs of discussion groups, reading groups and colloquia are encouraged to refer to the guidelines on good practice provided by the British Philosophical Association:

<https://bpa.ac.uk/diversity/>

<https://bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Seminar-chairing.pdf>

Reading groups and discussion groups can be advertised via the Faculty's phil-events email list, see <http://bit.ly/CamPhilEvents> for further information. For students, staff and researchers who are considering setting up new reading groups or discussion groups, the Faculty Office may be able to advise on scheduled lectures and teaching, and timings of other existing or planned reading groups, with a view to avoiding undesirable clashes. Please contact phil-admin@lists.cam.ac.uk for further information.

The quality of philosophical discussion is important, and if participants have ideas about how it could be further improved, they are encouraged to contact the session leader or chair in the first instance. If need be, the Undergraduate Coordinator, MPhil Coordinator, Director of Postgraduate Studies, or Chair of Faculty may also be contacted, as appropriate.