



## Advice on Syllabus Language

A syllabus is a contract of sorts that spells out expectations, policies, and pathways through the inquiry at hand. But a syllabus can be more than that: a syllabus can set the tone for an entire course. By choosing syllabus language carefully, teachers can empower students from day one to navigate ideological polarization, tribalism, and hostility. To this end, we suggest building off of the syllabus language below to encourage good faith communal inquiry in your classroom.

### **Commitment to Open Inquiry, Viewpoint Diversity, & Constructive Disagreement**

In order to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas, the following principles will guide interactions among students and professors in this class:

- Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their opinion;
- Treat every opinion as open to examination, even if it comes from someone with more experience or expertise than you;
- Reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions;
- Some perspectives, opinions, and conclusions are unreasonable or based on falsehoods and should be identified as such;
- Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking and deepens understanding, it will factor into your participation grade;
- All viewpoints are welcome;
- No ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate;
- You will not be graded on whether your professor or peers agree with your opinions;
- You will be graded on the evidence and reasoning that leads to those opinions.

In a nutshell, quality of thought and mode of engagement matter!

We suggest that you, the teacher, revise these suggestions to fit your own pedagogical values and the students with whom you work.