



# #CivilityVT: LET'S TALK

Thank you for participating in our three-part program on active listening and civil discourse!

After you have completed the online training, we ask you to practice these skills with a counterpart in the 'real-world'. You are then asked to return to the website to reflect on your experiences.

This programming was developed as part of the Civility Project, with generous support from the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT), VT's School of Public & International Affairs (SPIA), and the Division for Student Affairs.

*CIVIL DISCOURSE 101 ONLINE MODULE - PLEASE VISIT [WWW.CIVILITY.VT.EDU](http://WWW.CIVILITY.VT.EDU)*

**STEP**

**1**

## **THE TRAINING**

Participate in interactive online training module at [www.civility.vt.edu](http://www.civility.vt.edu). Learn and explore concepts and tools for civil discourse, active listening, ground rules, and other key themes.

**STEP**

**2**

## **THE PRACTICE**

Meet with someone you know to practice the learned techniques on a topic of your choice. Ideally, the person you speak with will hold a different perspective than you.

**STEP**

**3**

## **THE DEBRIEF**

Return to the project website to reflect on your experience. You will be asked to answer some questions both to foster reflection and for our research purposes.

# GROUND RULES & ACTIVE LISTENING

- Be respectful of your counterpart, which involves being thoughtful in the language you choose and non-verbal cues you send.
- Do not interrupt - only one person should speak at a time.
- Do not make personal attacks under any circumstance.
- Be ready to (really) listen as much as, if not more than, you speak.
- Try to suspend judgment, at least during your conversation, but do question assumptions.
- Ask probing questions to better understand where your counterpart is coming from;
- Describe your views, but do not make assumptions about others.
- Attempt to understand rather than just persuade, remaining open-minded.
- Aim to speak honestly about your reasons for expressing a particular concern or point of view, and avoid holding 'hidden agendas'.

One effective technique for healthy dialogue and deliberation is 'active listening'. As the name implies, this is not a passive process of simply waiting our turn, paying little attention to what others have to say while we prepare our arguments in our heads, and then delivering a monologue when we have the chance. Instead, this approach calls on us to really listen, asking probing questions to dig deeper into our counterparts' perspectives and confirm that we understand what they are saying.

Active listening does not ask us to change our minds, although that can happen, but rather that we remain open and willing to increase our empathy and understanding. Ideally, this increased empathy and understanding will, when appropriate, create windows of opportunity and creativity to arrive at some degree of consensus on how we can better move forward despite our differences.

Active listening involves respectful interrogation. That is, being respectful of our counterparts, avoiding recrimination, assumptions, and vitriol, while probing to understand and challenge each other.

*Inappropriate language: Don't you care about me? Why don't you just be reasonable?*

*Appropriate language: Where do your views come from? Have you ever had a friend that is like me? What would you do about \_\_\_\_?*

While what we say matters a lot, so does our body language; the non-verbal cues we send can be very powerful. Think about the ways in which your counterpart might interpret your facial and physical gestures.

**For more information, please visit <https://civility.vt.edu>.**