

# Civility in Sharing Opinions

Some conversations are about sharing ideas, some focus on winning an argument, and others are about exploring opportunities to find common ground. The first step is to know the nature and goal of the conversation. Then you can decide what the best approach to the conversation will be. Whatever the type of conversation, the best approach is one focused on respect.

## Debate

- **Tone:** Combative
- **Atmosphere:** Threatening
- **Goal:** Winning
- **Action:**
  - Persuade
  - Convince
  - Find flaws
  - Offer statements
  - Seek closure (winning)



It's all about winning the argument.  
A verbal "fight".

## Discussion

- **Tone:** Challenging
- **Atmosphere:** Exploratory
- **Goal:** Reach understanding
- **Action:**
  - Explore different perspectives
  - Understand aspects of an issue
  - Seek common ground
  - Not seeking closure

It's about pushing a winning idea.  
Breaking apart of issues.



## Dialogue

- **Tone:** Collaborative
- **Atmosphere:** Safety
- **Goal:** Growth
- **Action:**
  - Share perspectives
  - Listen to understand
  - Discover new options
  - Find shared connection
  - Seek closure (respect)



It's about finding a shared connection.  
Park the ego and listen with an open spirit

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; They listen with the intent to reply.”

—Stephen R. Covey

## TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

- **Stop other activities** and focus on listening when someone is speaking.
- **Set aside judgment and assumptions**
- **Remove physical barriers** that might hinder your listening
- **Show the speaker that you are actively listening.**
- **Practice listening repeatedly** to improve your ability to hear and understand.
- **Use active listening techniques**, including open-ended questions, paraphrasing, and reflecting feelings.



## WHAT IS ACTIVE LISTENING?

Active listening requires the listener to pay close attention to what is being communicated verbally and nonverbally.

- **Listen for total meaning** - tune into the information conveyed AND how it is conveyed and any nonverbal cues.
- **Respond to feelings** - respond to the feeling of what was said. This establishes empathy and makes the speaker feel understood.
- **Note all cues** - including tone of voice, facial/body language, and speed of speech.



- **Pay attention:** Look at the speaker, maintain eye contact, avoid distractions
- **Show that you are listening:** Nod occasionally, keep open posture, offer small verbal comments
- **Provide feedback:** Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.
  - "What I am hearing is...", "Sounds like you are saying..."
- **Defer judgement:** Allow the speaker to finish a point before responding. Don't interrupt with counterarguments.
- **Respond appropriately:** Be candid and open in your response. Assert your opinions respectfully.

“Civility is the art and act of caring for others.” —Deborah King