

Dear Commissioners:

To support preparation for your upcoming Retreat Study Session and help you to take full advantage of our time together, we are providing the following preparation materials. They include a brief about Purpose Statements, Values, Norms and Decision Making as well as a set of questions for your consideration that will also be asked during Retreat exercises. Finally, we are providing a summary of Decision-Making materials that you can review prior to our planned conversation about Decision Making during the retreat.

Brief – Purpose, Values, Norms

Purpose & Values Statement – In brief, a Purpose & Value Statement is used for a committee or commission, especially one that has a specific task or is formed temporarily to complete a specific project. It is a statement that lays out the purpose of the body, and in many instances, is combined with a set of values the group commits to regarding how they will engage and the care they will take to developing their recommendations or decisions.

The document would answer the following questions:

- **Purpose** – What is the purpose of our Commission?
- **Values** – What values will guide our engagement together and with others?

Once developed, as we understand, the Purpose & Values Statement can be used:

- 1) **Externally** – To communicate the purpose of the Commission and commitments the Commissioners make to values and/or commitments that will guide your process and decisions.
- 2) **Internally** – To serve as a guide by including the values, standards and/or commitments that inform how you will engage with each other and the public as well as to inform the quality of the process you take to come to conclusions and decisions.

Norms – Values are abstract concepts that lay out commitments to certain kinds of behaviors. They tend to be just words or marketing materials, unless we take the time to explore what they look like in action. Norms are a standard of behavior, providing a description of our commitment to acting, and interacting, in specific ways that reflect the values we say guide our work. For instance, if you hold a value of Mutual Respect, it sounds nice but is not functional unless you explore what it might look like to express Mutual Respect in the midst of a strong disagreement or debate. What actions do you take, or do not take, to show that respect, in moments when it might be hardest to do so? We will discuss the norms you would like to establish for the Commission as a part of the Purpose and Values Statement.

Retreat Study Session Preparation Questions

In line with these definitions, we offer the following questions for your consideration and to help you prepare for our upcoming discussion.

Purpose

- When you said yes to the invitation to be a part of the Commission, what motivated you to say yes?
- What purpose did you hope to serve by saying yes?
- From your responses, what should we include in the purpose statement?

Values & Norms

- If you were to describe a passionate debate you have had with someone where you learned from others and felt heard and respected, what was essential to that experience?
- Think of a family or individual that will be impacted by your work on the Commission. Imagine you are explaining to them what the experience is like working on this Commission, and what you want them to know about your behaviors. Finish these sentences...
 - ✓ It is really important to us that we act with...
 - ✓ What I appreciated most about my colleagues on the commission is that we treated each other with _____ (and then give an example of what that looked like).
- We will be naming and exploring specific values and the behaviors or norms that reflect those values. If you like, to prepare for the retreat, you might write 1 or 2 of the values and behaviors you would most like to include in your work with the Commission.

Examples of Purpose & Values Statements

We are pleased to provide the following examples of purpose and values statements for your review:

- Los Angeles Unified School District Redistricting Commission
- Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission
- Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission
- California Utilities Commission

Decision Making Exploration

The following list of articles are provided to help you prepare for a discussion about a culture of respectful decision making and tools or methods to support that culture.

- 11 Myths About Decision-Making, Cheryl Stauss Einhorn, Harvard Business Review, April 20, 2021
- Resources for Respectful Debate, University of British Columbia.
- Actually, It's OK To Disagree. Here are 5 Ways We Can Argue Better

ITEM #3

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

PURPOSE AND VALUES

PURPOSE

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Redistricting Commission is responsible for redrawing LAUSD's School Board Member (Board of Education) district boundaries based upon census data and informed by community input and understanding of critical communities of interest. Commissioners recognize that their decisions will have significant and long-term impacts on students, families and communities and therefore will strive to:

- Create transparent, inviting and accessible processes that encourage robust participation by parents, students, teachers, school employees and other stakeholders.
- Promote public understanding of the impact of Commission's decisions and the data and tools that will inform these decisions.
- Create a process that centers students, families, and communities and that takes extra care to uplift the voices and concerns of those that are historically underserved and underrepresented.
- Maintain communities of interest as much as possible while also ensuring fair and balanced representation of LAUSD's diverse communities and their interests.
- Make decisions that are data-driven, promote equity, and embrace the District's rich diversity.

VALUES

The following values guide our conduct and make our actions worthy of the public's trust:

Invest in Transparency – We operate in ways that are open, accessible, understood and welcomes public engagement.

We are transparent when:

- The public understands the scope of the Commission's work, the limitations of its reach, and the impact that boundaries can have on the quality of a student's educational experience.
- Commission's procedures and systems are easily available for review and comment.
- Information and data that inform decisions are available to the public in accessible, understandable formats that allow for public comment.

Listen and Learn – We approach our work as a shared learning opportunity, recognizing that personal knowledge is limited, and the strongest decisions are made when we listen to and learn from one another and the public.

We listen and learn when we:

ITEM #3

- Embrace and acknowledge the unique experiences, knowledge and perspectives of community members and Commissioners.
- Seek to make whole-system recommendations by understanding the strengths, challenges and needs of communities outside of our own experiences.
- Promote public engagement with an understanding that diverse communities may prefer to receive information differently.
- Serve in approachable and accessible ways that allow for a wide range of community input and opinions.
- Promote civic engagement in the educational system long after District boundaries are approved.

Intentionality and Integrity – We serve in open and honest ways and are fully present for and prepared to conduct the work we are charged to complete.

We act with intentionality and integrity when:

- Decisions are data-driven and informed by community knowledge.
- We maintain an impartial, unbiased approach to our work.
- Actions engender mutual respect and reciprocity.
- We are being of service to students, families and communities that will be impacted by our decisions.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – LAUSD is one of the largest, complex and diverse school districts in the nation. As such, we seek to make boundary decisions that embrace this diversity and promote educational equity for all students.

We promote diversity, equity and inclusion when we:

- Encourage robust, respectful debate, recognizing that healthy conversations can lead to thoughtful and inclusive conclusions.
- Recognize that we must equally represent students, families and communities whose voices are present in our process and those who may not participate in this process.
- Invest the time and resources to make decisions that are informed by the needs of students, parents and communities who may not currently be served well by the system.
- Recognize and compensate where possible for the pandemic-related restrictions that require online Commission gatherings that may limit participation and restrict traditional engagement.



[2021 City of Los Angeles Redistricting Commission](#)[L.A. City Council](#) | [LAUSD](#)

Vision and Values

Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission 2021 Purpose, Vision, Values, & Principles

Core Purpose

To independently draw proposed Los Angeles City Council District boundaries based on census data that will allocate constituents proportionately while also accounting for the unique histories, experiences and interests of communities, such that those interests will have the highest probability of being served by elected representatives and the City of Los Angeles.

Vision

To strengthen the governance of the City of Los Angeles by empowering its communities to have their diverse needs served through fair and inclusive representation.

Core Values

Equity, Integrity, Transparency, Respect, Compassion, Dignity, Data-driven, Solution-oriented and Interdependence.

Operating Principles

1. We will adhere to City, state and federal laws governing redistricting and, to the extent feasible, keep neighborhoods and communities intact, utilize natural boundaries or street lines, and be geographically compact.
2. We will be intentional in creating and investing in opportunities to strengthen capacity and provide access for historically underrepresented communities to allow for full participation of their voices in the process.
3. We will strive to ensure the data utilized captures LA's communities of interest.
4. We will conduct our business with transparency and integrity, our processes will be open, and we will hold true to our purpose, vision, values and operating principles.
5. We will center equity, compassion, respect and dignity of communities in decision-making.
6. We will strive to equitably understand and acknowledge the different challenges and strengths of LA's communities of interest.
7. We will value community rooted knowledge and different forms of information.
8. We will embrace creative and respectful tension to reach just decisions.
9. We will recognize interdependence to help strengthen the City of Los Angeles as a whole.
10. We will respect due process, fairness and adherence to the law in all our deliberations.

LA County Human Relations Committee

Mission, Vision, and Values

Our Mission

To promote better human relations in Los Angeles County by working to transform prejudice into acceptance, inequity into justice, and hostility into peace.

Our Vision

We envision a County where...

- Human relations will be at their best because fundamental human rights have been met for everyone and all groups, including our most basic human needs for, safety, food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, free expression, and a voice in governance.
- All people and groups will enjoy an equal opportunity to realize our full potential to do good for ourselves and our communities, unfettered by personal, institutional, or structural prejudice or discrimination, or abuse of power.
- It will be the norm to value and draw upon cultural diversity to enrich all aspects of our lives, and to understand and appreciate individual differences and commonalities as well, so that everyone feels a sense of belonging.
- Through universally taught and practiced effective conflict resolution skills, we will enjoy greater harmony in our intergroup and interpersonal relations, which will bring about increased cooperation and collaboration between people and organizations.
- Our County government will lead and model the highest level of respect for civil liberties, human rights, and the intrinsic dignity of every human being through its policy and budgetary priorities and practices.

Our Core Values and Guiding Principles

Justice and Human Rights: We strive for social justice. We believe the foundation of positive human relations is to treat everyone with respect that affirms their intrinsic dignity as a human being and protects and fulfills their fundamental human rights.

Diversity and Inclusion: We must continue to move beyond tolerance as a goal. We celebrate the splendid diversity of human cultures, identities, and expressions. We seek mutual understanding and the full acceptance and inclusion of everyone in the essential aspects of community life.

Understanding and Compassion: We know that if we seek to understand the perspective of others, if we listen intently, try to “walk in their shoes”, our compassion for others will grow.

Cooperation and Collaboration: We engage others because we know that none of us succeeds alone, we need the support of others, and together we are stronger.

Non-Violence: We believe in the general principle of non-violence, knowing that violence begets violence. We must learn and teach how to express dissatisfaction, resolve conflicts, and achieve positive change peacefully, with respect for human dignity and without resorting to violence.

Concrete Results and Deliberate Process: We believe that the social transformation we seek requires dialogue, but not dialogue as an end in itself. We persevere to discover and devise solutions that bring about real change. We know that the process through which change is created is as important as the results. The ends never justify the means: the end result does not permit us to violate our principles to reach those results. So we consciously employ processes that respect and reflect our values.

Teaching over Doing for Others: We believe that our work is more effective, meaningful and long lasting if we emphasize teaching others how to do what needs to be done, instead of doing it for them.

The CA Public Utilities Commission

Mission

We empower California through access to safe, clean, and affordable utility services and infrastructure.

Vision

The California Public Utilities Commission better the lives of all Californians through our recognized leadership in innovative communications, energy, transportation, and water policies and regulation.

Values

This statement is intended to capture the values of the Commission and to remind us all to conduct ourselves in ways that makes us worthy of trust and respect. The values do not supersede or replace the policies and laws to which each employee is subject, nor do they alter any Memorandum of Understanding. To the extent that there is a conflict, the memorandum of understanding, policy, or law will govern.

These **core values** describe the culture of integrity and excellence we strive for at the CPUC. The CPUC's success depends on our individual and organizational commitment to these core values, to our fellow employees, and to the public interest. The values apply to all CPUC employees, volunteers, and commissioners.

Accountability: Operating with transparency and accepting responsibility for our actions.

We hold ourselves accountable when we:

- Take ownership and get the job done, showing leadership and courage.
- Provide transparency to enable public scrutiny.
- Admit our mistakes and learn from them.
- Evaluate project processes and outcomes to identify areas for improvement.
- Meet commitments by engaging the necessary resources and working collaboratively with other groups.

Excellence: Striving to achieve exceptional performance by consistently delivering quality work in a timely manner.

We strive for excellence when we:

- Take pride in our work and continually seek to improve and welcome new challenges.
- Produce well-reasoned, evidence-based decisions, resolutions, and other work products.
- Work with initiative and creativity across programs and divisions to achieve agency objectives.
- Contribute to providing an open, fair, timely, and inclusive process.

Integrity: Behaving in an open, honest, trustworthy manner, both professionally and personally.

We act with integrity when we:

- Conduct our work objectively and place the public interest above personal interest.
- Behave professionally, displaying good character and high ethical principles.
- Treat everyone with courtesy and dignity, build relationships based on trust, and respect others' time.

Open Communication: Exchanging information, thoughts and concerns in an open, timely manner.

We communicate effectively when we:

- Listen to, and communicate with, others with an open mind, caring attitude, and respectful tone.
- Solicit input from those with relevant expertise before making decisions.
- Acknowledge limitations and request assistance when necessary.
- Respond to internal and external stakeholders with relevant and timely information.

Stewardship: Serving as responsible caretakers of the human, financial, information, and natural resources entrusted to us.

We engage in responsible stewardship when we:

- Act with a commitment to the health and safety of Californians and the preservation of the natural environment.
- Design and implement public policies that promote California's environmental sustainability goals.
- Allocate resources to high-priority objectives that deliver real value to Californians.
- Seek and employ contributions from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

This statement is intended to capture the values of the Commission and to remind us all to conduct ourselves in ways that makes us worthy of trust and respect. The values do not supersede or replace the policies and laws to which each employee is subject, nor do they alter any Memorandum of Understanding. To the extent that there is a conflict, the memorandum of understanding, policy, or law will govern.

Transparency

The CPUC is committed to transparency in its work to serve the people of California. On this page you will find information about the CPUC's consumer programs, accident and inspection reports, industry program reports, and more.

Decision Making

11 Myths About Decision-Making

by Cheryl Strauss Einhorn

April 20, 2021



Klaus Vedfelt/Getty Images

Summary. From “I like to be efficient” to “I trust my gut” to “I can make a rational decision,” there are a number of deeply ingrained — and counterproductive — myths we tell ourselves about how we make decisions. Underlying these myths are three common and popular... [**more**](#)

Can you imagine life without your smartphone?

So many of us can't. We depend upon them for everything from directions to telling us the temperature outside to tracking our daily steps and heart rate. Our "Hey, Siri" culture has conditioned us to equate speed with efficiency and efficacy — and it's changing how we process information. Our brains have become conditioned to respond with pleasure to the bings, pings, and dings our phones and computers provide.

While Siri and Alexa and Google are great when we're jonesing for Italian food and want help finding a restaurant, they're not great, or even desirable, when it comes to complex decision-making. In fact, they help enable a series of counterproductive ideas and reactive behaviors that actually impair your ability to make informed decisions.

For example, let's say you want to buy a car. Maybe you're weighing a Prius versus a Crosstrek. Siri and Google can give you all sorts of information, such as fuel efficiency or the current interest rate on your loan. But a search engine won't know why you're buying the car, how you intend to use it, or what impact the purchase will have on your budget. Ultimately your decision needs to come from a clear understanding of your needs, values, and goals — information that's outside the reach of their algorithms.

11 Myths About Decision-Making

I've been studying decision-making for more than 20 years and have identified a number of deeply ingrained and counterproductive myths that harm our ability to make decisions. The most common of these myths include:

1. I like to be efficient. So many of us think efficiency means jumping right in and making a decision. But to be truly effective, we need to be clear on what we are solving for. Rushing can lead you to make a decision based on the wrong factors, which ultimately will lead to regret. For example, walking into a car dealership and buying

the first car you see may feel efficient, but may mean you end up with the car the salesperson wants to get rid of, not the car that best fits your needs and budget.

2. I'm too busy; I don't have time to give to this decision. Putting off a decision is a decision in and of itself. However, intentionally slowing down to get clear on what you're solving for will speed up your efficacy. You'll save time later by spending quality time now to avoid having to revisit the decision. For example, taking a little bit of time to research prices before visiting a car dealership will better help you negotiate the price of the vehicle.

3. I just need to solve this problem at this moment. This is the classic example of “losing the forest for the trees.” Our problems sit in a context. A narrow focus may solve the wrong problem, or only partially solve the problem. If your car breaks down unexpectedly and you rush out to buy a new one, are you considering your needs beyond the present?

4. This is my decision alone; I don't need to involve others. Our important decisions *do* involve other stakeholders. Avoiding this bigger picture of who else is affected by a decision can, at best, only partially solve the problem, and may exacerbate it. For example, if your spouse or child can't drive a stick-shift, do you really want to buy a manual transmission car that no one else in the family can get out of the driveway in an emergency?

5. I know I'm right; I just want data or an opinion to confirm my own thinking. Known as “confirmation bias,” this decision-making flaw has been behind notorious failures from the Bay of Pigs to the subprime loan market implosion to the NASA Challenger explosion to the Deepwater Horizon environmental catastrophe. In each case, disconfirming data was available and should have raised concerns, but groupthink set in, and no one wanted to raise the red flag. To better understand and define the limitations of what you think you know, look for contrary examples and evaluate rival explanations. These techniques can prevent “frame blindness” to keep you from

seeing what you want to see rather than what may be present. For example, maybe you've settled on the Crosstrek in your car search, but you decide to look around anyway. Could your preference for the Crosstrek influence how you evaluate the other cars? Could you be looking to confirm your inclination rather than buy the best car for your needs? To pry open cognitive space, first consider your needs and then look for cars that fit those parameters.

6. I trust my gut. It's great to rely on your instincts when picking a breakfast cereal. But for larger, high-stakes decisions, when we rely on our gut, we are relying upon bias and faulty memory. Important decisions benefit from prying open cognitive space to allow for new information and insight. You may have set your mind on the Subaru Outback because you have fond memories of your family having one years ago, but some drivers find the driver's seat uncomfortable. Skipping the test-drive may result in a car that doesn't work for your long drives.

7. Decision-making is linear. In fact, good decision-making is circular; it needs a feedback loop as we gather information and analyze it and our thinking. At times we need to go back to find information we've glossed over, or to gather new information or conduct a different kind of analysis. When buying a car, for example, you might think that doing your research first and then going to a dealer and negotiating a price is enough. But there are many dealers, and they each have leeway to negotiate a price, so circling around and comparing offers may get you a better price.

8. I can pull my ideas together well in my head. Large decisions are made up of multiple smaller decisions. When we try to keep all of those moving parts in our mind, we end up relying on a faulty memory and a distracted mind. Our emotions can also get in the way, leading to biased thinking. Keeping a record is an important part of thinking and analysis; both Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci kept notebooks. We may never be as brilliant or creative as either of these great thinkers, but we can take a page from their notebooks and write things down to create a record of our thinking and our work.

9. I have all the information I need. While we may want to forge ahead, we can improve our decisions — and our satisfaction — by investing in a little bit of research and confronting assumptions with evidence. Your best friend might love her car, but that doesn't mean it's the car for you, particularly if it won't fit your daughter's hockey equipment. Looking to the experts, such as *Consumer Reports*, which does substantive research, can help you make an educated decision that's also right for you.

10. I can make a rational decision. Psychologists far and wide, such as Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, have demonstrated that as much as we'd like to believe it, none of us are rational. We all operate through a dirty windshield of bias based on past experiences and feelings. You might think you won't get taken in by a car dealer, but they are professional salespeople who know how to evoke an emotional response.

11. There's just one way to do this. Whether it's how the bed should be made, which diet to follow, or how to divide up your retirement account, there's always more than one way to get to "yes." We've been conditioned out of listening to other voices, siloed in our information, environment, and social (media) circles. But getting outside your routines and patterns leads you to seeing things differently. You may always have gone into the dealership to buy cars, but more and more, people are negotiating car purchases online and through texting and email.

Take a Time Out

Underlying these myths are three common and popular ideas that don't serve us well: First, as busy people, we don't need to invest time to make good decisions. Second, we are rational human beings, able to thoughtfully solve thorny and high-stakes problems in our heads. Third, decision-making is personal and doesn't need to involve anyone else.

All three of these assumptions are false — and problematic for clear thinking and analysis. We are not computers. We are social beings who operate in community. We need time for reflection, an ability to confront unconscious biases or to consider the bigger picture.

One way to combat these biases is to put a speed bump in our thinking — a strategic stop to give us time to pause, to see the whole picture, and to reflect on what we're experiencing. Slowing down can help improve efficacy by steering us away from our reliance on these decision-making myths and reflexive behaviors.

I call these strategic stops a “cheetah pause.” I came up with this term after learning that the cheetah's prodigious hunting skill is not due to its speed. Rather, it's the animal's ability to decelerate quickly that makes it a fearsome hunter. Cheetahs habitually run down their prey at speeds approaching 60 miles per hour but are able to cut their speed by nine miles per hour in a single stride. This allows them to make sharp turns, sideways jumps and direction changes.

In decision-making, too, quality thinking benefits from periods of thoughtful deceleration. These calculated pauses empower you to check and challenge your biases, consolidate your knowledge, include others and enable you to decide whether to pivot and move in a new direction or stay the course before accelerating again.

Here are five questions to ask yourself in these cheetah pauses:

1. Which decision-making myths am I relying on to make this decision?
2. How will this decision move me toward my life goals?
3. Are my feelings related to this decision based on what's actually happening or do they reflect my learned patterns of behavior?
4. What information is out there in the world that could help me make this decision better?
5. How can I better understand the perceptions and perspectives of others involved in the decision?

The next time you're speeding toward a decision, let the cheetah pause remind you of the value of taking a strategic stop. This vivid cue can help you see past decision-making myth "trees" and beyond the "forest" of biases that they rely upon, improving your decision-making skills. The right complex decision result *for you* is out there in the jungle — and you (not your smartphone) have the tools to find it.

Cheryl Strauss Einhorn is the founder and CEO of Decisive, a decision sciences company using her AREA Method decision-making system for individuals, companies, and nonprofits looking to solve complex problems. Decisive offers digital tools and in-person training, workshops, coaching and consulting. Cheryl has taught for years at Columbia Business School and Cornell and has won several journalism awards for her investigative news stories. She's authored two books on complex problem solving, *Problem Solved* for personal and professional decisions, and *Investing In Financial Research* about business, financial and investment decisions. She is currently working on a book about different decision-making approaches called *How You Decide*. For more information please watch Cheryl's TED talk and visit areamethod.com.

Resources for Respectful Debate

The University of British Columbia has responsibility for and is committed to providing its students, staff and faculty with an environment dedicated to excellence, equity and mutual respect. Personal harassment and bullying are harmful to a respectful environment and therefore have no place at UBC.

When engaging with others in dialogue or debate, consider the following basic principles and practices:

- Listen respectfully insofar as possible.
- Practice active listening, instead of thinking only about what you are waiting to say next.
- Speak for yourself, and let others speak for themselves.
- Instead of putting words in another person's mouth, ask the other person to clarify: "What did you mean?"
- Sometimes disagreement is based on a misunderstanding of another person's actual point of view.
- Practice the ability to disagree with an idea without attacking the speaker.
- Belittling, humiliating comments are major impediments to dialogue.
- Highly inflammatory language can cause people to stop listening.
- Try to avoid "conformity bias" and "group-think."
- Play thoughtfully with metaphors; sometimes they stimulate helpful insights.
- Analogies can be helpful; keep in mind that analogies are never perfect.
- Oversimplifying complex issues can aggravate and deepen differences.
- Generalizing formulations about an individual or a group of people, such as "you always..." or "all ___ think that..." are probably untrue.
- Lengthy speeches or monologues are antithetical to productive dialogue.
- Everyone shares responsibility for a productive dialogue, even if there is a designated "facilitator."
- Pay attention to sharing speaking time and not repeating ideas.
- Communication styles are not uniform; these differences might be socially conditioned, such as physical proximity, volume of speech, pauses.
- Sharing a language does not always mean equivalent levels of fluency.
- Words convey different meanings to different individuals, even when they share a common language. Try asking: "How are you using the word ___?"
- Avoid cutting off dialogue prematurely, but consider taking a break to lower the temperature.
- Because ideas from multiple perspectives and knowledge domains can deepen and broaden understanding of complex issues, seek to make connections between diverse ideas.
- Try asking genuine questions, rather than only rhetorical questions.
- to respond to the thread of a conversation before starting a new thread.
- Building on ideas enables a dialogue to go deeper.
- Don't be afraid to disagree; disagreements can lead to teachable moments.

Refer to:

[UBC Statement on Respectful Environment for Students, Faculty and Staff](http://www.hr.ubc.ca/respectful-environment/files/UBC-Statement-on-Respectful-Environment-2014.pdf)

[\(http://www.hr.ubc.ca/respectful-environment/files/UBC-Statement-on-Respectful-Environment-2014.pdf\)](http://www.hr.ubc.ca/respectful-environment/files/UBC-Statement-on-Respectful-Environment-2014.pdf).

[President's message to the UBC Community on Respectful Debate](http://president3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/Respectful-Debate-2015-Jan.pdf)

[\(http://president3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/Respectful-Debate-2015-Jan.pdf\)](http://president3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/Respectful-Debate-2015-Jan.pdf)

[Academic Calendar \(Vancouver\) – Policies and Regulations – Academic Freedom](http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,0,0)

[\(http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,0,0\)](http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,0,0)

Download:

[UBC Resources and Supports for Respectful Debate](http://equity2.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/UBC-Resources-and-Supports-for-Respectful-Debate.pdf)

[\(http://equity2.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/UBC-Resources-and-Supports-for-Respectful-Debate.pdf\)](http://equity2.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/UBC-Resources-and-Supports-for-Respectful-Debate.pdf) (pdf)

[Respectful Dialogue and Debate: Principles and Practices](http://equity2.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/Respectful-Dialogue-and-Debate-Principles-and-Practices.pdf)

[\(http://equity2.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/Respectful-Dialogue-and-Debate-Principles-and-Practices.pdf\)](http://equity2.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/01/Respectful-Dialogue-and-Debate-Principles-and-Practices.pdf) (pdf)

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair

ACTUALLY, IT'S OK TO DISAGREE. HERE ARE 5 WAYS WE CAN ARGUE BETTER

Hugh Breakey - Senior Research Fellow, Moral philosophy, Institute for Ethics, Governance & Law, Law Futures Centre, Griffith University

Argument is everywhere. From the kitchen table to the boardroom to the highest echelons of power, we all use argument to persuade, investigate new ideas, and make collective decisions.

Unfortunately, we often fail to consider the ethics of arguing. This makes it perilously easy to mistreat others — a critical concern in personal relationships, workplace decision-making and political deliberation.

The norms of argument

Everyone understands there are basic norms we should follow when arguing.

Logic and commonsense dictate that, when deliberating with others, we should be open to their views. We should listen carefully and try to understand their reasoning. And while we can't all be Socrates, we should do our best to respond to their thoughts with clear, rational and relevant arguments.

Since the time of Plato, these norms have been defended on what philosophers call “epistemic” grounds. This means the norms are valuable because they promote knowledge, insight and self-understanding.

What “critical thinking” is to internal thought processes, these “norms of argument” are to interpersonal discussion and deliberation.

Why ‘ethical’ arguing is important

In a recent article, I contend that these norms of argument are also *morally important*.

Sometimes this is obvious. For example, norms of argument can overlap with commonsense ethical principles, like honesty. Deliberately misrepresenting a person's view is wrong because it involves knowingly saying something false.

More importantly, but less obviously, being reasonable and open-minded ensures we treat our partners in argument in a consensual and reciprocal way. During

arguments, people open themselves up to attaining worthwhile benefits, like understanding and truth. If we don't "play by the rules", we can frustrate this pursuit.

Worse, if we change their minds by misleading or bamboozling them, this can amount to the serious wrongs of manipulation or intimidation.

Instead, obeying the norms of argument shows respect for our partners in argument as intelligent, rational individuals. It acknowledges they can change their minds based on reason.

This matters because rationality is an important part of people's humanity. Being "endowed with reason" is lauded in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights to support its fundamental claim that humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Obeying the norms of argument also has good effects on our character. Staying open-minded and genuinely considering contrary views helps us learn more about our own beliefs.

As philosopher John Stuart Mill observed,

He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that.

This open-mindedness helps us combat the moral perils of bias and groupthink.

What's more, the norms of argument aren't just good for individuals, they are also good for groups. They allow conflicts and collective decisions to be approached in a respectful, inclusive way, rather than forcing an agreement or escalating the conflict.

Indeed, arguments can *make* collectives. Two arguers, over time, can collectively achieve a shared intellectual creation. As partners in argument, they define terms, acknowledge areas of shared agreement, and mutually explore each other's reasons. They do something *together*.

All this accords with everyday experience. Many of us have enjoyed the sense of respect when our views have been welcomed, heard and seriously considered. And all of us know what it feels like to have our ideas dismissed, misrepresented or caricatured.

Why we have trouble arguing calmly

Unfortunately, being logical, reasonable and open-minded is easier said than done. When we argue with others, their arguments will inevitably call into question our beliefs, values, experience and competence.

These challenges are not easy to face calmly, especially if the topic is one we care about. This is because we like to think of ourselves as effective and capable, rather than mistaken or misguided. We also care about our social standing and like to project confidence.

In addition, we suffer from confirmation bias, so we actively avoid evidence that we are wrong.

Finally, we may have material stakes riding on the argument's outcome. After all, one of the main reasons we engage in argument is to get our way. We want to convince others to do what we want and follow our lead.

All this means that when someone challenges our convictions, we are psychologically predisposed to hit back hard.

Worse still, our capacity to evaluate whether our opponents are obeying the norms of argument is poor. All the psychological processes mentioned above don't just make it hard to argue calmly and reasonably. They also trick us into mistakenly thinking our opponents are being illogical, making us feel as if it's them, and not us, who's failing to argue properly.

How should we navigate the moral complexity of arguing?

Arguing morally isn't easy, but here are five tips to help:

1. Avoid thinking that when someone starts up an argument, they are mounting an attack. To adapt a saying by Oscar Wilde, there is only one thing in the world worse than being argued with, and that is *not* being argued with. Reasoned argument acknowledges a person's rationality, and that their opinion matters.
2. There is always more going on in any argument than who wins and who loses. In particular, the relationship between the two arguers can be at stake. Often, the real prize is demonstrating respect, even as we disagree.
3. Don't be too quick to judge your opponent's standards of argument. There's a good chance you'll succumb to "defensive reasoning", where you'll use all your intelligence to find fault with their views, instead of genuinely reflecting on what they are saying. Instead, try and work with them to clarify their reasoning.
4. Never assume that others aren't open to intelligent argument. History is littered with examples of people genuinely changing their minds, even in the most high stakes environments imaginable.

5. It's possible for both sides to "lose" an argument. The recently announced inquiry into question time in parliament provides a telling example. Even as the government and opposition strive to "win" during this daily show of political theatre, the net effect of their appalling standards is that everyone's reputation suffers.

The upshot

There is a saying in applied ethics that the worst ethical decisions you'll ever make are the ones you don't recognise *as* ethical decisions.

So, when you find yourself in the thick of argument, do your best to remember what's morally at stake.

Otherwise, there's a risk you might lose a lot more than you win.

<https://theconversation.com/actually-its-ok-to-disagree-here-are-5-ways-we-can-argue-better-121178>