

# BUILDING MY VOICE



# ABOUT THE PROJECT ON CIVIC DIALOGUE

Founded in 2018 as the Project on Civil Discourse, the **Project on Civic Dialogue** fosters opportunities for active and worthwhile conversations. Though our beliefs and perspectives vary, we work from two core values: first, that dialogue is a skill that can be learned and must be practiced (and not a spectator sport). And second, that expressive freedom is a necessary condition for dialogue, but the real work is in collaborative inquiry, listening, and learning.

We understand that we are asking more from ourselves than mere civility; we commit to listen generously, think critically, engage meaningfully, and inquire rigorously. We are all architects of our own voices, and we seek to use them and develop them with purpose and integrity.

## Building My Voice

Building My Voice (BMV) is a resource developed by the Project on Civic Dialogue to support students in identifying their goals, values, and challenges as speakers, listeners, and learners.

BMV provides a shared framework for reflecting on classroom dialogue—including speaking, listening, reading, and learning. Students, faculty, student groups, and classes can use this when planning or having tough conversations, making decisions about guest speakers and events, considering classroom contributions, resolving student disputes, and dealing with challenging events such as bias incidents. Students can refer to their goals and values statements when making decisions about how they use their voices, and evaluating their progress as productive, engaged members of the academic community and the world.

It encourages students to move from thinking about what they can say to why they speak, listen, and study.

# WE ARE THE ARCHITECTS OF OUR VOICES

Our choices of how to communicate, what conversations to engage in, and whether and how we listen to others are at the core of our learning experience.

***Our voice is  
ours to build;  
we are the  
architects.***

Building our voice involves actively deciding how best to communicate in service of our goals and values; taking responsibility for our choices as a member of the university community; pushing ourselves to engage in rigorous inquiry; and challenging ourselves to make the most of our education.

# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

## Students

Take the time to consider these questions and if possible, write your answers. Your answers are yours alone - you don't need to share them unless you want to (and the electronic BMV survey will not store and share your information).

Write the date next to each entry and revisit your answers often, adding new comments and dates through your years in school (and beyond).

## Faculty and staff

We encourage you to consider these questions, too. You can also choose to assign your students any or all of these questions in advance of your first class, and/or introduce this material in discussions about classroom expectations and learning objectives.



# STEP 1

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# EXPLORING YOUR VALUES

In this section you will explore the values, goals, and beliefs that inform your approach to communicating, listening, and learning.

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**1. What is the purpose of higher education? How does your decision to attend college relate to your values?**

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Date

**2. What are your goals for your time in school?**

You might include academic goals, skills you hope to develop, relationships, reputation, professional development, personal growth, service.

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**3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of speech? What kind of speech is useful, and what is not?** Consider speech in the classroom, in professional environments, or in social or political conversations.

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**4. Why do you speak? Why is it important to use your voice?**

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**Date**    **5. Are there limits to our freedom to speak? Should there be?**

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**Date**    **6. What do you expect from other speakers? What makes you more likely to listen to another speaker? What might make you tune out?**

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**Date**    **7. Do all ideas deserve equal time? Where do lies fit in the marketplace of ideas?**

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**Date**    **8. What kind of speaker are you?** Think about your Sensitivity to audience, Interest in relevance, Openness to criticism or correction, and commitment to truth.

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**Date** 9. Do you listen to understand or to respond? Do you interrupt?  
How carefully do you listen?

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**Date** 10. Do you actively seek information and perspectives that are new to you?

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**Date** 11. How do you want your peers to see you?

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**Date** 12. Think about someone whose ways of communicating you admire. This could be someone you know or a public figure. What makes him or her effective? What can you learn from this speaker in building your own voice?

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# STEP 2

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# SETTING YOUR GOALS

You now have explored your values and beliefs. This step will ask you to set some individual discourse goals. As the architect of your own voice, use this framework to help you service the values listed above.

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**1. I want to try to use my voice in academic space by doing:**

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Date

**2. I want to try to be an active listener in class by:**

(Some examples could be listening to understand rather than respond, asking more questions, challenging yourself to engage with your peers' ideas)

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**3. Highlight the option of your choice and then fill in the corresponding blanks.** (For example: I like when I feel like people give me a chance to explain myself, so I'm going to try to do the same by waiting to respond or ask questions).

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**I like/dislike it when others \_\_\_\_\_, so I'm going to try to \_\_\_\_\_.**

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**Date** 4. I want my peers to see me as someone who \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. I can try to accomplish this by doing:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Date** 5. To build good relationships, I want to try:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# STEP 3 \_\_\_\_\_

## ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

List 5 things you will do to help achieve the things you described in Exercise 3. For example, a student might decide to:

- Attend an event held by a political group with which they disagree;
- Practice listening while peers are speaking in class;
- Encourage their student organization to collaborate with another that has opposing views;
- Read books by diverse authors.

Date

1. I want to \_\_\_\_\_. I'm going to try \_\_\_\_\_ to achieve it.

Date

2. I want to \_\_\_\_\_. I'm going to try \_\_\_\_\_ to achieve it.

Date

3. I want to \_\_\_\_\_. I'm going to try \_\_\_\_\_ to achieve it.

Date

4. I want to \_\_\_\_\_. I'm going to try \_\_\_\_\_ to achieve it.

Date

5. I want to \_\_\_\_\_. I'm going to try \_\_\_\_\_ to achieve it.

# STEP 4 \_\_\_\_\_

## **IDENTIFY EXAMPLES FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE**

\*Re-visit This Step Often

**Date** 1. A time when you felt a classroom discussion (student or teacher) was not productive. Why?

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**Date** 2. An example of someone discussing a highly-contentious issue in a manner that you respected even if you disagreed.

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**Date** 3. A time you wish you'd spoken up but didn't.

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**4. A time you wish you'd been more open to what someone else was saying.**

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**5. Something you feel strongly about but know you need to study to truly understand** (for example, health care).

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