

TO: Students in CJ Theories of Crime
FROM: R. B. Taylor
DATE: 9/15/08
RE: Speaking and listening norms in class

We talked last time about ways we wanted to be listened to, and ways we wanted to be spoken to during this class.

On the listening side people talked about several things including:

- Not interrupting when others are speaking. I am pretty good at queuing up until about 3 or 4 deep, so raise your hand and I will get you in the queue
- Trying to pay attention when others are speaking – avoiding side conversations if possible or running commentaries. *Please see materials in syllabus about blackberries and texting and email and such.*
- Try to avoid running “nonverbal” commentary when others are speaking. Examples to include would be heavy sighs, eye rolling, and the like.
- Even though you may disagree with what is being said, see if you can listen for something “positive” in what is said.

On the speaking side people talked about several things including:

- Avoiding personal attacks. Folks seemed to know what this meant. What I was hearing was comment on the content of what was said not the personal qualities of the speaker. Good idea.
- Relatedly, it was suggested to avoid stereotyping comments about groups – “Every person from Missouri is a ...” It is one thing to make probabilistic statements if they can be backed up with data regarding, for example, men vs. women. It is not acceptable, however, to be making blanket statements about group differences. Because they cannot be true.
- Folks suggested trying to be verbally or nonverbally intimidating with things like, respectively, yelling or pounding on the table.
- Regarding cuss words folks thought it was ok to read them if they were part of a text, but not ok to add them on your own. To start adding swear words would be offensive to many.

So this is where we are at. These are tentative. If we need to revisit these either because something is not working, or we did not cover something, then let me know and we can adjust.

There was one interesting conversation thread at one point about being open to theory. Folks were suggesting it would be good to be open to what these theories are saying about why people or groups commit crime. Many of you all, however, already come to the table with a large volume of set ideas about a lot of things. If you are willing to suspend or put into play “what you know” in light of these materials, such that your vantage is at least at risk of shifting somewhat, that would be good. It requires a lot of openness. Part of our job in the classroom and in the seminar format is to create the conditions for that openness, regardless of whether or not it actually occurs.