

Guidelines for Workshops and Conferences

The logo of Ruhr University Bochum (RUB) is located in the top right corner. It consists of the letters 'RUB' in a white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a dark blue square.

Welcome to

Norms and Social Understanding from a Comparative Perspective

<https://normsandsocialunderstanding.philosophy-cognition.com/>

By participating at the workshop or conference mentioned above every participant agrees to respect the following:

Guidelines for Workshops and Conferences

These guidelines are intended to help foster a positive and respectful atmosphere at workshops and conferences at Ruhr University Bochum. Discussion at meetings can seem to be competitive and aggressive which can be intimidating especially for participants who are less experienced or are from minority groups. The consequence of this is that participants hesitate to participate in discussion. This may lead to less fruitful discussion which is contrary to the goals of our scientific events. The aim of these guidelines is to facilitate constructive and inclusive discussion which is maximally beneficial to the work at workshops and conferences. While these guidelines are primarily intended for formally structured discussion sessions, guidelines for providing constructive feedback should also be kept in mind for informal discussion. Furthermore, they are enriched to include general behavioral rules.

I. General

General behavioral rules:

During the whole event, including dinner and breaks, we expect from all participants a respectful behavior in relation to all other participants. Thus, the organizing team will implement a zero-tolerance strategy against any violent, aggressive, racist, or sexist communication or behavior. If you need help or feel uncomfortable do not hesitate to contact any one from the organizing team or from the supporting team.

General rules for discussions:

Chairpersons should also involve PhD students and postdocs. PhD students and postdocs should be given priority when asking questions – the chair should always explicitly encourage PhDs to ask the first questions.

It is acceptable to ask for clarification if something was not understood, even if the question/feedback seems unsophisticated or uninformed. The objective of asking questions and providing feedback is not to impress anyone. Questions should be kept short and to the point. Follow-ups should be allowed according to the finger/hand rule, but each person can ask ONE follow-up and the follow-up should not be longer than the original question.

The chair should be allowed to interrupt questions and discussions when they have the feeling that they take too long.

Approaching the speaker after the talk is acceptable but it can be courteous to grant the speaker a break after a presentation before following with deeper discussion during coffee/lunch breaks.

II. Giving Constructive Feedback

Discussion at workshops and conferences provides a valuable opportunity for receiving feedback. These guidelines aim to ensure that these comments are given in a respectful manner and are maximally beneficial to the presenter.

Object to theses and arguments, don't object to people. Feedback should be cast in a constructive manner. This includes critical feedback, which is an essential part of science and crucial for progress and the presenter's development as an academic. Nonetheless, positive feedback such as comments and questions that build on a speaker's project or strengthens their position are also explicitly encouraged. This might also include suggestions for further relevant issues or literature to be explored. Objections should be cast in a constructive way and should not be presented as flat dismissals; it should be acknowledged that there is a possibility of a response. Even when an objection is destructive with respect to a position, it often helps to find and propose a positive insight granted by the objection.

Discussants who think that the project is worthless and there is nothing to be learned from it should make doubly sure that their question is nonetheless phrased in a respectful manner and should consider whether it might be more appropriate to provide this radical feedback in private. It is permissible to question the presuppositions of a project or an area, but discussions in which these questions dominate can be unhelpful.

Discussants should not keep pressing the same objection (individually or collectively). This is relevant to the Q&A as well as informal discussions.

III. Chairing and Enforcing Norms

The chair should vary the discussants involving members of all academic levels: PhD, Postdoc, Professors. Female discussants should be given priority in asking questions and PhD students should be encouraged to ask the first question. It is reasonable for chairs to apply the norms flexibly and context-sensitively, but they should be mindful of reintroducing biases in doing so.

When norms are violated, the chair is encouraged to gently point this out, and others should feel free to say something or to signal the chair. If it is more comfortable to do so, it is also fine to quietly point out violations after the session to the organizing team.

Participants should not be defensive when a violation is pointed out. It is quite possible to violate these norms without being inimical, or intentionally doing so.

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