The Anti-Racist Discussion Pedagogy

An introductory guide to building an anti-racist pedagogy in any discipline through instructor reflection, clear communication guidelines, and inquiry-based discussion.

By Dr. Selfa Chew, Dr. Akil Houston, and Dr. Alisa Cooper

Presented by Packback

All education is political; teaching is never a neutral act.

- Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

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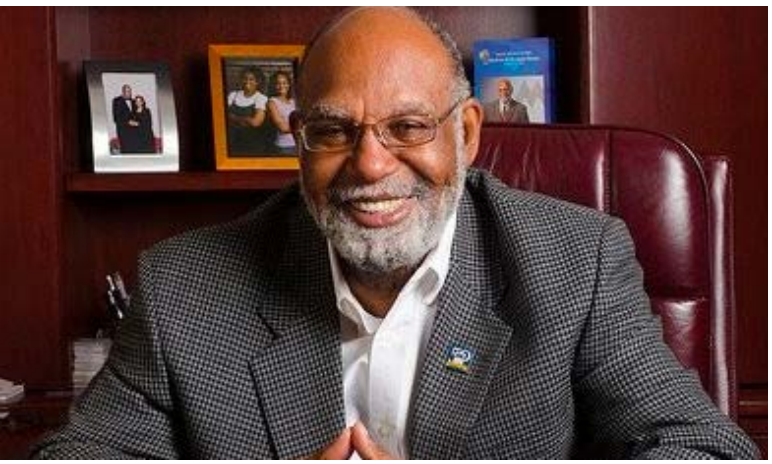


Foreword by Rufus Glasper, Ph.D.

Dr. Glasper is the President and CEO of League for Innovation in the Community College, and Chancellor Emeritus for the Maricopa Community College District

When reading through this guide after being invited to contribute a foreword, I was surprised by just how much the experiences of the coauthors reminded me of my own experiences throughout my career in academia.

When I graduated from college with a degree in business administration and business education, I decided to pursue teaching. I had just gotten a new job and would be teaching at a local high school, and had to request a copy of my college transcript. The transcript was sent directly to the employment office and reviewed by the school business manager, who was my boss for summer employment prior to the start of school in the fall. After receiving the transcript, I learned that my college advisor had written on it, "I am glad that Rufus decided to teach in the inner city schools because I don't think someone like him would be successful in the highly competitive business world."

I never became a high school teacher but spent a significant part of my career on the business side of education. I have spent my career determined to prove that advisor wrong. I went from graduating with two letters behind my name—with a BA degree—to 27 letters behind my name today. Multiple degrees, titles, and years later when I became a chancellor, I was still frequently introduced professionally as, "our Black chancellor", rather than just, "our chancellor". It turned out that no matter how many letters followed my name, I was still defined in the eyes of others by my race.

Racism is just as real and present a force in America today as it was when I started my career. And the first step to solving any problem is to acknowledge that we have one.

I currently serve as President and CEO of League for Innovation in the Community College. I have now been a part of the education community for 46 years, with 34 years in higher education, and while the specific situations and conversations around race may have changed in those years, the underlying need to dismantle systemic racism has remained constant.

After a summer of protests in response to ongoing police violence against Black and Brown people, I hope that our higher education community seizes this moment as an opportunity to create lasting change.

This guide is for instructors. Any administrators who may be reading this guide may see the guide's focus on instructors and believe that racism in higher education can be solved through the actions of individual instructors alone. While brave instructors can take on the important work of implementing an anti-racist pedagogy in the classroom, work must also be done at the highest levels of our institutions to create system-wide change. One day, I hope for a future where anti-racist pedagogy is a given–rather than an exception–because anti-racist practices are so baked into the fabric of the institutions' operations and values. Until that point, there is still much work to be done.

For faculty members reading this guide, you must accept that this work will not be easy. But it is essential work; your leadership matters deeply in shaping the experiences, perspectives, and futures of your students. When you engage in anti-racist discussion in your class, present your students with information that shows the realities of race in our society, frame the conversation...and then step back and listen. I think you will be surprised by how much you can learn from your students' experiences when they are given the opportunity to share.

If you are nervous about doing this work, remember: your job as an educator is not to have all the answers. It is to ask the right *questions*.

Rufus Glasper, Ph.D.

President and CEO of League for Innovation in the Community College

Chancellor emeritus for the Maricopa Community College District

Introduction

This guide's goal is to provide a starting resource for instructors who want to adopt an Anti-Racist discussion pedagogy in their own classroom, regardless of subject.

Our intention with this guide was to balance theory with practical tools for easing the transition to an Anti-Racist teaching style. Much of this guide focuses on the *internal* reflections that an instructor should undergo before asking students to reflect outwardly via class discussion. This decision was by design; anti-racist work must start within through reflection, then grow outward through action.

As a company dedicated to critical inquiry, curiosity, and asking big questions, Packback sees it as our responsibility to help amplify the voices of great educators employing a critical pedagogy in their classrooms to challenge and oppose the forces of racism.

We hope that you find value in this guide and share feedback on how we can iterate and extend this resource to provide an evolving guidebook for employing an anti-racist discussion pedagogy.

- The Packback Team

AUTHORS' NOTE

The views, opinions, and recommendations in this guide are exclusively those of the individual coauthors involved in the creation of this guide and Packback. This guide is not intended to represent the views of any specific institution.

Methodology

This guide was compiled based on 9 hours of interviews with three instructors across different disciplines who employ anti-racist teaching principles in their classrooms. These interviews resulted in this guide which covers four key topics: why building an anti-racist pedagogy matters in all subjects, how instructors can prepare themselves to employ an anti-racist pedagogy, setting explicit communication standards to make anti-racist discussion possible, and how to use student discussion to bring anti-racist reflection and engagement into a class.

Co-Authors Biographies

Dr. Selfa Chew | History and African American Studies
University of Texas at El Paso

Dr. Chew has taught at Saint Lawrence University, New Mexico State University, El Paso Community College and the University of Texas at El Paso. At UTEP, she is an Associate Professor of Instruction and is completing her second doctoral degree.

Dr. Alisa Cooper | English and Journalism
Glendale Community College, A Maricopa Community College

Dr. Cooper returned full-time as an English professor at Glendale Community College last fall. She recently finished a 4 year term as the Faculty Director of the Center for Teaching, Learning and Engagement.

Dr. Akil Houston | African American Studies and Cultural Studies
Ohio University

Dr. Houston is a filmmaker, DJ, social critic, and one of the nation's most authentic Hip-Hop scholars. He is an Associate Professor at Ohio University and has served on the National Leadership Board of the non-profit, Hip Hop Congress, for 11 years.

Incorporating an Anti-Racist Pedagogy Into All Disciplines

Discussions about race and systems of race-based power are common in sociology, political science, and psychology classes on college campuses across America. But what conversations of race exist in biology classes? Or art and music classes? Or history or technology classes? What role does race play in these subjects?

Race-based power structures impact all institutions in American society. Because education is a complex institution within society, education both reflects the racism of society at large, and can unintentionally be used as a powerful tool to further it.

Our textbooks are shaped by race; in the examples which they choose to cite, the framing that is used to describe events and people, and most notably, in what is omitted from text.

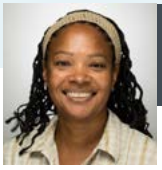
Our reading lists are shaped by race, and not only by the active choices of instructors over which researchers to include. What students are exposed to in classes today has been shaped by centuries of racial disparity in American

society; historical limitations to access to education; active and implicit bias in acceptance processes to elite institutions; and bias in the publication process for peer reviewed works, to name a few.

Our medical training guidelines are based on an assumption of a white male as the default medical subject. This selection bias in clinical studies has wide reaching impacts on the medical training, shaping pharmaceutical recommendations, risk factors, and limiting visibility into how diseases present different symptoms in patients of different races and genders.

Through the active filtering of voices (like that performed by gallery curators or journal editors) and passive filtering of voices (like that which results from a system that does not equally distribute access to resources and opportunities), the net result has historically been one that has led to curricula which center whiteness and white voices. This has an impact on students of all races; shaping their perception of their field of study, their perception of race, and their perception of themselves. Dr. Cooper shares her experience of the inseparability of race from other experiences:

"As an African American instructor, I never go into a class thinking that I'm *only* teaching Composition. I always go into my classroom as myself—a black instructor—and think about how I may actually be the first black instructor my students have ever had. Dealing with race in my class is baked in."



– Dr. Alisa Cooper

Without conscious and concerted effort on the part of educators (and students) in all subjects, higher education will inherently reflect the systems of racism and white supremacy of the society in which it exists.

What we hear today are the echoes of our history. What students of tomorrow will hear in their classrooms are the echoes of today. In a very real way, what is discussed in today's classrooms around race—and how students grow from those discussions—will shape the future of our society.

What is an Anti-Racist Pedagogy?

The advocacy group Race Forward defines anti-racism as:

> ***The work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism tends to be an individualized approach, and set up in opposition to individual racist behaviors and impacts."***

Anti-Racist Pedagogy is a paradigm located within Critical Theory utilized to explain and counteract the persistence and impact of racism *(Blakeney, 2005)*. An instructor may apply an anti-racist pedagogy to any field of study.

While an anti-racist pedagogy may employ a number of tools and praxes to build a more inclusive and representative course design, the heart of an anti-racist pedagogy is the intent to actively acknowledge and oppose racism in all aspects of the course.

Though conscious choices about what authorial voices to focus on, intentionally designing communication expectations and power relationships in the classroom, using discussion to examine and oppose the forces of racism that exert influence on the field of study, and building continuous feedback and iteration into the design of the course itself, instructors can cultivate the conditions that can create constructive change.

But the work starts within. In our next section, we dive into the "prerequisite" work for building an anti-racist pedagogy; building an anti-racist **self**.

Preparing to be an Anti-Racist Instructor

Depending on your own race, gender, and identity, there will be different challenges to cultivating an actively anti-racist curriculum in your classroom. This kind of work is hard and uncomfortable by its very nature. Discussions on race have been made a cultural taboo in many contexts, and instructors who choose to enact an anti-racist and critical pedagogy may experience conflict and push-back from their class and their community.

To be able to drive any societal change, the work always begins internally. Dr. Houston urges educators to self-reflect before embarking on an anti-racist pedagogy in your classroom.

Anti-Racist Self-Reflection Prompts for Instructors

The following questions can be used for guided instructor self-reflection to help prepare educators for engaging in anti-racist teaching methods.

1. Am I truly ready to do this work, even when it becomes uncomfortable?

"Ask yourself, 'Am I ready to do this work, even when it becomes uncomfortable?'. If you can't honestly say 'yes' to the question, perhaps this isn't the conversation for you to lead at this time. As an instructor, we often feel like we need to have all the answers. But if you present yourself as the expert, it can be tough for your students to discuss openly."

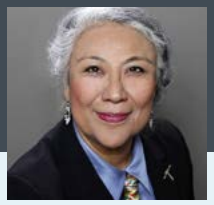
– Dr. Akil Houston

While conversations on race and systems of power are less taboo than they may have been in the past, this work is still challenging and can make other people uncomfortable. Understanding your own **level of comfort** with discomfort can be a helpful barometer for understanding what conversations you are ready to facilitate in your classroom. Are you prepared to respond to potential push-back you may receive for engaging in this pedagogy?

2. Have I learned enough to confidently support this conversation?

"Are you attuned to the news and the media your students are consuming? Knowing what kind of language they are naturally using outside of the classroom can help you understand when censorship is needed, versus when it is just an opportunity to reflect on the use of language within the context of race."

– Dr. Selfa Chew



By no means do all instructors need to be **experts** on race. But it is important to do preparatory work to ensure you have a foundational understanding of race's impact on your society, before asking students to do this work. An awareness of the media your students are consuming and the language they are using is helpful to have before engaging on topics related to race so that you have context about how your students are already talking about race outside the classroom.

3. How has my own experience shaped my perspective and biases?

"For example, I'm not just a Black Man, I am a Black man teaching in Appalachia. I need to be aware of the environment that I teach in. For many students who are from the schools surrounding counties where Ohio University is located, poverty is high. This context matters in shaping my pedagogy."

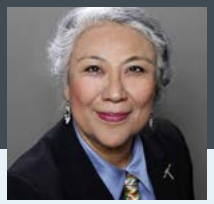
– Dr. Akil Houston

Reflecting on how your **identity** shapes your relationship to issues of race and power can help you to be aware of biases. Considering how your own identity intersects with that of your students' provides important context for how you might consider approaching difficult topics. The way a white instructor approaches topics of race when teaching at a predominantly white student group would differ from how they might approach those topics if teaching a predominantly Black student group.

4. Am I ready to facilitate, rather than dictate?

"Before engaging in this work, reflect on if you feel that you need to be above your students and hold power over them to control the conversation, or if you are ready to receive feedback and critiques that may be directly targeted at your community and identity? How will you respond to these critiques? Will you be comfortable taking a listening role?"

– Dr. Selfa Chew



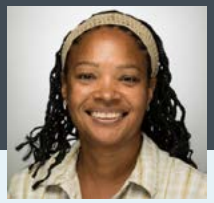
Because instructors are an "authority figure" in the classroom, a willingness to be wrong, to listen, to learn from students, and to make mistakes are foundational to an anti-racist pedagogy. A switch from the directorial role to a **facilitatory role** is necessary for authentic discussion to flourish. We suggest guiding sensitive discussion through the use of questions, context sharing, and gentle redirects, rather than instruction or lecture.

5. How will I handle potentially challenging scenarios?

Planning ahead of time how you would handle **common scenarios** can help you to act in accordance with your values and deescalate situations calmly, should that situation arise.

"Prior planning prevents poor performance in a stressful moment. The way instructors handle conflicts and difficult situations sets crucial examples for these students. You do not want to go in without a plan."

– Dr. Alisa Cooper



Ask yourself: How would I deal with the following?

- A student uses an anachronistic or offensive term?
- A student misrepresents data to make a racist and/or logically flawed argument?
- A student utilizes non-academic sources (like the bible) to make an argument?
- Two students argue with one another in the discussion, with one student being a minority?
- A student complains to your department head about the "political" nature of the course?
- A fellow faculty member is uncomfortable with your adoption of an anti-racist pedagogy in your class?

Using Discussion as a Key Tool in Building an Anti-Racist Pedagogy

Why is Discussion Central to Anti-Racist Pedagogy?

As individuals, we are influenced deeply by our upbringings and personal experiences, which shape our perspectives, beliefs, and actions. Higher education presents the rare opportunity to interact with people from a wide range of backgrounds and communities, and become exposed to ideas and experiences from which the students (and educators, for that matter!) may have otherwise been insulated.

Radical change at the highest levels of society begins internally, with the changing of individual minds and actions. Discussion is integral to the process of self-examination and reflection. Gloria Steinem, journalist and political organizer, talks about the concept of “everyday radical acts” in her book, “Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions.”

Often, when white people become aware of systemic injustices in our society and

they begin to engage in anti-racist activism, their energy to make change comes in a great and unsustainable burst. If someone sets out and hopes to change the entire socio-political system overnight and results don't immediately follow, their disappointment frequently leads to despondency and detachment.

While setting out to try to create sweeping change overnight may seem tempting, it's "the small, everyday things we can do that can actually create a greater impact," says Dr. Houston, "and discussion provides students an opportunity to learn without shame."

Discussion in Classrooms of Differing Levels of Diversity

In non-diverse classrooms, discussions on race can be powerful tools of necessary self-reflection to prompt the students to get comfortable observing and naming the lack of diversity in the common spaces where they spend their time. Robin DiAngelo, author of White Fragility, discusses the omnipresent ways in which white supremacy shapes modern culture and the various social and interpersonal tools that help to uphold these systems. As DiAngelo points out in her book, the "Racist = Bad, Non-Racist = Good" binary can stunt genuine reflections by white people on how they have been benefited by, influenced by, and a party to racism. Predominantly white classrooms have a crucial responsibility to talk about race and become comfortable naming the ways racism has shaped their experience and perspectives. Encourage students to reflect on *why* their classroom lacks diversity; what social, political, and economic forces led to their classroom lacking people of color?

In highly diverse classrooms, discussions on race matter even more, because they present the opportunity to expose students to the experiences of others, first-hand. But highly diverse classrooms also present a unique challenge of creating a space for cross-cultural and cross-racial communication, which requires the greatest investment in upfront expectation-setting and trust-building. "Many people that are apathetic to anti-racist causes simply don't have the context to understand how Black people feel about what is going on today. I tell my students to put themselves in the other person's shoes and ask, 'How would I feel if this incident happened to me?', and to think before they respond. When that happens, these conversations can be transformative," says Dr. Cooper.

Building a Safe Space for Anti-Racist Discussion

Training students *how* to have productive conversations examining race is critical. "In many conversations today—not just about race—people hold their own opinions so strongly that they aren't really listening to the other side. We have to teach students to listen, to think, and then respond," says Dr. Cooper.

Early, up-front, and clear expectations help protect both the students and the instructor, and create a space conducive to constructive discussion.

"It is very important to create a space for students to freely discuss, but that freedom also carries responsibility," says Dr. Chew, "There is a responsibility to protect the other participants, to understand that it is not a finished conversation, that the discussion is *not* a contest where anyone wins any prize for yelling or screaming or being the most articulate, that feelings do have a place in the conversation, and that the ultimate goal is to build a better society."

Not every class needs to have the ***same*** boundaries and guidelines for what is acceptable for discussion; expectations, boundaries, and communication guidelines can vary by subject, by student age or maturity, and even by instructor confidence with handling sensitive topics within the context of their class.

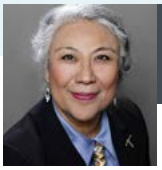
But a core component of an anti-racist pedagogy must be the prioritization of explicit interpersonal guidelines that protect and support minority students when sharing their perspective, and create an environment where constructive discussion can take place for students of all races and genders.

> As Patricia Hill Collins says in her work, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (2000), "oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group." Because of this, our social expectations for discussion in the classroom must create a space that lifts up and protects the voices of marginalized students. A shared "social contract" that outlines the explicit expectations for communication, goals, and consequences in the classroom can act as a "shortcut" for giving feedback by removing the personal nature of the feedback.

When redirecting a student back to the explicit social contract of the classroom, you are not making a personal judgment or attack on their morals or values; you are reminding them of an academic expectation to uphold a productive learning environment for all students.

The more explicit, memorable, and publicly visible your "social contract" is, the more helpful a tool it can be for preventing and deescalating conflicts.

"We always must use guidelines to help create a safe space for discussion if we want students to have a productive experience. And we [as instructors] do not have protection without guidelines. It may seem cumbersome, but it is necessary."



– Dr. Selfa Chew

So, how do you create a safe space for anti-racist discussion? Follow these steps to build and communicate your classroom's "social contract" for discussion.

1. Establish the "Why" by Setting Course Intentions

Dr. Houston sets intentions in his course by stating, "We are all here for academic purposes: to take in information and engage with it. My expectation is that everyone engages in good faith. Then, each of us make decisions on how we want to use the new information we've learned to shape our actions or behaviors outside of the classroom."

The purpose of an academic space is to learn, and by setting expectations early for why anti-racism is being incorporated into the course design, you can reduce drama and focus on the academic goals of an anti-racist pedagogy. Dr. Houston also recommends sharing a "mantra" with students.

He uses the mantra, "**It's not about shame, blame or guilt,**" inspired by the words of Peggy Mcintosh, American feminist and anti-racist activist. By establishing simple **shared language**, if the course discussion gets off-track,

emotional, or unproductive, this “mantra” can be used as a shortcut to help recenter the class.

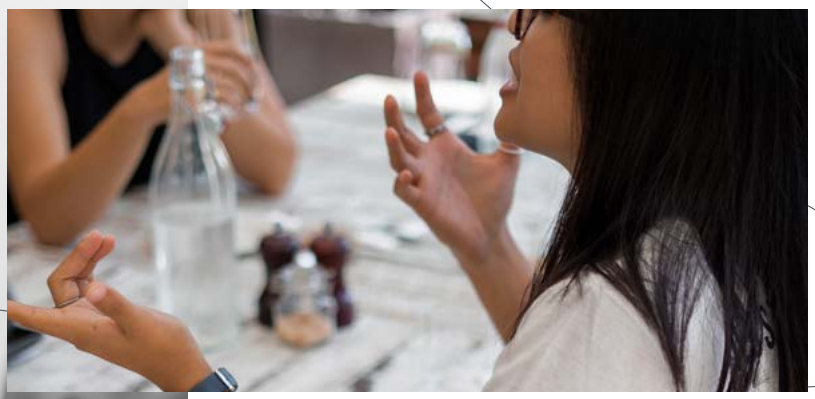
2. Set an Example of Vulnerability, Honesty, and a Willingness to Learn

It is important to normalize to your class that these will be difficult conversations. All of us who live in America have been touched by and socialized by racism. It is inevitable that all of us will misspeak, make mistakes, and realize new areas where we are uninformed as we grow in greater cross-racial consciousness. The most important thing is how we learn from these mistakes to change our actions when they are brought to our attention.

Disclosing your own perspective and you have been impacted and touched by racism can help to establish an example of transparency for your students and help them open up and approach the course from a learning mindset.

It can be helpful to also address the “elephant in the room” at this point, if there is one. For example, are you a white instructor working to incorporate anti-racist teaching methods? Are you a Black instructor working with a predominantly white class? If you feel uncomfortable about something, it’s likely your students are aware of it, too. Simply naming the awkwardness can help to dispel it.

> Dr. Chew immediately addresses the question that she anticipates is likely on her students’ minds when they see her; a non-Black instructor leading a class on African American Studies. When she greets her students at the start of a new term, she tells her students, “I am not your professor. You have at least 30 African American intellectuals who you will be learning from, and these scholars are outstanding...and I am just the medium, and we are going to learn from them together.” By naming the “elephant in the room”, she takes away its power... allowing the class to focus on learning.



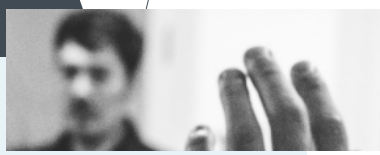
3. Publish Communication Guidelines for your Class

Great communication standards and expectations for what constitutes an acceptable academic argument are critical to separating critical discussion from emotion and deeply held moral beliefs within students. Before the class gets underway, it is also important to make it clear what happens if there are transgressions of the communication standards. This will vary by department policy, instructor approach, and severity of the issue, but always must be concrete and easily referenceable for students.

It is *critically* important to note that not all spaces can be equally safe for all ideas when working to cultivate an anti-racist pedagogy. Dr. Houston shares that rather than to just create an open space, his goal is to **"create a space for social justice"** and ensure minority students are able to learn in a safe and supportive environment where their identity is validated.

Packback has created sample Communication Guidelines written so that they can be shared directly with students, informed by the guidelines shared by the three coauthors of this document.

We suggest publishing the following Communication Guidelines to your students in your LMS or Syllabus:



Student Guidelines for Anti-Racist Discussion

1. Name the discomfort
The fastest way to dispel discomfort is to address it head on. If you are feeling uncomfortable with a topic, name what you are feeling! Labeling and bringing emotions out into the open allows them to be examined with a more objective eye; you are then observing your emotion, not being controlled by it.

2. Your impact is everything
Stating intentions early can help avoid misunderstandings. However, if a peer is hurt by something you did or said, your intention is no longer the focus; the impact of your words or actions is more important. Apologize if you harmed someone, accept feedback graciously, and decide how you want to learn from it.

3. Keep a learner's mindset
Seek to understand, before being understood. Your experience is valid and real, but that does not make it universal. In response to a new concept or difficult feedback, think: "I am grateful to have received this new information and can now choose how I want to integrate and use this information."

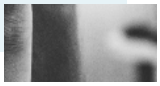
4. Use sound academic arguments
Refer back to the text: *When attempting to make a statement that is not from direct and immediate personal experience, it should always be backed by an academic resource.*

- **Discuss like a scholar:** *Be cautious of generalizations and unsupported claims, be wary of logical fallacies, and watch for misleading data.*
- **Check your sources:** *What are the biases present in the sources you have cited? What are the sources of their data?*
- **Form complete rhetorical arguments:** *When making a claim, use logic and back up your assertions with evidence.*

5. Use appropriate language
In this class there is a zero tolerance policy for overt racist language and abusive terms.
In this class we also avoid terms that are anachronistic, and update your language as you learn: some terms may have been acceptable in the past but are no longer respectful terms.

6. Make all voices heard
Look around the room; do most people look like you? If so, how can you make sure less represented groups are represented in the discussion? Before speaking up, ask, "Does saying something add something critical to the discussion, or does it take an opportunity away from an under-represented voice?"

Ask your classmates what they think! Outside of creating space for peers to speak, nominating (*naming*) a peer in discussion also has a huge positive impact on engagement and builds a stronger community.



Implementing a Critical Discussion Pedagogy

Require Students to Write Reflectively

"It is impossible to self-reflect on ideas when they have not yet been formalized as a conscious perspective. Articulating thoughts in writing moves them into the realm of being an concrete idea that can be evaluated. Before we can critique, we must first be aware," says Dr. Cooper.

Encouraging journaling or reflective discussions can encourage students to get their ideas and thoughts down on paper, allowing students to become aware of and articulate their perspectives.

This goal of this type of writing is not perfect convention nor formality; rather, the goal is to get students to articulate their thoughts and feelings on a topic in writing. This can be done privately, or as a part of a larger reflective discussion environment. "Writing about yourself is easy because it is the subject you know best," says Dr. Cooper, "This practice should help them realize how their own backgrounds shape their opinion."

Reflective journaling or discussion alone will not provide the comprehensive historical, socio-political, economic, and cultural context required to engage more broadly in anti-racist discussion, but the practice of written reflection is a critical foundation to interpersonal discussion and critical analysis. Encourage students to ask their own questions and respond to peers' questions. "Asking questions as a form of reflection, as well, because it requires students to think about what they learned, consider what they are interested in, and then articulate their thoughts in writing to create concrete ideas that can be evaluated and answered by peers" says Dr. Cooper.

Getting students to ask their own questions requires a higher level of meta-cognition than simply responding, and can keep students interested and engaged. The Practical Inquiry Model outlines the cognitive processes engaged when a learner forms their own open-ended inquiries. (Garrison & Aykol, 2011).

However, just because the discussion questions are asked and responded to by students, does not mean that they should be subjective or abstract. In Inquiry-based discussion of any kind, but particularly when it focuses on anti-racist concepts, the importance of source citation is paramount to keep the discussion productive and academic.

> "I always try to bring them back to the text, and ask them to use the language from the text," says Dr. Chew. She tells her students, "We have historians, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers who have studied this. Refer back to their work. Analyze their arguments, their sources, the way they build this text and this research that has already been approved and reviewed by a board of experts."

Adopt a Facilitatory Model, Rather than a Directorial One

"Discussions can be stilted when they are not 'student-centered', because the students are afraid to be wrong, afraid to be embarrassed, and afraid to speak up because the instructor is an authority figure," says Dr. Houston.

While seemingly counter-intuitive, research shows that more interaction from the instructor is not always a good thing. A high level of faculty-to-student interaction has been shown to lead to a lower engagement rate. The interaction model for discussion found to lead to the highest levels of engagement and meta-cognitive attainment was a high student-student, low student-instructor, and high student-content interaction model.

In practice, this means encouraging greater autonomous student-to-student interaction, and being reserved about sharing your own perspective in the discussion. As Dr. Cooper points out, if she ever shares her opinion in a discussion this typically effectively ends the conversation because her class will rush to align with her expert opinion.

But maintaining a less directorial role in the discussion does not mean refraining from all participation. Rather, it's about finding, in Dr. Houston's words, "a balance between being heavy handed and giving space for students to explore."

This can generally be accomplished by focusing your instructor interactions on the discussion at a meta-level, rather than interaction within the discussion.

A few examples of effective facilitation might include:

- Intervening if a transgression of your communication guidelines occurs
- Praising a student on the structure of their argument and their analysis, rather than "agreeing" with their post
- Challenge a student on their logic or reasoning evident in their post
- Highlighting examples of effective discussion threads that show perspectives being shared respectfully
- Praising an example of a student who showed that they changed their mind after being exposed to new data

Prompts for Sparking Anti-Racist Discussions

If you are looking for ways to spark anti-racist discussions in your classroom, the following instructor-led prompts can help break down barriers and set the tone.

Prompt 1: Place yourself in history

What was happening at the time of your birth in the history of the subject of this course? What were major political concerns?

Details: To answer this prompt, you will need to do some research to learn; what was going on socially at this time? What recent discoveries had been made in our field? Dig a little deeper… talk to some family members about how they felt about the key events, social movements, and discoveries you uncover. How have attitudes changed over time?

Why this prompt: This activity helps students see themselves as a part of history, and reflect on the recency of key historical events that may feel like the distant past. This is helpful as "scaffolding for future discussions when you want to talk about the past with your class, and how the past influences what is happening today," says Dr. Houston.

Prompt 2: Myth-busting with data

(To prepare, share a 'shocking' statistic that involves race which is relevant to your course)

What are your immediate preconceptions of this stereotype and statistic?
Using the stereotype as a starting point, perform an analysis using academic data sources to determine the full narrative behind a stereotype.

Details: What does the data actually tell us about this stereotype? What other factors exist that may have led to this perception? Were there any special interest groups that stood to benefit from furthering this specific narrative?

Use reliable, academic sources for sourcing data to build your analysis.

Why this prompt: Nearly every field will have stereotypes, biases, and statistics that do not tell a whole story. This prompt is a tool for challenging preconceptions with data. It is also a useful exercise for students to investigate raw data using reliable sources to form independent conclusions which is particularly helpful in our current climate of information overload and fake news.

Prompt 3: "How could we…?" employ a generative hypothetical

Re-frame a question that would ask for the morality or validity of an idea, and practice converting the question into a constructive hypothetical starting with, "how could we…"

Details: For this prompt, select a common "ethical" question involving race, and reframe as a "tactical" hypothetical questions instead. Rather than asking "Is this right or wrong", try instead. For example, rather than "Should affirmative action exist", ask students, "How could higher education institutions improve the long-term and short-term diversity of their student body? Think creatively!"

Why this prompt: A morality-based opinion-focused discussion tends to lead to both parties digging in their heels. By reframing discussion questions to focus on a "how could we…" question, it forces students into problem-solving, rather than a debate. This prompt is to help students practice the art of re-framing questions to focus on imagining an alternative future, rather than debating current reality.

Building a *Holistically* Anti-Racist Classroom

Evaluating and Selecting Reference Texts for the Course

One of the most political choices that an instructor makes in their class is the selection of reference texts for the course. When designing a course, an instructor is accomplishing so much more than just delivering subject matter information. "There's a lot of conscious planning that must go into designing a class," says Dr. Cooper. "I use the example of accessibility: we consider how a blind or deaf student will be able to navigate through the class. When designing an anti-racist classroom, we must consider how students of different races will navigate through and experience this class. It's more than just selecting the readings; it's the holistic design of the course."

A recommended or required reading list is very much like a panel at a conference; who is invited to be on the panel—and who is left off the panel—acts as a filter for what perspectives the audience is able to hear. The choice of who to include and who to omit on course reading lists is influential and can shape your students' perspectives for the rest of their lives.

> "We have to emphasize intellectual work of people of color. Our students are going to be exposed to European scholars in other classes, no matter what, so even the simple act of selecting texts from scholars of color plays a critical role in showing students that all people have the same intellectual abilities and value to offer," says Dr. Selfa Chew.

Additionally, Dr. Chew uses carefully selected reading materials to scaffold challenging conversations. "In my class, there is no difficult or challenging conversation that isn't accompanied by text, a film, or a reading," she explains, "The selected material in a class is the key for respectful conversations, because it gives the students the tools to respectfully critique the other students using the language they've learned from the text. Rather than correcting students personally on a perspective, I frequently ask them to reference back to the text."

The context of the class who will be engaging with the readings matters as well. Dr. Houston cites an example of a semester where his class was predominantly white and modified his reading list. And after first using his typical reading list which featured many women and people of color, he received push-back from his students, who initially discredited the concepts because they came from marginalized authors. Reacting to this context (while keeping his larger goal of productive discussion around the role of race in media), he selected a reading of white authors who addressed and critiqued the topic of race. “It was important for the literature to make those connections for students, and to help them find themselves in the literature,” he explains. “It took having access to readings written by anti-racist scholars who were white to actually get them to open and up and talk about race. And a huge reason for this was shame.” After being exposed to the new readings, a student shared with Dr. Houston, “If I do acknowledge these ideas, it means I am not the person I thought I was.”

That can be an incredibly difficult and painful thing to experience, but carefully selected readings can create the right conditions for meaningful self-reflection.

Considering Bias in Interactions and Evaluations

Often, instructors consider students of color differently when offering feedback or suggesting changes to their work. Sometimes, feedback is avoided because of the idea that it will not be appropriately received. In some cases, however, there is an overuse of academic feedback as a response to “non-traditional” language or writing.

It is important to assess your own cultural bias before offering or avoiding feedback to students of color. Special consideration must be given to diverse backgrounds and students who took a non-traditional path to education, but this must happen as a form of self-reflection, prior to interaction with a student.

We must remember that although many of us may teach in similar ways or in similar institutions, our students are a reflection of what our world truly looks like—therefore, we cannot offer feedback or guide students through one very standard academic lens. An unlearning process must occur in order to view ALL

students not just as writers and researchers, but as adults with different life experiences and modes of expression.

Dr. Cooper suggests working to integrate a practice of conscious inclusion as a part of your personal mode of teaching. She recommends actively looking for ways to refine, prune, and grow your inclusive pedagogy. From applying conscious thought to each piece of content used in the class, to revisiting examples to ensure they are representative, to considering the ways that you can even evolve interpersonal interaction in the classroom to ensure that all students feel comfortable speaking up.

When considering inclusive assessment or evaluation design, Dr. Cooper recommends reading over the "default" materials provided in the textbook with a critical eye. "For example, if you are teaching a medical course and the medical textbook provides examples and default tests or questions, ask, "How are the questions worded? Are the 'real-world scenarios' provided actually scenarios that all of my students will have experience with personally, and equally able to benefit from using as an example?"

A comprehensive discussion on inclusive assessment design is warranted, and we encourage readers to do further reading on the topic of Inclusive Assessment Practices, on which excellent guides exist.

Continuous Iteration in an Anti-Racist Pedagogy

Finally, it is important to remember that even the best-intentioned instructors working to employ an anti-racist pedagogy in their classes **will** make mistakes.

Educators, just like students, have grown up within a society which has shaped their perspectives and biases. And educators who were raised here in America have been a part of a society which has been shaped at its core by racism; no one is immune to being influenced by this experience.

You will get some things wrong. You will be exposed to new information from your students that forces you to reevaluate your own perspectives and

curriculum. You may even put your "foot in your mouth" from time to time.

> "If I see that some students do not understand a topic, I will change my syllabus to give extra points and then assign alternate reading to help ensure all students understand. I am constantly adjusting my selected texts. Each class is different; each class has a personality, so we must always be comfortable with constantly adjusting ourselves to adapt to the class' needs," says Dr. Chew.

The most important thing is not avoiding mistakes, but learning from them. Anti-racism is not a fixed state; it is a practice and a process.

Conclusion

Education both exists within a society and plays a critical role in shaping it. As a result, education is one of the most powerful systems in our society.

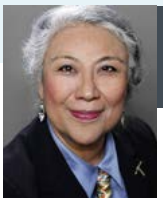
What we are exposed to shapes our worldviews. And in very real ways, our worldviews shape the world, through our perspectives, our words, and our actions. Because of this, educators have a unique responsibility to play an active role in helping students become aware of their role within larger societal and global systems, and to help students build the critical questioning skills and confidence necessary to create change in those systems.

What underpins an "anti-racist" teaching method—or critical pedagogy—is the desire to help students question and understand the systems and structures of power which exist in our society, both implicit and explicit, and actively critique and dismantle them to create a society that maximizes the happiness, success, and freedom of all of its citizens.

This guide focuses on implementing an anti-racist pedagogy specifically, but the philosophical underpinnings of anti-racism can be extended to apply to gender, ability, class, sexual orientation and identity, or religion. Kimberlé Crenshaw, professor and civil rights activist, coined the term Intersectionality in 1989 to describe the phenomenon that a single person may hold within themselves multiple, intersecting, and sometimes conflicting identities.

A student can, for example, be Black *and also* a woman, or be multiracial *and also* gay, or be a white male *and also* disabled. Our intersecting identities may carry with them different unique power dynamics in society, privileges, biases, stereotypes...which will influence our relative position of privilege and power depending on the circumstance and the identities of those around us.

"It is not only my gender, or race, it is also my accent, my experience, my class, my age, my culture, my religion, my sexuality. We should examine how race comes into play in conjunction with other social factors. Race is the door that will take us to a richer discussion of identity and society overall"



– Dr. Selfa Chew

Human beings are complex, interconnected, multi-faceted, and only able to be fully understood within the context of our communities and societies. Similarly, a critical pedagogy takes steps to unpack, understand, and change the complexities of how we shape society and how society shapes us. Like untangling a knot, the more we pull on one thread, the more we realize that everything is connected.

By engaging in critical reflections within our classrooms, we can create a generation of learners ready to answer the biggest questions of our time.

Resources

Foundational Anti-Racist Resources

Books and Articles:

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire
All Speech is Not Free, by Megan Bowler
White Fragility, by Robin DiAngelo
The Possessive Investment in Whiteness, by George Lipsitz
How to be Anti-Racist, by Ibram X. Kendi
The New Jim Crow, by Michelle Alexander
Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White by Frank Wu
The Making of Asian America: A History, by Erika Lee
Racism Without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America, by Eduardo Bonilla Silva
"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria" (article), by Beverly Tatum

Authors:

Works by Peggy Mcintosh
Works by Gloria Steinem
Works by Kimberlé Crenshaw
Works by bell hooks

Films:

Race, The Power of an Illusion
13th, by Ava Duvernay
Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin, by Nancy Kates and Bennett Singer

Downloadable versions of resources from this guide

Student Communication Guidelines for Anti-Racist Discussion

A downloadable version of the Student Communication Guidelines shared in this guide, which can be posted in your LMS, sent to students via email, or posted in physical classroom spaces.

Access Poster Version | **Access Plain Text Version**

Sample Anti-Racist Syllabus Statement

Sample syllabus statement for setting course expectations around Anti-Racism that can be copied and modified for use on your syllabus.

Access Plain Text Version

References

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Further Reading

This guide is an introductory resource for instructors preparing to engage in an anti-racist pedagogical approach in this classrooms. This is not a comprehensive resource and should not be taken as a ***complete*** set of recommendations for building an inclusive, anti-racist classroom. The authors recommend further reading on the subjects, including; inclusive assessment design, inclusive evaluations, equitable feedback approaches, cultural awareness, implicit bias awareness, and Mastery learning.

Special Thanks

To Dr. Houston, Dr. Chew, and Dr. Cooper; thank you. Thank you for sharing your time, experience, and trust with the Packback team on this project. I hope that we have done justice to your words and your vision for this guide, and that instructors across the country find that this guide helps give them the confidence to step into discomfort and to do what must be done.

A special thanks to Dr. Rufus Glasper for contributing the foreword for this piece. Your success is a monument to unbreakable vision and strength of will. We share your hope that the future holds a reality in which young Black students and other students of color succeed not in spite of a system that would try to hold them back, but rather because they are supported by a system that lifts them up.

To Jacqueline DeMeritt, thank you for your feedback, your time on calls, and your resources that helped inform our team. We are lucky to work with instructors who care about students and justice the way that you do.

For Questions, Support, and Feedback

If you find yourself with questions or in need of more personalized coaching or support as you navigate this work, please email the Packback team at **help@packback.co**. We will do our best to connect you with instructors in our network who are experts on these topics, or provide resources that we are aware of to help answer your question.

If you have feedback about how we can improve the usefulness, quality, or comprehensiveness of this guide, please share this feedback with our team. This is a living document and we hope to refine and update the resource continuously to ensure that it is as helpful and useful as possible. If you have ideas for how to improve this resource, please email Packback's co-founder Jessica Tenuta at **jessica@packback.co**.