

# **Combatting the Clumsy Conversation**

Timothy Valshtein, Department of Psychology

Erin Routon, Harvard College Writing Program

*Inclusive Teaching Institute Workshop Series*

*Harvard University*





# Overview

Icebreaker

Strategies and Approaches

Small Group Workshop

Share + Discuss

Approaches & Lessons From Our  
Classrooms

Conclusion



# Share Your 'Clumsy Conversations'

- ✓ Name, Department, Courses this term
- ✓ What difficult or challenging in-class discussions have you had in your classes?
  - + What are students (not) doing or feeling?
  - + What are they (not) walking away with?



***In attempting to tackle these difficult class conversations, what approaches, strategies, and tactics can we use?***



# **Lead Uncomfortable Class Discussions: All About Establishing Shared Norms**

- Consider the ways in which tactics can be deployed
  - + In Course Design
  - + Before Discussion
  - + During Discussion
  - + After Discussion
- Across all points of intervention, strive to emphasize the Four Cs in all tactics:
  - + 1) Curiosity
  - + 2) Candor
  - + 3) Courtesy
  - + 4) Courage



## **Lead Uncomfortable Class Discussions:**

## **Establishing Shared Norms IN COURSE DESIGN**

- Consider physical and/or ambient characteristics of learning environment
- Setting expectations via grading system and other course details
- Adopt a modularized approach to help students stay ‘plugged-in’
- Ensure materials are current and accessible
- Evaluate demographics of scholars by asking “who is missing?”
- Bring content experts to the classroom



# **Lead Uncomfortable Class Discussions: Establishing Shared Norms *BEFORE CLASS***

- Explicitly set clear expectations and guidelines
- Articulate the value sociocultural differences bring
- Acknowledge that it takes practice to have conversations
- Affirm willingness to participate and dive into controversy
- Recognize the importance and relevance of emotions
- Emphasize that discomfort indicates stakes, and thus value, in what the conversation is about



# **Lead Uncomfortable Class Discussions: Establishing Shared Norms *DURING CLASS***

- Use provocative conversation starters
- Emphasize awareness of what nonverbal cues communicate
- Recognition that new ideas can sometimes come out clumsily
- Reaffirm that others may be reluctant to share the same ideas
- Continue validating importance and relevance of emotions
- Focus on responses to controversial points
- Interrupt the discussion and let students consolidate their questions, knowledge, via quick writes and reflections





# **Lead Uncomfortable Class Discussions: Establishing Shared Norms *AFTER CLASS***

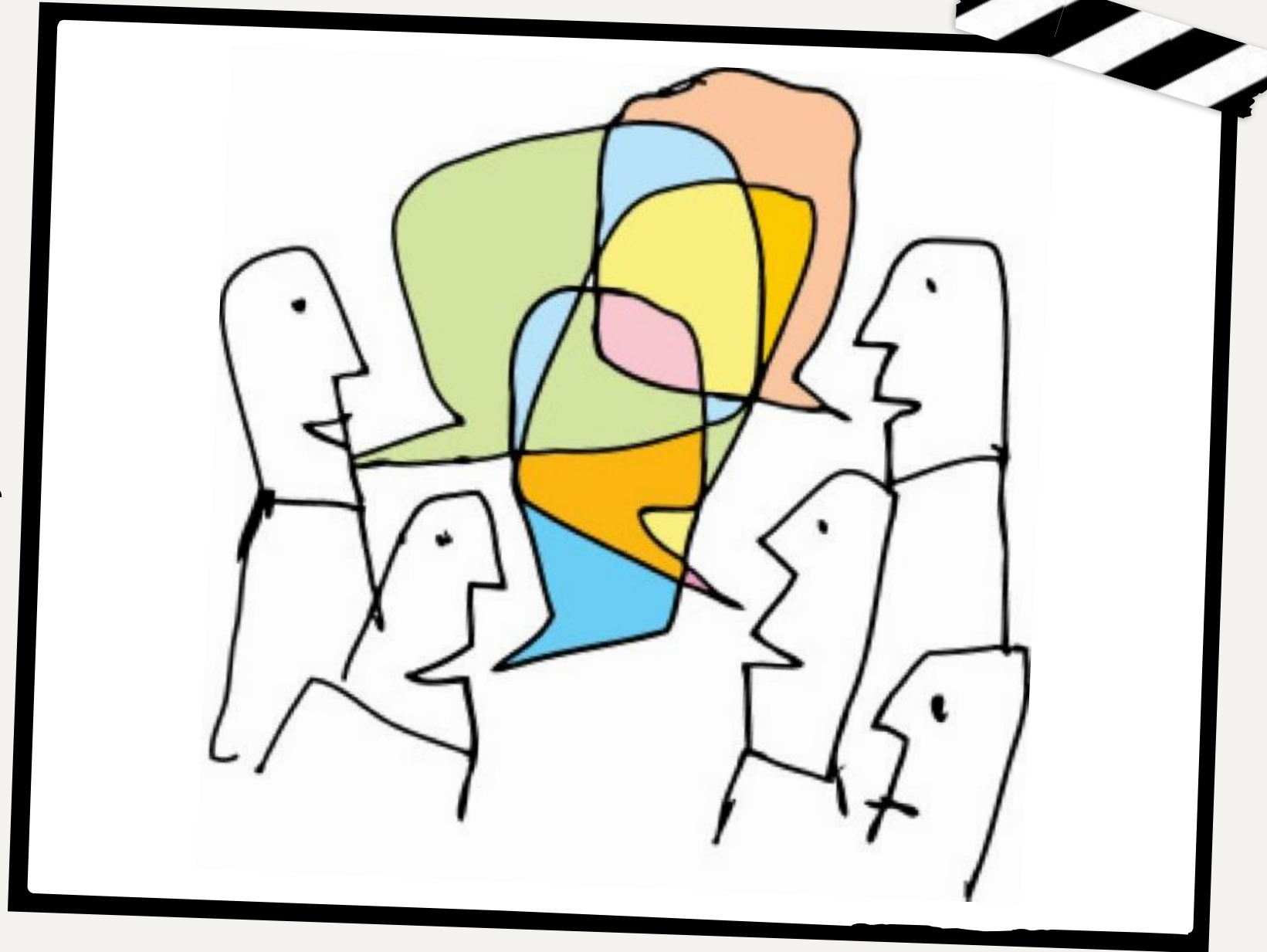
- Express Gratitude: Thank students for participation
- Conclude with summary and synthesis of discussion
- Encourage subsequent discussion outside of class



# Workshopping

## Scenarios

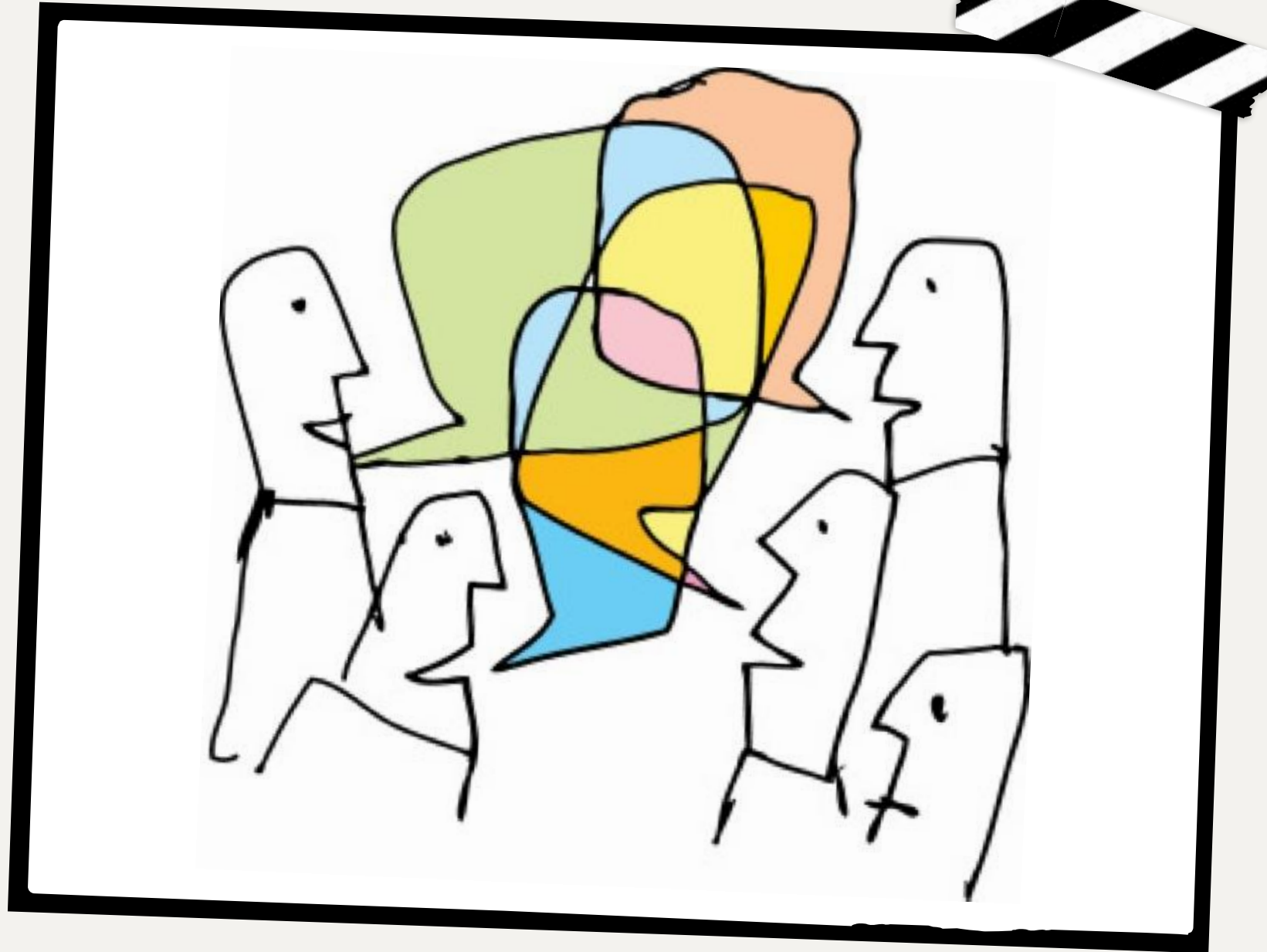
- ✓ 10 minutes for groups of 3-4 to troubleshoot a clumsy conversation
- ✓ Generate 2-3 strategies for how you would address the problems
- ✓ Offer an explanation for why and how you think each strategy will be effective



# Sharing

## Strategies

- ✓ Spend 10 minutes walk around see what other groups came up with
- ✓ As you stroll, consider the following:
  - + Do strategies work across different situations or do some only work for certain situations?
  - + Other themes or patterns?



**Strategies &**

**lessons from our**

**classes**

*discuss*





## **Erin's class: Who (or what perspective/s) is missing?**

- Acknowledging gaps and/or overrepresentation may not have considered in content
- Pose questions to students at end of class discussion
  - + *What perspectives or voices do you feel are missing from the course content throughout the semester?*
  - + *What perspectives are important to bring into this discussion in order to fully understand the issues that are maybe not represented well or well enough in the materials?*
  - + *Do you feel there is an overrepresentation of a certain perspective or view on these issues?*
- Asked students to take until next class (1 week) to consider/reflect
- Start class with question, opening discussion





## ***Erin's class: Who (or what perspective/s) is missing?***

- Clarifications:
  - + Completely voluntary
  - + Acknowledged the meaningfulness of feedback on the content selected for my courses, personally important
  - + Offered option to email privately
  - + Desired honest feedback because of commitment to being a better educator





## **Erin's class: Who (or what perspective/s) is missing? Results**

- 'Warming up' needed
- Wide variety of suggestions, but focus fixed more on diversity of materials (rather than perspectives)
- Nonetheless, some useful perspective suggestions





## **Erin's class: Who (or what perspective/s) is missing? Lessons**

- Care in phrasing important for reaching specific desired response (my own clumsiness!)
- Yet, response still informative (and useful for diversity/inclusivity goals), so appreciate that
- Measurable comfort in sharing constructive, yet critical, feedback, not only with what but how communicated



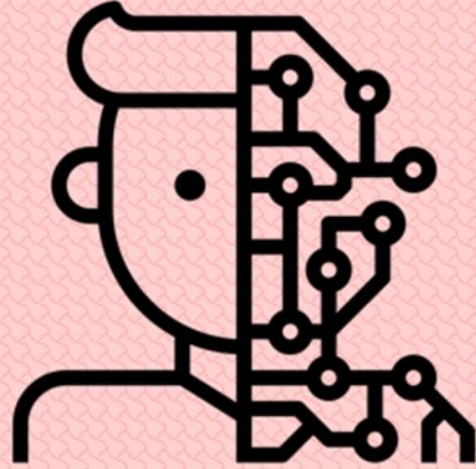




## **Tim's Class: The Problem**

- A Lack of “Zing” in the conversation
  - + Nothing fundamentally \*wrong\* with the current learning objectives, lesson plan, or activity
  - + Current setup:
    - Read three articles
    - Mini discussion activity
    - Group work + discussion articles
- Wanted to more effectively bring to life the relevant implications
- Do a better job connecting scientific work to students beliefs, intuitions, and values.





## Is it good to give up on our goals?

- Generate some positive and negative consequences of giving up on a goal
- Generate some “goals scenarios” on when a person should consider disengaging
- Share with your neighbor
- We’ll discuss as a group





## **Tim's Class: The Solution**

- Reduce the reading load to articles
- Intentionally establish expectations
- Spend more time situating the readings in students' intuitions
- Scaffolding & modeling what discussion looks like in this activity
- Diversify the tone: more humor, more sitting with discomfort, etc.
- Call back to student intuitions during more technical discussions
- Gratitude & Synthesis of discussion





# Understanding the limits of goal pursuit, drawing from personal experience

Challenge yourself to immerse in this activity deeply  
and the implications of it all will become clearer

motiversity



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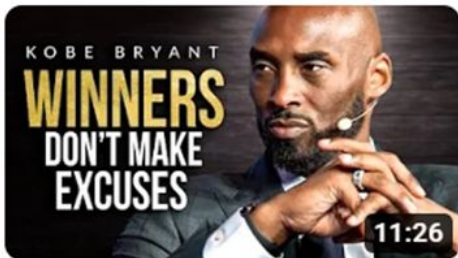
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# A Thought Experiment in Disengaging

## **4. What does life look like in the absence of this goal?**

- a. What is hardest to let go of with respect to this goal?
- b. What new doors might open if you gave up on this goal?
- c. What are the consequences of working on a goal you cannot achieve?

Describe your world in the aftermath of this goal:

- a.
- b.
- c.

Share some of these impressions



**Thanks for sharing!**

Being authentic and candid makes this activity meaningful!  
Other general thoughts, questions, reflections?

***Thank you!***

Timothy Valshtein (tjvalshtein@fas.harvard.edu)

Erin Routon (erinrouton@fas.harvard.edu)

**Consider deploying tactics:**

- + In Course Design
- + Before Discussion
- + During Discussion
- + After Discussion

**The Four Cs in all tactics:**

- + 1) Curiosity
- + 2) Candor
- + 3) Courtesy
- + 4) Courage

**Tailor to your unique classroom!**





# References

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