

problems than the expression was probably worth. In fact, in response to a negative *New York Times* review of his movie *The Avengers* in May 2012, actor Samuel L. Jackson castigated the writer in a tweet that was then met with harsh criticism across the country. Just because you may feel a certain way and can post it through social media does not necessarily mean you should. Additionally, we communicate more and more through e-mail, but that medium is not always used in a way that promotes civil correspondence between people. Make no mistake e-mail is an extraordinary tool for communication, but it is also rife with potential pitfalls. Table 11.3 shows some guidelines for e-mail use that will help ensure you use it to maximum effect while also remaining civil in the tone of what you write.

Table 11.3

Some Things to Consider When Writing an E-mail	
In General	
1. Use e-mail to request or provide succinct pieces of objective information 2. Avoid discussing sensitive issues through e-mail 3. Use e-mail to publicly praise, but not to blame employees 4. Use e-mail to share insights, not to instigate confrontation 5. Judiciously use blind copy function	
As Sender	
1. Give e-mail a clear and direct subject heading 2. Get to the point 3. Avoid hedgers and qualifiers as phrases 4. If asking a question, be sure to ask the question (don't issue evaluation) 5. Specify who should respond 6. Be clear about when you need a response 7. Provide relevant context 8. One message, one topic 9. Provide brief summary when sending an "FYI" or forward e-mail 10. Don't use sarcasm	
As Receiver	
1. Don't make assumptions about sender's emotional state 2. Don't escalate by sending an emotionally charged response (sleep on it; perhaps don't reply by e-mail) 3. Don't respond right away 4. Be careful quoting e-mails out of context in a reply	

shouting matches. Instead, ample time is afforded to participants to express their views, explain their data, and listen to counterarguments. This type of exchange, although ineffective at changing minds of those on the show, at least disseminates information for people in a way that does not encourage emotional outbursts. Alas, these shows are often broadcast at times when people generally do not watch television.

Civility and Social Media

More and more people today use social media to stay in touch with friends and family, conduct business, and promote themselves and their products. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are just a few of the social media tools employed to accomplish these tasks. Even though these resources do not allow for face-to-face communication, they do not reduce or eliminate the need for civil communication. Civility is more than just behaving well to others when they are in front of you; it is a lifestyle where we always genuinely think about how what we say and do can affect other people.



To this end, it is instructive to think before posting status updates to Facebook, issuing a tweet about how you feel regarding an event or issue, or even uploading your resume to LinkedIn. Remember that you need not share everything on Facebook, and that what you choose to share is now on the Internet. The Internet is like plastic—it never goes away—so you should make sure that what you post will be acceptable later as well as now. Take care when issuing comments to others as well, and even if you disagree, do so with respect and make sure it's the position and not the person with which you disagree. There are people who have lost their jobs over what they posted to Facebook, after all.



Bill Maher
(left) comedian

Tim Tebow
(right) football player

Twitter presents just as many issues for expression and it is, like Facebook, a place where self-restraint could come in handy. In late 2011, comedian Bill Maher issued a tweet mocking the religious beliefs of then-Denver Broncos quarterback, Tim Tebow. Others have issued similarly scathing tweets that have caused more

at a meeting. Business relationships occur between two or more people, and the emphasis should be on the fact they are people first. People are very quick to change providers or go with a different company if they feel they are treated as numbers instead of valued clients.

In an increasingly global environment, successful business relationships also require that people learn and value the cultural background of all parties. This means adhering to cultural expectations of host countries, but also understanding how other people operate. In some Asian cultures, for example, direct discussion of business only comes after a lengthy socializing process so all involved get to know each other. In fact, people often make business deals with others with whom they feel the most comfortable, not necessarily those who submit the best offer. It is important to know that up-front blunt communication may not always be the best route to go.

When negotiating for a new position, there are also certain behaviors to keep in mind. First, do not mention or discuss salary until an offer has been made or the company brings it up. Additionally, begin all interactions with greetings and conclude them with gratitude. Finally, be prepared with questions when you interview, as this reciprocity is expected. There are multiple other elements to successful interviewing, and other courses will provide you with that type of instruction, but for the purposes of our discussion here just know civility can go a long way in the interviewing process.

Civility in News Media

Unfortunately, today we need look no further than the news media and talk radio for examples of incivility and disrespectful communication. In spring 2012 talk show host Rush Limbaugh called a female Georgetown law student a "whore" for testimony she issued to Congress regarding the cost of contraception for women. In April 2007, morning talk show host Don Imus referred to the Rutgers University



Rutgers University
women's basketball team

women's basketball team as "nappy headed hoes." Finally, just look at all of the news programs and talk shows that pit members of opposite sides of an argument against each other. These shows devolve quickly into, at best, a recitation of talking points, or, at worst, a shouting match. In both instances nothing of substance is ever truly discussed, and emotions overshadow content.

These are the models of civility people are exposed to every day. As we have discussed, civility demands that we assert our own ideas, and these shows definitely allow for this to take place; however, it also calls for respect and understanding, which many of these shows do not demonstrate for the public. If these programs are an example of civil society, then civility is most definitely on the wane today.

That said, there are examples of dialogue and civility in the news media. Sunday morning talk shows often bring in diverse viewpoints and rarely culminate in

Simple behaviors like this by both instructors and students will create an environment in the classroom more conducive to learning.

Civility in Relationships



As we briefly covered earlier, you maintain multiple relationships in your life. These include those with friends, family, co-workers, and even the barista at your local Starbucks. Each of these relationships is an opportunity to connect with a larger, more robust community and a chance to learn about different people, cultures, and experiences. The trouble is that we all know how difficult these relationships are to maintain and develop over time, especially when we have disagreements with members of each group. That said, practicing civility can help enhance these relationships in every situation.

At home, you naturally behave with respect toward your parents, brothers, sisters, and significant others, but conflicts often do arise. With your friends you also practice a degree of civility, but sometimes you may say something to which they might take offense. It is ironic, but people generally are accepting of genuine apologies, but these apologies are also simultaneously the hardest thing for us to issue. We do not like admitting when we are wrong, and even when we do admit it we often qualify the apology with some explanation. If you are going to apologize, do so earnestly and without a qualification. This civil practice can go a long way toward maintaining healthy relationships with those closest to you.

Civility, however, also extends to those you encounter elsewhere but with whom you may not be close. Salespeople, hotel front desk agents, and even the person who makes your morning coffee all deserve the same type of respect and civility you accord to family and friends. Sometimes, simply having a brief conversation in which you ask about their day or just say "good morning" can go a long way toward improving their life in that moment. It is also important to recognize that people in these roles have lives you do not know, and they are people too. So, if someone in one of these roles says something or behaves in a way that frustrates or upsets you, concentrate your disapproval on the behavior or statement and not the person. If you do this, you will more likely come to a quicker and more acceptable resolution, while not unnecessarily upsetting or ruining someone else's day. This is an example of being able to disagree without being disagreeable.

Civility in Business

To conduct business effectively requires civil conduct by people in various positions. These behaviors can be as simple as respecting the time of others by not being late to scheduled meetings, or calling well in advance to reschedule them if necessary. It also includes things like knocking before entering offices, not taking calls in the middle of meetings, and learning the names of those present

There are other differences in how men and women construct messages that are worth noting. Women tend to ask more questions in a conversation and more openly discuss emotions than men. Men in turn tend to use more self-references and judgmental adjectives when describing things to others. To be civil you must understand these gender distinctions in behaviors so that you do not get frustrated by expecting others to conform to your way of interacting.

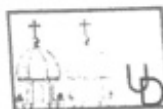
Now that we have covered some of the basic dimensions of interpersonal interactions and cultural influences on how people relate to one another, let's examine some contemporary environments where we can use this information to enhance civility in our own communities.

Contemporary Contexts for Civility

In this section of the chapter we will briefly discuss five settings in which we can apply civil communication to improve understanding and general wellness in our social relationships. We begin with those in your own immediate context: the classroom. We then will discuss how civility can operate and improve our interpersonal relationships with friends and significant others. Third, we will look at the professional world which you will enter in just a few short years. Next, we will examine the general lack of civility in news media, before we conclude with a discussion of civility in social media.

Civility in the Classroom and on Campus

Learning for every student in a classroom depends upon a civil atmosphere, and the responsibility for creating this falls on both instructors and students. In fact, every student at UD has seen and recited the pledge in UD's Commitment to Community (see Table 11.2). This document represents a collective promise to engage in behaviors that create a civil, responsible, and connected community at UD. That promise manifests itself in dormitories, the Student Neighborhood, and even the classroom. Additionally, both the faculty and students have responsibilities to uphold this commitment. On the one hand, instructors should allow students to express their questions, comments, and thoughts about course content without fear of reprimand or mockery. They also should listen when students have questions regarding grades or requests for accommodations. Finally, instructors should welcome student visits during office hours to discuss course material and academic progress.



Students also bear a significant portion of the burden for creating a civil classroom climate. Students should not argue with instructors for the sake of arguing, nor equate instructor experience and knowledge with opinion. Students should also begin e-mails and visits to the office with cordial introductions and conclude them with a genuine note of gratitude. They also should treat each other with respect and listen to peers when they offer questions and commentary and rather than judge them for their ideas, engage them to understand the thinking behind the statements their peers make. Finally, students should follow course rules and policies as outlined in the syllabus, particularly those regarding laptop and cell phone use. Being on the Internet or texting a friend during class is very rude to the instructor and your fellow classmates.

cultures where there is an uneven distribution of power and one person or a specific group of people dominate. These cultures often are reflective of monarchies and dictatorships. Interestingly, if you think back to the origins of the term "courtesy" from earlier in the chapter, you will see it has its roots in the latter of these two types, which is yet another reason it is not synonymous with our definition of civility.

Power influences our communication with each other in many ways, and we can often "feel" its presence. Some people, like bosses, have power based on their positions; others have power thanks to their knowledge about certain things. Some jobs come with the power to reward or punish others as well. The fundamental thing to take away from all this, however, is that power is not static; rather it is fluid. One person wields power in one area of his or her life, but not others. If we think about that for a moment, we realize then that being civil in all situations and not abusing power when we do have it can increase our ability to create a culture of civility.

Gender Gaps

gender

.....
the socially constructed expectations and roles that accompany a particular sex, and these vary between cultures

sex

.....
a biological distinction between men and women

In addition to culture and power, gender also plays a role in our interactions. It is also important to note that gender and sex are two different things. *Gender* refers to the socially constructed expectations and roles that accompany a particular sex, which vary between cultures. *Sex*, on the other hand, is a biological distinction between men and women. In fact, men and women communicate in significantly different ways. In order to be civil and respect others, then, it is important that you understand the differences between the genders and how they approach communication. In short, you should not expect everyone to communicate the way you do, and appreciating that fact can lead to more civil relationships with those around us. Let's take a moment and briefly discuss some of these differences.

One of the key differences between how men and women communicate involves what role they attribute to communication in relationships. Women tend to view communication as the primary vehicle for expressions of intimacy and the maintenance of close bonds between partners. Men, on the other hand, view communication more as a tool used to accomplish tasks and complete projects. In short, women use communication to express feelings; men use it to accomplish tasks.

This difference can often lead to problems in relationships, for when men listen to women express feelings and discuss problems and challenges they respond by offering solutions. On the surface this can seem like a supportive gesture, but it is not always what women wish from the interaction. In these situations, men should listen carefully before jumping to the conclusion that there is a problem to be solved, so they can understand what their conversational partner wants from the interaction. This does cut both ways, though, in that women, or men who exhibit this behavior, should appreciate the fact that when men offer solutions it's a way of expressing support. Here we see the importance of listening attentively in an effort to have a more civil interaction.

Not every culture, country, or society holds the same values as do Americans. In fact, not all Americans hold the same values to the same degree. If we were to conceptualize measuring cultural values, we would recommend thinking about it as a linear continuum. On one end of the continuum are collectivistic societies, and the other individualistic. Any culture can be placed at some point along that continuum. In this section we will examine what each of those categories means and how they might affect our ability to be civil.

A **collectivistic culture** is one that values harmony in group and societal relationships. Collectivistic cultures tend to have very strong family units, strong ties within their communities and high levels of loyalty to employers. These cultures also do not value conflict and direct communication the way most Americans do. In fact, they handle conflict in a much more indirect fashion, because it helps maintain social harmony. On the other hand, in **individualistic cultures** people feel the strongest loyalties lie with themselves and not their social groups. It should come as no surprise that the United States today falls much closer to individualistic than collectivistic on this scale.

collectivistic culture

.....
values harmony in group and societal relationships

individualistic culture

.....
people feel the strongest loyalties lie with themselves and not their social groups

This has not always been the case, however. Given our definition of civility, a healthy society depends upon a balance between collectivistic and individualistic values. In the mid-twentieth century some of the most popular groups were the Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus, and other such social and service clubs. Additionally, communities worked together to maintain their neighborhoods and raise families, and often went bowling together. Today, in places like Las Vegas, homes are built with large stone walls blocking homes from neighbors, and, more significantly, as author Robert Putnam notes in his book *Bowling Alone*, membership in social groups has drastically dropped off from just a few decades ago. People today just do not interact with each other the way they used to, and this lack of connection contributes to both an exaggerated individualistic society and a culture where civility is less prevalent than in prior times.

Power Distance

No matter how hard we may try, there is always a power dynamic in any relationship. Just think of some of the clichés bandied about in the world today, like "the customer is always right." Power exists in any relationship, and it can and does affect our ability to be civil with each other. Sometimes we speak respectfully because of someone's title or ability to reward or punish us, but this is not, by our definition, civil. Rather, it is being polite or courteous based on the other person's power or position, not because of the respect he or she should be accorded as a human being.

low power-distance cultures

.....
members value equality and believe no one person should dominate

high power-distance cultures

.....
where there is an uneven distribution of power and one person or a specific group of people dominate

Power, much like culture, can be thought of on a linear scale based upon how a particular group or society understands it. On the one end of this scale are **low power-distance cultures** where members value equality and believe no one person or group should dominate. These groups are indicative of democracies like the United States. On the other end of the spectrum are **high power-distance**

person's argument it does not mean you do not like or appreciate that person. The position is not the person.

Agreement and disagreement are not "all or nothing" propositions. In fact, things are always more complicated than they appear and we must be able to articulate that complexity when we explain how we agree and disagree with someone. By detailing both agreement and disagreement we can preserve aspects of the person's argument without seeming to devalue everything he or she had to say. This respects other people's willingness to express themselves while also explaining yourself appropriately as well.

Now that we have established the basics of civility, we will explore how it has functioned in human history. The idea of respect for other people and ourselves is nothing new, and has played a role throughout human history. In the next part of this chapter we will briefly explore the practice of civility today.

Table 11.1

Behaviors for a Civil Interaction

1. Describe instead of evaluate
2. Focus on the problem, not controlling the outcome
3. Acknowledge the feelings of others
4. Be provisional instead of certain
5. Control your own facial expressions
6. Do not interrupt someone when they are speaking
7. Do not disparage others when they are not present
8. When disagreeing, describe the points with which you disagree and agree

CIVILITY TODAY

The fact of the matter is that civil behavior affects our quality of life in myriad settings, and all it takes is a small effort to take the feelings of others into consideration before acting or speaking. To be sure, every area of our lives is complicated, from the boardroom to the dining room table. But in today's technologically advanced world where we are all so closely and quickly connected, taking a moment to think before we speak and incorporating civility into our approach is more necessary than ever. In this part of the chapter we will discuss some foundational dimensions and variables of every interpersonal interaction, and then briefly explore how we can recognize these aspects of a situation and become more civil in our dealings with others.

Foundational Dimensions of Interpersonal Interactions

In every relationship, from the business world to the classroom to the home, multiple variables influence the way we interact with each other. All of these things are also aspects we must be attuned to in order to effectively incorporate civility into our approach to others. The first of these involves what we will broadly call cultural values, the second involves the power one wields, and the third relates to gender.

Listening

Earlier in this book we discussed listening and how it related to public speaking, but its importance is much broader than simply attending to messages in formal situations. To be civil we must listen to what the other party is saying, in effect giving them our undivided attention. We may believe we can multitask and pay attention to multiple things at once, but this is a myth. In his book *Brain Rules*, John Medina explains that it is actually physically impossible for our brains to focus on two things at once,¹⁰ making paying attention to more than one person impractical in addition to uncivil.

We owe it to others to give them our attention when we expect the same in return when we speak. The idea of listening transcends conversations and speaking situations, to include e-mails, text messages, and phone conversations. We all have had situations in which we tried to do something else while on the phone with a friend, but when we do that we are not truly listening. It would be much better to actually say we needed to do something else and arrange another time to talk, or to even have a shorter more focused conversation in which we actually listen to the other party. Genuine listening is the manifestation of respecting other people and being there with them.

Listening also entails the ability to come to an understanding of what the other person is saying. This may require asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing messages, or other forms of perception checking. Remember that making sure you understand the other person is a hallmark of genuine listening, and not a rude behavior. It does not mean, however, that you agree with the other person, just that you understand them. In fact, the third and final civil behavior we will discuss in this section involves the ability to assert disagreement.

Disagree without Being Disagreeable

As we mentioned earlier, civility requires us to express ourselves and assert our positions. This does not limit itself to moments of agreement. We also must be able to express ourselves when we disagree. Unfortunately, people tend to view agreement and disagreement as the only two options available, when in fact they are not absolutes. More often than not we find ourselves wanting to agree with parts of a person's argument while disagreeing with other aspects of it.

To express such complicated positions in which we both agree and disagree with another person at the same time calls for specific and delicate skills. In order to do this, it is important to first stress areas of agreement with the other party. This establishes a more comfortable climate for the interaction and enables both parties to see the exchange in a positive and constructive light. When focusing on areas of agreement, be as detailed as you would be with those things with which you disagree. Then, after expressing agreement, detail those things with which you disagree and explain why. The explanation is important because it shows you listened to the other party, but have information of your own to offer to the discussion. In more tense situations it may also be necessary to conclude with a statement reinforcing that just because you disagree with all or parts of the other