

# Tips for Engaging People who Don't Agree with You

## #1. Example: “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!”

DON'T respond defensively to claims or positions.

*Inappropriate response: “That’s ridiculous! The creation story is a myth—scientific research shows the first human was a woman in Africa!”*

DO use humor and keep a light touch.

*Appropriate response: “Are you saying heterosexuals are responsible for the fall of humankind? I’ll try not to be bitter.”*

## #2. Example: “We just want freedom of Religion, you want to destroy America.”

DON'T fight with provocative loud-mouths. You risk alienating your audience.

*Inappropriate response: “And you’re an idiot! Stop wasting my time!” or “People like you are a threat to democracy and freedom!”*

DO appeal to moderate observers.

*Appropriate response: “Most people would agree that reasonable discussion among people with different views actually strengthens democracy.”*

## #3. Example: “This campus is overrun with liberal posturing and students who don't think for themselves.”

DON'T let someone else frame the debate or set parameters of the discussion.

*Inappropriate response: “Well, you’re just a megaphone for the Religious Right yourself!”*

DO speak positively and stay on track.

*Appropriate response: “I’m interested in talking about this issue [the war in Iraq, or reproductive rights] and how students can respond.”*

#### #4. Example: “That’s not hate speech. I just think everyone should be able to say what they like.”

DON’T demonize or insult anyone.

*Inappropriate response: “You are such a bigot to believe that!”*

DO differentiate leaders from followers and use language of respect.

*Appropriate response: “Many people who strongly oppose discrimination are being misled by critics of speech codes. I believe hate speech is harmful.”*

#### #5. Example: “Abortion is murder, pure and simple.”

DON’T allow speakers to monopolize moral turf.

*Inappropriate response: “That’s just stupid!”*

DO claim your own moral high ground.

*Appropriate response: “The same Bill of Rights that protects your right to that view also guarantees my own principled perspective.”*

#### #6. Example: “We need strong Homeland Security.”

DON’T globalize the issue or use frightening rhetoric.

*Inappropriate response: “The Feds are turning this country into a fascist regime.”*

DO speak specifically about the issue and its effects in tangible, measurable ways.

*Appropriate response: “Some aspects of the Patriot Act go too far and unjustly limit people’s rights.”*

#### #7. Example: “I’m not worried about our current use of energy sources.”

DON’T try to terrorize people into agreeing with you.

*Inappropriate response: “Well, if we don’t act quickly to find renewable resources, we’ll all be blown to bits in a nuclear accident!”*

DO live up a vision of unity.

*Appropriate response: “If we all give careful attention to energy issues and not get divided, we can solve one of the major problems in the world today.”*