

CONTENT WARNINGS

BEST PRACTICES



What are They?

Although you can be sensitive to student requests to leave the classroom, remind them that they are still responsible for all course content.

Content warnings are an opportunity to evoke discussion and delve further into course subject matter and the context of a work to be studied. They can ease the conversation about historical inequality based on class, race, gender, sexuality, etc.

A content warning is a cautionary statement, spoken or printed, that alerts students to the delicate nature of the material about to be seen, read or discussed in class.

Content warnings are not an excuse for students to skip class or censor your material.

CONTENT THAT MAY NEED A WARNING

- Graphic/Explicit Violence, especially towards women and people of color, and violence toward animals
- Self Harm & Suicide (Including suicidal thoughts)
- Graphic / Violent Death, especially mass death and genocide
- Hate Speech & Extreme Bigoted Sentiments, including black / brown /yellowface and racial caricatures
- Rape, Sexual Assault, & Harassment
- Abuse, Slurs
- Graphic Bodily Fluids, especially blood & vomit



What Can I Do?

CONSIDER SHIFTING CULTURAL NARRATIVES

For example, Bernardo Bertolucci's film, *Last Tango in Paris*, might be hailed as a cinematic masterpiece, but it portrays sexual violence that students might view with alarm. Pointing this out as a brief note at the start of the discussion could be useful.

INVOLVE THE STUDENTS

Encourage students to give content warnings to the class before they present materials with difficult subject matter. Examples include studio work that deals with traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse or rape or written materials that talk about issues such as racism or uses explicit language. In addition, let your students come forward about content they feel warrants a warning.

MODEL A CULTURE OF CARE

Content Warnings can support student learning. Giving students a heads-up can be seen as an understanding of their needs and a willingness to work with the 21st century mindset.

REASSESS YOUR CURRICULUM THROUGH A LENS OF JUSTICE AND EQUITY

For example, when showing Edouard Manet's painting, *Olympia* (1863), consider that narratives of enslavement may play out differently in the viewer's consciousness today, as opposed to a decade or two ago. Pointing this out as a brief note at the start of the discussion could be useful.

CREATE A SPACE FOR OPEN DIALOGUE

For example, the following note opens up the conversation and helps keep channels of communication flowing between you and your students: *If at any point in the semester you feel uncomfortable because of specific topic covered in this class, please set up an appointment to meet with me individually. It is important that all members of our community contribute to a safe and positive learning atmosphere.*



How Do I Make One?

ON A LESSON HANDOUT

Drop a quick warning on that day's lesson plan, if you realize that the material shared might be troubling to some students.

ON THE SYLLABUS

If you know ahead of time that your course will be covering sensitive materials consider putting a short content warning (1-3 sentences) in your syllabus to make students aware at the beginning of the semester. This can be done your printed syllabus as well as on Gmail, Canvas, Google Drive, or any other digital space you use to manage your classroom.

AS A VERBAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Make a verbal note of the sensitive content before a reading, discussion or critique. Verbal warnings go hand in hand with printed ones.

RESOURCES

For more info, see the *Content Warnings Research Folder*. It contains various articles, as well as the Student Voice Association's (SVA) presentation on Content Warnings.

EXAMPLES OF CONTENT WARNINGS

- ▶ Today's lecture contains material that might be difficult to discuss.
- ▶ Content warning: the work of this designer overtly deal with sexual violence.
- ▶ The film we are about to watch explores the theme of suicide, which some students may find distressing.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS? Contact the co-chairs of the Faculty Committee on Student Affairs: LaToya Hobbs, lhobbs@mica.edu ; Eva Wylie, ewylie@mica.edu