

A FEMINIST GUIDE TO GRADUATE STUDIES (AND BEYOND)



The term “feminist” here does not depend on your definition of gender: whether you think gender is fixed or fluid, biological or socially constructed. Practicing a feminist mode of intellectual engagement in graduate seminars means creating a respectful environment in which collaborative work and equitable exchange lead to shared learning.

Feminist praxis in graduate seminars follows from careful self-reflection. Pause to ask yourself questions about your expectations and behavior:

- Do I allow space for others to contribute? Do I recognize that others might require more time to enter a conversation than I do? Do I push myself to contribute to discussions even when I'd rather remain quiet?
- Are my tone and body language conducive to respectful and productive exchanges? Do I tend to assert myself more forcefully around certain people? Do I apologize or self-efface unnecessarily?
- Do I approach texts and discussions with an open mind—not to demonstrate my knowledge or intelligence but to learn from the text and conversation?
- Do I accord the same amount of authority and respect to faculty regardless of their gender, sexuality, age, ability, race, and rank? To writers regardless? To classmates?
- Do I address (in person and email) my peers and faculty with the same respect, regardless of gender, sexuality, age, ability, race, and rank?
- Of whom do I ask affective labor? When I want to share personal concerns or need emotional guidance and reassurance, am I thoughtful about who I approach, when I do so, and how I ask for such help? Am I mindful that affective labor is labor?
- Do I accept that I will make mistakes? Do I accept that my peers will make mistakes? For learning to happen, we must accept and forgive mistakes. Despite our best intentions, we sometimes misspeak, misjudge, and offend. We should not allow a fear of such actions to inhibit us excessively. Think of mistakes as learning opportunities and respond to others' errors as you would like them to respond to yours. Call in, not out. Remember that in this community of scholars, we are partaking in a shared and collaborative effort: we're in this together!