

The Integrity Gap

When Good Intentions Undermine Truth

Constructive Discussion Guidelines

How to hold a careful conversation about memes, misinformation, and political identity

The Integrity Gap can generate strong reactions because it asks readers to examine not only “the other side’s” misinformation, but also the content they are most tempted to accept and share. These guidelines are designed to help groups keep that discussion rigorous, fair, and constructive.

Purpose

The goal is not to prove which side is worse. The goal is to practice better standards of evidence, context, proportion, and restraint.

Suggested Group Norms

1. Apply the framework inward first. Begin with examples from content you might be inclined to agree with.
2. Separate the concern from the meme. A meme can point toward a real issue while still using weak evidence or misleading framing.
3. Avoid instant diagnosis. Before calling a meme false, manipulative, or accurate, identify the exact claim being made.
4. Distinguish emotion from evidence. Strong emotion may be understandable, but it should not substitute for verification.
5. Use proportional language. Ask whether the conclusion is stronger than the evidence supports.
6. Practice the Reverse Lens Test. Ask whether the same standard would feel acceptable if used by the other side.
7. Reward correction. If someone changes their mind or qualifies a claim, treat that as intellectual strength rather than weakness.
8. End with behavior. The most important question is not only what the meme means, but what a responsible reader should do with it.

Facilitator Language That Helps

When you need to...	Try saying...
To slow the conversation down	“What is the exact claim we are evaluating?”
To reduce defensiveness	“Can we separate the underlying concern from the way this meme presents it?”
To check proportion	“Does the tone of the meme match the strength of the evidence?”
To apply the reverse lens	“Would we accept this same standard if it supported a

When you need to...	Try saying...
	conclusion we disliked?"
To move toward action	"Would we share this, share it with context, verify first, or withhold it?"

Ground Rules for Political Examples

- Use examples to examine mechanisms, not to attack participants.
- Avoid turning every example into a debate over the entire political issue.
- Permit disagreement about interpretation, but require evidence for factual claims.
- When a claim cannot be resolved during the meeting, mark it for later verification rather than forcing a premature conclusion.

Closing reminder

A good discussion should leave readers with better habits, not merely stronger opinions.