



Ouch/Oops

How to Address Offensive Comments or Actions in Real Time

Participating in theater allows actors to experiment, explore, and challenge. Acting is physical and can involve what is considered, in “normal” environments, violations of personal space. Writing involves open, free-form brainstorming and an exploration of every possibility. Interpreting any work of art will necessarily include a consideration of a variety of perspectives and experimentation with different approaches.

Participants should have insight as to their own levels of sensitivity and independently determine whether a particular project is likely to cause more discomfort than may be tolerable. In projects that intend to challenge limits, push boundaries, and include explicit language and content, transparency is key from the outset. However, all potentially offensive content cannot possibly be disclosed in advance or avoided in the spontaneous and open environment that is improvisational theater or in collaborative writing rooms, for example. Participants should weigh the likelihood of encountering issues sensitive to them prior to deciding whether a particular medium is for them.

More often than not, participants have no intention of causing offense. The DIVA community is intentionally designed to bring together individuals of different generations, educational levels, socio-economic statuses, cultural experiences, abilities, and backgrounds. People bring differing levels of sensitivity to any environment. It is our goal to be respectful of everyone without suppressing anyone. While we may not achieve agreement, we will at least find mutual understanding, tolerance, and acceptance.

Therefore, we enter into the artistic process with full knowledge of the possibility that we may offend or be offended. We will endeavor not to hold on to offenses. We offer this method of addressing offensive comments or actions in real time.

If you observe a comment or action that offends you, simply call, “Ouch!” To acknowledge having made a potentially harmful comment or action, the actor simply responds, “Oops!” The room should then pause. It is then incumbent upon the ouch-caller to determine whether further discussion is warranted. If so, the ouch-caller should try to refrain from using a judgmental or accusatory tone. The oops-responder should try to refrain from defending their comment or action (there is no need to persuade the ouch-caller that they should not have been offended) but rather seek to find an understanding of how the comment or action gave offense.

It is not necessary to be the “target” of the potentially hurtful comment or action to call “ouch.” However, it is possible that the “target” did not consider the comment or action as one warranting an “ouch.” Additionally, it is neither uncommon nor prohibited to call “ouch” after the fact. The “ouch” should be expressed as soon as possible and practical but, in that instance, will require a brief and judgment-free explanation of the comment or action that caused the “ouch.” If necessary, the Concern Resolution Path should be followed.

The goal is not persuasion and victory but mutual understanding and acceptance. Everyone’s boundaries should be acknowledged and respected. No one should feel suppressed or silenced. DIVA seeks to promote an environment where it feels safe to speak up. We welcome any reminder to maintain a positive and respectful atmosphere.