

Guidance Manual

for Dealing with

Sensitive

Content

in Educational

Settings

Guidance Manual for Dealing with Sensitive Content in Educational Settings

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Preface

Between June 2022 and January 2024, we, the largely voluntary student work group “Dealing with Sensitive Content in Educational Settings”, worked closely with members of the university and university institutions at Ruhr University Bochum on how to consciously deal with sensitive and potentially distressing content in university education.

During the course of the project, many conversations with students, lecturers, and people working in counselling reinforced our impression that university education needs to be more aware of sensitive and potentially distressing content: Universities are places where people with different positions of affectedness, diverse backgrounds of experience, and lived realities come together. According to the RUB's *Mission Statement for Teaching*: “Here you meet many people and encounter diversity” ([Ruhr-Universität Bochum 2017, translated from German](#)). Such a diverse university community is characterised by a variety of topics that can be perceived as sensitive and potentially distressing. Therefore, speaking about and researching these topics comes with particular challenges.

With that said, we view this guidance manual as an offer of information for lecturers and students at Ruhr University – and of course all other interested parties. Our guidance manual is intended to help navigate dealing consciously with sensitive content in education and to encourage all readers to develop an informed and self-reliant approach to dealing with these topics.

There can be various answers to the question of how to consciously deal with sensitive content in university education. In this guidance manual, we focus on the concept of content notes. We view content notes, i.e. the written or verbal announcement of sensitive content in advance, as a helpful and easy-to-implement measure to foster a self-determined approach to dealing with sensitive content. Labelling sensitive and potentially distressing content can help ensure transparency in advance. Furthermore, content notes enable participants to deal with such topics in a self-sufficient and informed manner. The aim is to minimise or avoid being overwhelmed by sensitive content.

The usefulness and usage of content notes have long been the subject of controversial discussions. We want to clearly distance ourselves from the idea that content notes serve as a means of censorship. One of the work group's basic convictions is that the academic discussion of sensitive and potentially distressing topics is fundamental to academic practice in every respect. More precisely, we believe that content notes help to make discussing and researching potentially sensitive and distressing topics more self-determined, accessible, and productive. They help provide access for everyone interested in such important discourses and academic debates, all in accordance with the Ruhr University's Anti-Discrimination Directive.

We hope that the guidance manual we have developed can contribute to the important discussion about sensitive content in university education and wish you a good read!

What are Content Notes?

In the university context, “content notes” (CN), “content warnings” (CW), or “trigger warnings” (TW) refer to written or verbal announcements of sensitive and potentially distressing content in advance. These announcements serve to prepare lecturers and students for dealing with sensitive and potentially distressing content as well as enable them to deal with this content in an informed and self-determined manner. The primary aim of content notes is to avoid overwhelming individuals with sensitive content. Furthermore, content notes can help avert or at least minimise harm or re-traumatisation caused by sensitive content by preparing the participants. The use of content notes is intended to create a considerate teaching and learning environment. Although the terms mentioned above are often used synonymously, they are based on a different understanding of content and causes.

The Difference Between Content Notes and Trigger Warnings

The term “trigger” derives from the field of psychotraumatology and describes “certain stimuli that involuntarily trigger the memory of a past trauma and can thus cause flashbacks” (Brunner 2019, 23, translated from German). “Trigger” is therefore primarily used in the clinical sense in connection with symptoms of mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Triggers are individual, sometimes subtle, and not always predictable, even for those affected.

It is therefore criticised that trigger warnings are hardly able to identify and protect individuals against triggers. The inflationary use of the term outside of clinical contexts, which detaches it from its original meaning, is also criticised. Furthermore, the term “warning” implies potential harm and dangerous situations that supposedly need to be avoided and can trigger fears. Warnings make assessments of the content and the strategies to be adopted.

Content Notes: For More Inclusivity

This guidance manual uses the non-evaluative, descriptive term “content notes.” This is a comprehensive term for announcing content that can be perceived as sensitive and potentially distressing. In contrast to the concept of trigger warnings, content notes do not interpret the effect of the content and its cause but remain open to interpretation. The assessment of the content is therefore up to those involved. The recognition of the diverse lived realities of lecturers and students, who may perceive different content as sensitive or potentially distressing, is central to the concept of content notes.¹

¹ The state of studies on the topic of trigger warnings and content notes is ambiguous. In addition, despite their differences, the concepts of trigger warnings and content notes are often used synonymously. For further discussion of the research situation, please refer to the titles listed in the sources. This guidance manual is based in particular on the recommendations of a student study at Cambridge University. The study advocates for the use of content notes as they can be used by students and especially students with disabilities to prepare themselves for sensitive content, thus avoiding or minimising being overwhelmed and retraumatised by it (see [Carey; Lezo-McFarlane; Travis 2020](#)).

What are the Objectives of Content Notes?

Enabling a Self-determined Approach to Sensitive Topics

By announcing sensitive and potentially distressing content in advance, all participants are provided with the possibility to prepare for it in a self-determined way and develop individual strategies for dealing with such issues. Ideally, this announcement should minimise or avoid the unexpected overwhelming nature of materials and the associated harm or re-traumatisation. In cases of doubt, content notes can also enable participants to avoid a topic until they possess better coping strategies, resources, and support systems.²

Promoting a Critical and Diversity-conscious Approach to Educational Materials

Content notes offer lecturers and students the opportunity to evaluate the materials employed from different perspectives in advance, to reflect on the necessity of their use and the potential for harm caused by the content, as well as to prepare participants for critical discussions. The use of content notes in university education asserts the fact that sensitive and potentially distressing topics require conscious and considerate discussion.

Promoting Awareness for Sensitive Content

Content notes can help raise awareness of sensitive and potentially distressing content in the university context and destigmatise the approach to and handling of such content. Content notes are intended to make everyone involved aware of sensitive content and sensitise them to deal with it in a reflective manner. In addition, content notes can contribute to expanding one's own experiences by making the diverse lived realities at the university visible. Moreover, content notes can help to incorporate this diversity in university education.

Contributing to a Self-determined, Trusting, and Inclusive Teaching and Learning Environment

Content notes are an important tool for a self-determined, trusting, and inclusive teaching and learning environment. The focus here lies on recognising the different backgrounds and needs of a diverse university community. Content notes emphasise that these diverse needs are taken seriously and that the emotional well-being and mental health of everyone involved is central. Content notes can encourage individuals to externally communicate what they consider to be sensitive content, to set boundaries, and to acknowledge these as such. Content notes thus intend to help make university education less stigmatising and less discriminatory.

² The conscious decision to avoid dealing with sensitive content can have many legitimate reasons and be an important strategy for self-care in the absence of resources and support systems. At the same time, this can be in conflict with compulsory attendance in study regulations. This conflict cannot be resolved across the board. Therefore, in cases of doubt, a discussion should be held on how to deal with sensitive content in a self-determined manner and still comply with the study regulations. Other options include compensatory materials and assessments.

No Restrictions on Teaching, but Fair Access for All

Contrary to some assumptions, content notes are not aimed at restricting discussions about sensitive and potentially distressing content or preventing people from engaging with sensitive topics. Rather, the primary aim of content notes is to make dealing with sensitive and potentially distressing content more self-reliant for all those involved and to enable them to participate in university courses and discussions on an informed basis. Content notes have the potential to enable everyone to participate in educational settings in a more self-determined way and under fairer conditions, without their own lived realities becoming a disadvantage.

What are Limitations of Content Notes?

Even if this guidance manual sees content notes as a helpful tool for self-determined university education (including both teaching and studying) they are not an all-purpose tool for dealing with overwhelming, retraumatising, or discriminatory situations in university education. There are various reasons for this, including:

- Sensitive and potentially distressing content is highly individual and diverse. It is, therefore, impossible to fully guarantee that all sensitive and potentially distressing topics will be taken into account and that everyone involved will be aware of them. It is also possible that participants may only realise that a topic is sensitive for them once they are confronted with it.
- In university education, situations may arise in which a content note is issued too late despite awareness of the sensitive content or in which a content note can no longer be issued due to the spontaneous emergence of a sensitive topic.
- Content notes cannot eliminate power and discrimination structures and stigmas in society as a whole or within the university. For this reason, those negatively affected by these structures may have inhibitions or concerns about communicating their needs or content which may be sensitive for them in the university classroom. As a result, they may also struggle with asking for content notes or accepting offers to withdraw so as not to disclose that they are affected. The needs of those involved may also be in conflict with study regulations. It is not possible to create an educational space that is completely free of harm, even with content notes.

Discussion, Feedback, and Constructive Error Culture

Discussions and feedback opportunities are an essential part of consciously dealing with sensitive content in university education. These opportunities can be used to reflect on and discuss the opportunities and limitations of content notes as well as potential failures in dealing with sensitive content within the learning and teaching environment. A constructive error culture should be practised. This is based on the assumption that failures and mistakes are a normal part of human activity and a necessary prerequisite for learning processes. A culture of fear of mistakes and failures hinder these learning processes. In order to find constructive solutions for further collaboration and cooperation, discussions and feedback on possible failures should be conducted in a forward-looking and solution-oriented manner.

What Falls Under Sensitive and Potentially Distressing Content?

The following topics can be perceived as sensitive and potentially distressing. This compiled list does not claim to be complete, as sensitive and potentially distressing content can be very individual. The list attempts to summarise and cluster various contents that are related to each other in order to provide an orderly overview. The contents have been alphabetised to avoid hierarchisation. For a brief explanation of specific terms, please refer to the glossary.

Discrimination, Hatred, Violence, and Conflict(s)

- Discrimination and structural violence such as ableism, ageism, antifeminism, antisemitism, aporophobia (aversion and hostility towards poverty), bodyism, classism, fatphobia, aversion and hostility towards the homeless, misogyny, various forms of racism (anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Muslim racism, anti-Slavic racism, racism against refugees, racism against Sinti and Roma amongst others), sanism, sexism, transphobia, queerphobia and associated discriminatory language and images
- Violence such as abuse of and violence against animals, child abuse and violence against children, digital violence, gender-based violence, gun violence, hostage-taking and kidnapping, microaggressions, physical violence, psychological violence such as bullying or stalking, sexual violence
- Ideologies such as right-wing extremism, conspiracy ideologies

Global und Socio-Political Crises

- Collective violence such as genocide, military occupation, war, war crimes
- Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions
- Socio-political crises and upheavals such as attempted coups and coups, famine, protest movements, revolutions
- Terrorism, terrorist attacks
- The climate crisis in all its forms such as drought, floods, heat

Accidents, Body, Diseases, and Health

- Accidents such as home-related accidents, traffic accidents and related injuries, blood
- Dead bodies and death
- Drug use and drug abuse
- Epidemics and pandemics
- Mental illnesses such as addiction disorders, anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, psychoses, self-harming behaviour

- Physical illnesses such as acute illnesses (e.g. strokes, viral infections such as Covid-19), chronic illnesses (e.g. cancerous diseases, cardiovascular diseases, chronic lung diseases, diabetes, musculoskeletal diseases)
- Reproductive health such as abortion, birth violence, miscarriage, sterilisation, unfulfilled desire to have children
- Suicide and suicidal tendencies

How Can Content Notes be Structured in University Education?

Components of Content Notes

If contents are deemed sensitive, there are various options available. These range from providing transparent titles and descriptions for university courses or university contributions to the explicit announcement of sensitive content through content notes. Central to this is enabling self-determined and self-reliant engagement with potentially sensitive topics.

In principle, a content note should contain the following elements:

- The course type, course contribution, or course assessment that addresses certain content
- The sensitive content(s)
- The type of media through which the content is conveyed
- The time and place of the depiction or discussion of the sensitive content
- Contact persons or strategies for action in the event that participants are affected by the sensitive content

To ensure that content notes can fulfil their function of preparing participants for potentially distressing content, content notes should only be included if the content is actually being dealt with. When issuing the content note, an attempt should be made to be specific enough to make the sensitive content expectable, but at the same time not too explicit so as not to recount any potentially distressing content.

Course Types³

At Ruhr University Bochum, the following types of courses can be distinguished:

- Lecture
- Seminar
- Exercises
- Tutorials

³ These course types are specific to the German university system and may not be paralleled in other countries.

- Practical components such as conducting studies, excursions, group work, study groups

In these courses, students can provide various course assessments and examinations, including:

- Oral examinations
- Presentations within the course
- Project work
- Term papers

In addition to the number of participants, the course type also determines the level of communication between lecturers and students. This refers to whether communication about content is mainly digital, for example via eLearning platforms such as Moodle, or whether face-to-face communication during the course is possible.

(Academic) Material and Objects of Analysis

Content is presented and received differently depending on the type of media. One of the most common forms of media during a degree programme is the discussion of various texts. These include, amongst others:

- Academic literature such as anthologies, handbooks, and specialist journals as well as the essays and monographs contained therein; reference works such as dictionaries or specialist encyclopaedias
- Legal texts
- Literature such as dramas, epics (fairy tales, novels, short stories), poetry; non-fiction such as guidebooks, factual books
- Press such as flyers, magazines, newspapers, posters
- Online publications such as online journals, websites
- Written historical sources such as contracts, correspondence, historical speeches, personal testimonies, press
- Political texts such as election and party programmes, posters, speeches

Audiovisual, digital, and interactive media are also part of university education. These include, amongst others:

- Films such as documentaries, production shots, feature films
- Games such as computer games, console games, simulations
- Images and photographs
- Music such as concert recordings, songs
- Posts on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X/Twitter
- Series (both streaming and TV)

- Sound such as podcasts, radio broadcasts
- Videos such as music videos, news clips, video essays

What Types of Content Notes are there?

General Content Notes

When discussing or presenting the same sensitive and potentially distressing content regularly during a course or course contribution, one or more general content notes can be issued in advance for the entire course or contribution. This avoids having to provide the same content note for every session. At the same time, the centrality and repeated discussion of the topic for the entire course is clearly communicated from the beginning.

Examples:

We will deal with antisemitism in each session of this seminar. Antisemitism is featured explicitly in both the required and additional reading. Hereby antisemitic narratives, terms imposed by others, and imagery will be reproduced. There will be specific content notes for the individual sessions. Dealing with this content is essential for the entire course and relevant for the exam. If you feel overwhelmed by these topics, you can contact the counselling centres at Ruhr University. [Link to website]

The presentation in the fourth session examines hate comments against individuals read as female under videos on YouTube. Throughout the presentation, explicit sexist, fatphobic, and racist language as well as threats of sexual violence will be depicted and repeated through screenshots and quotes.

Precise Content Notes

Precise content notes are provided if particular texts, images, or audiovisual media and not the entire course or course contribution contain sensitive and potentially distressing content. Precise content notes can also indicate sensitive and potentially distressing content of notable explicitness. This means that these types of materials, contributions, or moments in time require specific content notes.

Examples:

Content Note: For the fifth session [title if applicable] of the seminar on [date if applicable] the required material discusses the topic of miscarriage. Pages 16 to 22 showcase the explicit description of a miscarriage. In addition, biologicistic and binary ideas of birthing individuals are reproduced.

In the next session, the second presenter will combine the theoretical basis of the input with the topics of mourning and death within the family environment. The seventh slide of the presentation, which has already been uploaded to Moodle, shows a video interview with a person affected by the death of a family member.

When and Where Can Content Notes be Issued?

Timing of the Content Note

Content notes should be made available with sufficient notice so that all participants can prepare for dealing with sensitive and potentially distressing material in advance and make a self-determined decision about how to deal with this content. This can be achieved through the course catalogue, the course schedule, or individual announcement emails. Nevertheless, there may be situations in which a content note can only be issued on short notice or last-minute.

Content Notes in the Course Catalogue and Course Schedule

Sensitive contents can already be included in the course catalogue and course schedule, for example in the form of a table column. Mixing general and precise content notes as required is possible here. The content notes can be listed as keywords and point to the used media or literature.

Course number	Course title and description	Lecturer	Content notes
123 456	The topic of the seminar is „Conspiracy Theories Regarding the Covid-19 Pandemic “. Together we will discuss which groups of people and which content were the targets of these conspiracies. We will also cover the key players and networks involved.	N. N.	Ableism, antisemitism, digital violence (baiting, hate speech), Covid-19 pandemic, queerphobia (session 3), racism, right-wing extremism

Content Notes via Email, Moodle, and Other Digital Learning Tools

Depending on the options for communication, lecturers and students can issue content notes before the course or course contribution via email, the eLearning platform Moodle, or other digital learning tools. When using Moodle, for example, the forum function can be useful to communicate content notes before the sessions. Content notes can also be included in the “Description“ field when uploading files to Moodle courses. The content note can then be found beneath the added document. The creation of a separate document is also possible, for example in the form of a pad. Such a pad can be accessed by all participants, enabling lecturers and students alike to issue and add content notes as well as obtain information about sensitive content if required.

Examples:

Dear students,

I would like to draw your attention to sessions three, seven, and ten, where we will deal with the topic of violence against animals very explicitly. We will be looking at both images and video footage of chickens on factory farms during the sessions. I will upload this material to Moodle three days before the respective session and label it with „CN: Factory farming“.

Dear all,

The topic of our presentation for the next session is going to be the use and abuse of alcohol. In this context, one person of our group will share their own experiences with a family member who is addicted to alcohol. While sharing, the topic of physical violence against children will be addressed. This will be the third and final part of our presentation, i.e. after about 15 minutes, and concern slides 12-14.

Dear students,

This document serves the purpose of cooperatively collecting content notes for all material used and contributions made during our seminar. Information regarding content notes can be found in the guidance manual „Dealing with Sensitive Content in Educational Settings“ [Link]. Content notes from my side can already be found in the document. Please feel free to add content notes should you encounter unannounced content that you consider sensitive or potentially distressing while preparing for the seminar. The same applies for your course contributions. We can gladly discuss this in the final 15 minutes of our first session in case you have the need to talk.

Content Notes During the Session or Course Contribution

Ideally, content notes are issued with enough time in advance so that participants can prepare themselves for dealing with sensitive content. However, situations in university education may arise in which unanticipated discussions about sensitive and potentially distressing topics occur during a session or in which a content note cannot be issued in time. Such situations limit the function of content notes.

Possible courses of action to minimise the overwhelming nature of these topics include:

1. Consider whether a content note can still be of help, e.g. if the same topic has already been discussed in another form. If so, then issue a last-minute content note, for example before explicit images, oral contributions, text excerpts, texts, or video/sound sequences.

We were just talking about anti-Muslim racism. I have had similar experiences and want to share my experiences with anti-Muslim racism in day-to-day life.

2. If a content note alone were too short notice, then, after issuing a last-minute content note or following an unexpected discussion of a sensitive topic, a break can be announced to allow everyone involved to prepare for the topic or leave the session unnoticed.⁴

In the next part of the session, we will explicitly discuss colonialism and anti-Black racism by working with a poem. Before we start, I suggest we take a 5-minute break. Those of you who do not feel up to discussing this topic today can use this break to leave the room/the session.

3. If participants are overwhelmed by content and both content notes and breaks are not possible, then offer a clarifying discussion during the session to help resolve the issues and/or refer those affected to support and advice centres.

In today's session material that reproduces ableist language was shared unannounced. This made several participants feel uncomfortable. I suggest we use the first 15 minutes of the next session to talk about how we can avoid such a situation from happening again. If you have the acute need to talk, please contact the university's support and advice centres. [Insert topic-specific advice centres here]

What are Supplementary Methods for Dealing with Sensitive Content in Teaching?

In addition to content notes, there are other ways to enable a more conscious approach when dealing with sensitive content in university education. At various stages of the preparation and implementation of teaching and the preparation of contributions, different measures can be taken to deal with sensitive content:

During Preparation of the Course/Session/Contribution

- Reflect on course materials, sessions, and (course) contributions in a diversity-conscious manner in order to identify sensitive and potentially distressing content as well as potential affectedness
- Reflect on the necessity and selection of explicit (visual, textual, etc.) representations for the understanding and discussion of the topic
- Find alternatives for particularly explicit representations, e.g. textual descriptions for images or subtitles for sound
- Formulate transparent course and course contribution descriptions that make sensitive and potentially distressing content predictable in advance
- Plan to deal with sensitive content outside of the course, for example by outsourcing the viewing of sensitive material to the preparation phase

⁴ Those affected may be reluctant to leave the session so as not to disclose their affectedness. Exiting the session may also be in conflict with study regulations. Leaving the session is, therefore, more of a theoretical option that cannot always be taken up and should ideally be avoided in advance.

At the Beginning of the Course/Session/Contribution

- Discuss ideas about how to work together, how to deal with sensitive content, and set common goals in the course
- Anonymously survey the participant's wishes regarding sensitive content in advance using digital tools, e.g. Moodle surveys, and then share the results anonymously with the course
- Refer to guidance manuals, information material, and advice centres at Ruhr University or post them on digital teaching platforms in order to initiate discussions about dealing with sensitive content outside the course context as well

During the Session/Contribution

- Offer discussions and reflection sessions on the impact of sensitive and potentially distressing content
- Schedule breaks to allow individuals to (informally) discuss the impact of sensitive and potentially distressing content, take a step back from the material, or leave the session unnoticed
- Create a place to withdraw to if the room and course situation allow it

At the End of the Course/Session/Contribution

- In relation to course assessments and examinations: Provide alternatives for particularly sensitive content such as texts/graphics/videos or, if this is not possible, communicate the relevance of the examination from the outset
- Schedule feedback meetings with anonymous elements, if possible, in which the handling of sensitive content in the course can also be reflected upon

Contact Persons and Advice Centres at RUB

If the unannounced dealing with and reproduction of sensitive, distressing, or even discriminatory content in a university context requires discussion or action, the following contact persons and advice centres at Ruhr University can be reached:

In the Event of Psychosocial Crises

[Psychological Student Counselling \(Psychologische Studienberatung\)](#)

[Nightline Bochum: Counselling for students in psychosocial crises in the evening](#),
Phone number: 0177 6761859

[Collection of RUB-external contact possibilities by the Psychological Student Counselling](#)

In the Event of Discriminatory Content

[RUB Anti-Discrimination Office \(Antidiskriminierungsstelle der RUB\)](#)

[Decentralised Diversity Officers \(Dezentrale Diversitätsbeauftragte\)](#)

[Equal Opportunity Office at RUB](#)

[Decentralised Equal Opportunity Officers](#)

Contact point for trans* and inter* persons: trans-inter@rub.de

[Autonomous Gay Student Division \(Autonomes Schwulenreferat\)](#)

[Autonomous Queer*feminist Student Division \(Autonomes Queer*feministisches Referat\)](#)

[Queer at Rub \(Queer an der RUB\)](#)

[Autonomous Foreigners Student Division \(Autonomes Ausländer*innenreferat\)](#)

[Representative for Disabled and Chronically Ill Students \(Beauftragte für die Belange Studierender mit Behinderung und chronischen Erkrankungen\)](#)

[Advice Centre for the Inclusion of Disabled People \(Beratungszentrum zur Inklusion Behinderter\)](#)

[Autonomous Student Division for Disabled Students \(Autonomes Referat für Menschen mit Behinderungen\)](#)

[Collection of RUB-external advice centres of the Anti-Discrimination Office](#)

Glossary

Ableism refers to **discrimination** against people with (ascribed) disabilities (see [IDA 2024](#)). This includes people with physical and/or mental disabilities, neurodivergent people, and chronically ill people. *Sanism* is a subcategory of ableism and refers to discrimination against people due to (ascribed) mental illness and neurodivergence such as autism, ADHD, interaction disorders, or learning difficulties (see [Minkov 2022](#)).

Ageism refers to **discrimination** against people on the basis of their (ascribed) age (see [IDA 2024](#)).

Antifeminism refers to attitudes as well as organised social, political, religious, and academic movements that oppose feminist concerns (see [Amadeu Antonio Stiftung 2023](#)).

Antisemitism refers to the stereotyping, vilification as well as aversion and hostility towards Jews, people who are perceived as Jewish or perceived Jewish communities and institutions. Antisemitic ideology constructs Jews as an influential and threatening community, regardless of the actual behaviour of Jewish people. This construction serves to justify the discrimination against as well as the devaluation, persecution, and extermination of Jews. Various forms of antisemitism are distinguished, including anti-Judaism, modern, Israel-related, and structural antisemitism (see [Vielfalt Mediathek 2024](#)).

Aversion and hostility towards the homeless refer to **discrimination** against people because of their (ascribed) homelessness (see [BPB 2023](#)).

Bodyism, also known as lookism, refers to **discrimination** against people who do not comply with prevailing beauty and body standards (see [IDA 2024](#)).

Classism refers to **discrimination** against people on the basis of a supposed (ascribed) lower social background, economic position, and level of education (see [Diversity Arts Culture 2024](#)).

Digital violence refers to forms of violence that are inflicted with the help of digital media and technical aids and/or take place in the digital space (see [Frauenhauskoordination 2024](#)).

Discrimination refers to the unjustified disadvantaging of persons or groups on the basis of one or more (ascribed) characteristics. Discrimination is based on social power structures and hierarchical relationships that support this disadvantaging. This is expressed in the form of prejudice, degradation, **microaggressions**, aversion and hostility, barriers, or hindered social and economic participation as well as violence. Discrimination manifests itself on an individual, social, political, economic, and legal level. A distinction is therefore made between individual (*interpersonal*: between people and *intrapersonal*: internalised by those affected), institutional, and structural discrimination (see [Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg 2023](#)). Multiple discrimination refers to discrimination based on different characteristics in different situations. Multidimensional or intersectional discrimination means that the characteristics have a specific and simultaneous effect and

cannot be considered separately from one another (see [Antidiskriminierungsstelle der RUB 2022](#)).

Fatphobia refers to **discrimination** against fat people and bodies (see [Benthin 2023](#)).

Gender-based violence refers to all forms of violence that are directed against a person because of their (ascribed) gender. Gender-based violence primarily affects women, individuals read as female, and queer people (see [Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte 2024](#)).

Genocide is a crime that has been established in international criminal law since 1948 and is characterised by the intention to destroy population groups and peoples completely or partially (see [GRA Stiftung gegen Antisemitismus und Rassismus 2024](#)).

Microaggressions refer to derogatory statements, whether straightforward or subtle, that are expressed towards people who are affected by **discrimination** (see [IDA 2024](#)).

Misogyny refers to the assumption of the inferiority of and hatred towards women and individuals read as female, femininity as well as activities, behaviours and more that have a female connotation (see [Queer Lexikon 2020](#)).

Racism is an ideology that constructs people as homogeneous groups based on (ascribed) physical or cultural characteristics (e.g. appearance, language, origin, religion) and establishes a hierarchy among these groups. This racist devaluation serves as an explanation for aversion and hostility, social, legal, and economic exclusion and **discrimination** against as well as for dehumanisation of and violence towards racialised groups (see [Mediendienst Integration 2022](#)). People affected by racism are often referred to as BIPoC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour). There are various forms of racism, such as:

- **Anti-Asian Racism** is a specific form of racism targeted at Asian people and people who are perceived as such (see [Mediendienst Integration 2021](#)).
- **Anti-Black Racism** is a specific form of racism targeted at Black people and people who are perceived as such (see [Vielfalt Mediathek 2024](#)).
- **Anti-Indigenous Racism** is a specific form of racism targeted at Indigenous people and people who are perceived as such (see [Government of Ontario 2023](#)).
- **Anti-Muslim Racism** is a specific form of racism against Muslims and people who are perceived as such. In addition to the term anti-Muslim racism, other terms are also used, including the term Islamophobia (see [IDA 2024](#)).
- **Anti-Slavic Racism** is a specific form of racism targeted at Eastern and Central Eastern Europeans and people who are perceived as such (see [IDA 2024](#)).

- **Racism against refugees** is a specific form of racism targeted at refugees and people who are perceived as such. It is associated with anti-migrant and anti-refugee rhetoric (see [Amadeu Antonio Stiftung 2022](#)).
- **Racism against Sinti and Roma** is a specific form of racism targeted at Sinti and Roma and people who are perceived as such. The term is subject to controversial debate (see [Vielfalt Mediathek 2024](#)).

Reproductive health refers to a state of unrestricted physical, mental, and social well-being in all areas of reproduction (see [Klein; Wapler 2019, 20](#)).

Sexism refers to the **discrimination** against individuals or groups on the basis of their (ascribed) gender as well as the idea of the superiority or inferiority of individual genders. Sexism primarily affects women, individuals read as female, and queer people (see [Diversity Arts Culture 2024](#)).

Sexual violence refers to violence that is expressed through sexual assaults and which violates the right to sexual self-determination of those affected. Sexual violence can take the form of verbal, psychological, and physical assaults (see [Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben 2024](#)).

Transphobia refers to **discrimination** against trans people and people who are perceived as such. Trans people are people whose gender does not coincide with the gender assigned to them at birth. Trans misogyny is a specific form of aversion and hostility against trans women (see [Queer Lexikon 2020](#)).

Queerphobia refers to **discrimination** against LGBTQIA+ people (lesbians, gay people, bisexual people, transgender people, queer people, intersex people, asexual people) and people who are perceived as queer (see [Queer Lexikon 2020](#)).

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About The Work Group

The work group "Dealing with Sensitive Content in Educational Settings" was founded in June 2022 after a situation during a university seminar in which participants were overwhelmed by material that was stressful for them and could not be avoided. Since then, the members of the work group have been tackling the question of how a self-determined teaching and learning environment can be created for all participants in university education with the help of content notes.

In October and November 2022, the work group organised three information and discussion events on the topic of content notes with the support of the Gender Studies Student Council, the Equal Opportunity Representatives of the Faculty of Social Science, and Queer at RUB, financially supported by the AStA of Ruhr University. Thanks to the successful application as a student initiative project, the work group, which until then had been working entirely on a voluntary basis, was supported by Ruhr University from April 2023 onwards in the creation of this guidance manual.

Since spring 2023, the work group has been particularly busy with literature research and evaluation, networking with university agents in the field of equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, and psychosocial counselling, as well as devising the manual. At the same time, the work group organised exchange and discussion events with RUB lecturers and students. Following the university-internal publication of the first draft of the guidance manual and the numerous feedback from lecturers, students, and university institutions involved in counselling, the work group devoted itself to incorporating this feedback and translating the manual into English in the second half of 2023. In addition, three individuals worked on paid sensitivity readings to enable as many perspectives as possible in the correction process. Through its public relations work, the work group kept interested parties up to date throughout the entire period as a student initiative project.