

Hot Button Moments

Responding to Conflict with Clarity and Care

Purpose: Hot button moments are emotionally charged or challenging situations that can disrupt learning if left unaddressed or they can deepen student engagement when skillfully navigated. This resource equips instructors to respond in the moment and foster constructive dialogue using the HOT Moments framework.

HOT Moments in the Classroom Framework

Adapted from [Disembroiling HOT Moments in the Classroom](#), By Rebecca Petitti, Amanda Irvin, and Soulaymane Kachani, Inside Higher Ed, 2024

Key: **Red** = definition | **Green** = strategy

1. **Heated:** A surge of strong emotions that calls for a mindful pause
 - a. **H** (Hold space): Pause to acknowledge strong emotions and create room for dialogue.
2. **Offensive** (Offensive): Hurtful language that disrupts inclusivity and demands clear boundaries
 - a. **O** (Observe and address dynamics): Notice both verbal and nonverbal cues and consider underlying issues and directly address this issue.
3. **Tense:** An undercurrent of unease hinting at unresolved issues needing gentle inquiry
 - a. **T** (Transform moments): Shift the energy from conflict to a learning opportunity by reframing the conversation.

Applying the HOT Moments Framework

1. **H (Hold Space):** How do you create an environment where emotions are acknowledged without derailing the conversation?
2. **O (Observe):** What cues (verbal or nonverbal) help you recognize when a conversation is heating up? How do you pause to address the situation?
3. **T (Transform):** Can you share a time when you successfully redirected a conflict into a learning moment? What strategies helped in that transformation?

Steps for Implementation

1. Prepare Your Class Culture

- a. Create a strong community early.
- b. Use class community agreements to ground behavior.
- c. Expect that hard conversations may arise and they can be productive.

2. Recognize the Type of Moment

- a. Ask yourself: Is this moment heated, offensive, or tense?
- b. Match your response using the HOT framework strategies.

3. Respond Using the Framework

- a. **H**old space: Pause and acknowledge emotion without escalating.
- b. **O**bserve and address: Respond clearly if harm or offense occurs.
- c. **T**ransform moments: Reframe tension into reflection and inquiry.

4. Debrief and Reflect

- a. Invite students to revisit the moment in a future class.
- b. Facilitate a group reflection or assign an individual reflection prompt.
- c. Use insights to inform future facilitation and class agreements.

Sample Roleplay Script to Demo a HOT Moment with Students

1. **Student 1:** Honestly, I don't get why low-income students struggle so much. If you work hard, you can succeed—simple as that.
2. **Student 2:** Yeah, easy for you to say when your parents hired tutors for you and you've never had to work a day in your life.
3. **Student 1:** Well, maybe if people didn't make bad life choices, they wouldn't be stuck in poverty.
4. **Student 2:** Wow, you really think you earned everything you have? You have no idea how the world works.

Instructor Planning Guide

1. Before Class

- a. Establish and revisit class norms regularly.
- b. Share your commitment to open, respectful discussion.
- c. Plan how you might respond to difficult dialogue.

2. During Class

- a. Be alert to emotional cues or shifts in tone.
- b. Use the HOT framework to guide your response.
- c. Normalize reflection and pause when needed.

3. After Class

- a. Reflect: What was said, who was affected, and what follow-up is needed?
- b. Consult colleagues or support staff if appropriate.
- c. Adjust future lesson planning if needed.

Instructor Checklist

- ☐ I've introduced and modeled discussion norms and reviewed the HOT framework.
- ☐ I paused and addressed emotional or tense moments.
- ☐ I created space for post-discussion reflection and followed up and documented the learning from the moment.

Resource: [Dialogue Across Differences](#) (Harvard University)