



Content & Trigger Warnings

The following content and linked sources are an introduction to understanding content and trigger warnings. This guide explains what content and trigger warnings are, why they are important to include for inclusive classrooms and learning environments, and how they can be implemented in practice. It is a recommendation to include content and trigger warnings when appropriate.

What are Content and Trigger Warnings?

CONTENT WARNINGS are verbal or written notices given before presenting or engaging in potentially sensitive content. These notices flag the contents of the material that follows, so folks can prepare themselves to adequately engage or, if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing.

TRIGGER WARNINGS are a specific variety of content warnings that attempt to forewarn audiences of content that *may* cause intense physiological and psychological symptoms for people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders triggered by stimuli that recall an individual's experience of trauma. Individuals do not have control over what triggers them, but many have personal strategies they use to cope with triggers when they must be encountered. Trigger warnings give people forewarning to allow them to make use of those strategies.

The following content and trigger warning tags are the most common. Consider what material covered in your courses, presentations, and/or discussions may include these and how you would like to flag them for students. Students may request additional tags, as this list is not exhaustive:

- Sexual assault
- Abuse
- Blood
- Child abuse/pedophilia/incest
- Animal cruelty or animal death
- Self-harm and suicide
- Eating disorders, body hatred, and/or fat phobia
- Violence
- Pornographic content
- Kidnapping/abduction
- Death or dying
- Pregnancy/childbirth
- Miscarriages and abortion
- Mental illness and ableism
- Racism and racial slurs
- Sexism and misogyny
- Classism
- Hateful language directed at religious groups (e.g., anti-Semitism)
- Transphobia and trans-misogyny
- Homophobia and heterosexism

How to Use Content and Trigger Warnings

In the context of the classroom or other learning environments, content and/or trigger warnings might be provided on a syllabus, spoken verbally in lectures, sent out as emails, or posted on a class or event website. They might include forewarnings of

challenging moments in texts they will read for class, material that will be covered in lecture, videos viewed in class, or topics that the facilitator expects will come up in discussion.

Best practices suggest noting content and/or trigger warnings in the syllabus (if applicable) coupled with a verbal announcement before the material is presented supports a safe, engaged, and inclusive learning environment.

Examples of Content and Trigger Warnings

If most of the material covered in the course or learning environment will include emotionally sensitive and potentially triggering content, consider using a blanket content and/or trigger warning as a part of the syllabus or description such as:

1. **CONTENT WARNING:** I acknowledge that each of you comes to RISD with your own unique life experiences that contribute to the way you perceive various types of information. All of the class content, including that which may be intellectually or emotionally challenging, has been intentionally curated to achieve the learning goals for this course. These topics include [list topics]. If you encounter a topic that is intellectually challenging for you, it can manifest in feelings of discomfort and upset. In response, I encourage you to come talk to me about it or connect with a mental health professional at [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#). Class topics are discussed for the sole purpose of expanding your intellectual engagement in the area of [subject/major], and I will support you throughout your learning in this course.
2. **TRIGGER WARNING:** The content and discussion in this course will necessarily engage with [topic(s)] every week. Much of it may be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. I will flag especially graphic or intense content that discusses or represents [topic(s)] and will do my best to make this classroom a space where we can engage bravely, empathetically, and thoughtfully with difficult content every week. Each time this topic appears in a reading or unit, it is marked on the syllabus. If you encounter a topic in this class that is triggering for you, I encourage you to take the necessary steps for your emotional safety. This may include leaving class while the topic is discussed or following up with a mental health professional at [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#). Should you choose to sit out on discussion of a certain topic, know that you are still responsible for the material; but we can discuss if there are other methods for accessing that material, and for assessing your learning on that material. Class topics are discussed for the sole purpose of expanding your intellectual engagement in the area of [subject/major], and I will support you throughout your learning in this course.

To mark or flag topics on the syllabus as needed, consider using a blanket content and/or trigger warning in the syllabus coupled with this format for the specific occurrences:

AUGUST 16 – Read: *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, chapters 1-4

Tags: Race, Racism, Racist Slurs, Violence, Classism

AUGUST 18 – Read: *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, chapters 5-9

Tags: Race, Racism, Racist Slurs, Racial Violence (graphic scene pgs. 82-96, will be discussed at length in the discussion section)

You may also wish to include an offer to tag less common triggers:

NOTE: I have done my best to identify any texts with potentially triggering content. I have included tags for: racism, racist slurs, racial violence, and classism. If you have concerns about encountering anything specific in the course material that I have not already tagged and would like me to provide warnings, please come see me or send me an email. I will do my best to flag any requested triggers for you in advance.