

Content warnings

As ECU develops and delivers units for students with increasingly diverse lives and histories, Unit Coordinators and instructors need to consider providing content warnings as an issue of accessibility and inclusion. Certain course content can impact the wellbeing and academic performance of students who have experienced corresponding traumas in their lives. This guide explains what content warnings are, why they are important to ensure inclusive classrooms, as well as how Unit Coordinators and instructors can implement them.

A content warning is a statement made prior to sharing potentially confronting content. That content might include graphic references to challenging topics such as sexual abuse, assault, self-harm, violence and so on, and can take the form of an image, video clip, audio clip or piece of text. In an academic context, the instructor delivers these messages to allow students to prepare emotionally for the content or to decide to forgo interacting with the content.

Common confronting topics

These topics most commonly require content warnings. Consider what material covered in your course may include these and how you can flag them for your students. Students may also request additional tags or potential areas of concern.

Sexual assault	Pornographic content	Child abuse/neglect	Mental illness/ableism
Bullying	Interphobia	Pedophilia	Aged care abuse
Violence	Death or dying	Self-harm and suicide	Eating disorders, body hatred, and fat-phobia
Blood	Animal cruelty	Miscarriages/abortion	Sexism and misogyny
Homophobia and heterosexism	Transphobia and trans misogyny	Racism and racial slurs	Hateful language directed at religious groups

General strategies to approach potentially confronting material

- Give your students as much advance notice as possible about potentially confronting content.
- Try to ‘scaffold’ a confronting topic to students, e.g. provide verbal context before graphics.
- Allow students to interact with confronting material outside of class.
- Instead of showing video materials or graphic images provide a caption or description.
- Advise students to be sensitive to their classmates.

When confronting content is used, give students an opportunity to debrief and check in with your students from time to time; during class, at the end of class and in subsequent lessons. *Try not to show/discuss confronting content towards the end of a class to allow sufficient time to discuss issues or to debrief.*

You can alert students to delayed reactions saying ‘Being confronted by this content can be an understandable reaction. If you continue finding the content confronting for some time after the event (days even) it is critical that you seek help with a support service’. Students can find out about [ECU counselling services](#); For an urgent appointment during working hours, call the Counselling Service on 9370 6706 or contact the out-of-hours Crisis Line for ECU students on 1300 583 032 or text 0488 884 232.







Making mistakes

It is not uncommon to miss flagging content that a student may find confronting. The best way to deal with it is to apologise sincerely to the student, assure them that you will try to do better and ask for any clarification if you need it. Mistakes are likely to happen as you are not necessarily sensitised to the same things your students are. Do the best you can and keep notes of content warnings that should be applied to material if you teach it again. Another option will be to include in the first class an introduction to best practice which includes appropriate use of content warnings - this indicates to the students that you are

aware that the unit contains potentially confronting information and that you will endeavour to forewarn them when you believe it is necessary but that you will not always do this, because it is not always necessary or, indeed, appropriate.

How to implement types of content warnings

There are multiple ways to implement content warnings in your class, and some may be more suitable than others depending on your teaching style and course.

Type	
	<p>Blanket warnings If most of the material in the course is going to include emotionally challenging and potentially disturbing content, you can include a warning as part of your course description.</p> <p><i>The content and discussion in this course will address racism every week. Much of it will be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. I will flag especially graphic or intense content that represents racism and will do my best to make this classroom a space where we can engage bravely and thoughtfully with difficult content every week.</i></p>
	<p>In-curriculum warnings When specific warnings are needed for material, indicate this is on the Unit Plan next to the assigned material. This can be achieved by tagging themes and topics.</p> <p><i>August 16 Read: Your Blues Ain't Like Mine, chapters 1-4. Tags: Race, Racism, Racist slurs, Violence, Socio-economic class (graphic scene pp. 82-96 will be discussed at length in discussion section)</i></p>
	<p>Unit BB site or separate document Supply a supplemental document, hosted on the LMS site or website or attached to an email for students to access.</p> <p><i>A content warning guide is available on our course website [provide URL], labelled "Content Warnings S2 2021." In this document, potentially challenging content, such as content dealing with racism and violence, is flagged for students who wish to know about it in advance.</i></p>
	<p>Personalised warnings In addition to common content warnings, it is appropriate to extend an offer to identify other content warnings if a student requests it.</p> <p><i>I've done my best to identify any texts with potentially disturbing content. I've included tags for: violence and racism. If you have concerns about anything specific in the course material that I have not already tagged please come see me or send me an email. I will do my best to flag any requested topics for you in advance.</i></p>
	<p>Email warnings If you are not able to flag lecture or discussion content in advance you can send out an email in advance of a given class letting students know what to expect.</p> <p><i>In the next class, our discussion will touch on the sexual assault that is depicted in the second last chapter of the assigned reading. This content is disturbing, so I encourage you to prepare. If you believe that you will find this traumatising, you may choose to not participate in the discussion or to leave the classroom. You will still, however, be responsible for material that you miss, so please arrange to get notes from another student or see me individually.</i></p>
	<p>In-class warnings In class, try to provide a break before tackling potentially distressing material, and let students know what will be discussed or viewed after the break.</p> <p><i>"We're going to take a five-minute break, and when we come back, we're going to discuss the scene in which Armstrong is killed. This will include some graphic and disturbing photos of violence and death. I expect our discussion to last until the end of class today."</i></p>

This resource has been adapted from the University of Michigan site – <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/inclusive-classrooms/an-introduction-to-content-warnings-and-trigger-warnings/>