



# FREE SPEECH

***"Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently."***

Rosa Luxemburg (1871 – 1919), German-Polish Marxist philosopher

## 1. Free Speech Discussion

1. What is freedom of speech? Why is it important? Should free speech ever be limited?
2. Are you free to say anything you want? What can't you say? Do you ever feel like you can't express your true opinions because of the possible consequences?
3. Who has the right to decide what we can and cannot say?
4. In which countries can people not criticise the government? What would happen to them if they criticised their government?
5. Which opinions expressed by other people do you completely disagree with? Do you still respect those opinions?
6. Should opinions, even if they are factually incorrect, always be protected as free speech? What about if these opinions contain lies or disinformation?
7. Can a person's opinions ever be considered dangerous? If so, which ones? Should they still have the right to express those dangerous opinions?
8. Winston Churchill said, "Some people's idea of [free speech] is that they are free to say what they like, but if anyone says anything back, that is an outrage." What did he mean, and do you agree with him?

## 2. Freedom Vocabulary

- **hate speech** (noun) – *speech that encourages hate or violence against a person or group based on their ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation, etc.*
- **to incite** (verb), **incitement** (noun) – *to encourage or provoke another person to act unlawfully.*
- **blasphemy** (noun) – *insults against a religion.*
- **to cancel** (verb), **cancel culture** (noun) – *to withdraw support for public figures, or to boycott a company associated with them, after they have expressed unpopular opinions or acted in a way that is considered unacceptable.*
- **(to) libel, (to) slander** (verb, noun) – *defamation in the form of falsehoods in written (libel) or spoken (slander) form.*
- **to no-platform** (verb) – *a tactic where a person who is considered to have dangerous views (e.g., fascist or religious extremist) is not given the opportunity, or platform, to promote their views.*

**Using the vocabulary words above, complete the following sentences (remember to use the correct form of the word, e.g. verb conjugation or plural noun)**

1. After revelations of sexual misconduct, Kevin Spacey was **cancelled** as his TV shows were taken off Netflix, and he was even replaced by another actor in the last film he featured in.
2. An Islamic cleric was arrested in London on **incitement** charges after he said the Koran gave permission to kill non-Muslims.
3. In 2006, a man was arrested for **hate speech** after he distributed pamphlets saying homosexuality was a sin.
4. In Brazil, **blasphemy** can result in a prison sentence of up to one year for those who offend religious feelings.
5. Johnny Depp lost his **libel** claim against the Sun newspaper over an article that accused him of being a “wifebeater”.
6. Oxford University’s student union **no-platformed** Nick Griffin, the leader of the fascist British National Party, arguing that he should not be given an opportunity to spread hatred and violence.

### Free Speech vocabulary comprehension questions

1. Should hate speech be illegal or protected as free speech no matter who is insulted or offended?
2. If people’s words lead to violence, should that always be considered incitement to violence? Can you think of any exceptions?
3. What, if any, would be an appropriate punishment for blasphemy?
4. If a public person makes a racist, sexist or homophobic comment, should they be cancelled? Why or why not?
5. In libel or slander cases, should the accused have to prove what they said is true, or should the person accuser have to prove it was false? Which is best for free speech?
6. Should universities or news programmes no-platform people with racist, fascist or other extremist views? Or is that a violation of free speech?



## 4. Free Speech Conversation Questions

1. Should teachers and lecturers be free to share their opinions with their students, for example, in a history or sociology class? Or does it depend on what their opinions are?
2. Do you agree with the Russian LGBT propaganda law that restricts speech in relation to LGBT issues?
3. In many countries, it is illegal to deny that the Holocaust happened. Do you agree with these laws?
4. In Austria, blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed is illegal, whereas in France, it is protected under free speech laws. Which do you agree with?
5. Do social media sites have the right to decide who says what on their platforms, or should everyone be able to say what they want?
6. Do private companies have a right to refuse customers whose views they disagree with?
7. Should companies have the right to fire employees who have expressed opinions the company disagrees with?
8. Can words ever be considered violent? Or do you agree with the saying, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"?

## 5. Free Speech Writing Task

Write about your opinion of freedom of speech. Try to use some of the vocabulary you learned earlier in this class. In your answer, you could include some of the following topics:

- Why freedom of speech is important.
- What limits, if any, should be placed on free speech.
- Which countries have a good reputation for free speech.

### Alternative exam question

Currently, the law gives social media companies the right to decide which views can and cannot be expressed on their sites. Should the law be changed to force social media companies to respect freedom of speech, regardless of which opinions are expressed?