Guidelines for Using the Deliberatorium

To work well, the Deliberatorium needs the integrated contributions of a community of committed users. In addition to knowing something about the subject being discussed, users also need to understand a few basic rules concerning how collective deliberation can work. A good way to understand these rules is to consider the different *roles* that users can play in a Deliberatorium community. There are five such roles, each with their own capabilities and responsibilities:

> **Readers** have read-only access to all the certified posts in the system (we will explain what a "certified" post is below).

> **Commentators** can rate, and leave comments on, any certified post. Like readers, they can only view certified posts.

> **Authors** can create and edit posts, as well as view any post, certified or not.

> **Moderators** ensure that the posts created by authors are structured properly into well-organized deliberation maps. Only well-structured posts are given "certified" status.

> **Managers** help ensure the effective functioning of the Deliberatorium community. They can create, edit, and delete topics as well as user accounts, as necessary.

Every role includes all the privileges (and responsibilities) of the roles listed above it. A Deliberatorium community thus consists of a number of authors that *create* posts, in addition to a (typically larger) population of readers and commentators that view, rate, and comment on these posts. Posts are initially given a status of "pending", until they are certified by moderators as having been properly structured into the deliberation map.

Guidelines for Readers

Readers can only view "certified" posts – i.e. posts that have been vetted for proper structure by the moderators.

Readers are free to use the content based on the licensing scheme in place for that material, but can not rate or add to the discussion.

Unless otherwise specified, all content entered into the Deliberatorium is governed by the terms of the Creative Commons Licence.

Guidelines for Commentators

Commentators, like readers, can only view "certified" posts – i.e. posts that have been vetted for proper structure by the moderators.

Commentators can leave comments on posts. The role of comments is to propose ways to improve the post. Commentators are asked to refrain from spam, personal attacks, or abusive language of any kind.

Commentators can also rate posts, using a five-star rating system where 1 star is the lowest rating, and 5 stars is the highest. The intent of ratings is to allow the community to identify (and encourage the creation of) posts that make a substantive contribution to the deliberation: the most important issues, interesting ideas, and compelling arguments.

A good argument is relevant to the point it was mustered to support, and should be backed up by credible and reliable evidence. There are a few widely-used types of evidence, each making assumptions that, ideally, should be checked to ensure that the argument is a valid one:

Evidence Type	*Example:* Global warming is caused by human-generated greenhouse gases …	*Assumptions to Check*
Cite data <conclusion> is supported by <report/data X>	Pro: ice core sampling has shown that global temperatures were highly stable until humanity began producing greenhouse gases	Does the data source X have *correct* information? Are the *assumptions* underlying X satisfied in this case? Are the conclusions in X being reported *accurately*?
Cite examples <conclusion> has been true for similar cases	Pro: other global warming epochs (e.g. the Pleistocene) have been associated with increases in greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere	Are the example cases described *accurately*? Are the example cases *similar* to our case? Are the cited examples *typical* or *outlier* cases?
Cite authority <person/group X> believes <conclusion>	Con: US Senator Inhofe does not believe that this is true OR Pro: the UN IPCC (Intergovernmental Program on Climate Change) says so	Is this an accurate report of X's belief? Is X *qualified* to comment on this topic? Does X have a *conflict of interest* on this topic?

When rating an argument, therefore, consider whether these assumptions are met.

Guidelines for Authors

Authors are empowered to write and edit posts in the deliberation map, in addition to viewing, rating, and commenting on other's posts. By default, any author can edit any post. Once a post is certified, however, authors can not change the type or location of that post.

Authors form the heart of the Deliberatorium community. Their job is to post well-structured high-quality content to the appropriate parts of the deliberation map. Every deliberation map starts with a top-level issue (e.g. "how can we reduce fossil fuel consumption?"). Ideas (e.g. "use biofuels") are attached to the issue they are relevant to, and arguments (e.g. "pro: Biofuels sequester CO_2", or "con: making biofuels reduces food production") get attached to the ideas or arguments they support or detract from. Issues can link to related "sub-issues", and ideas can link to related "sub-ideas", producing the following pattern of possible links between posts:

issue   idea ← (pro, con)
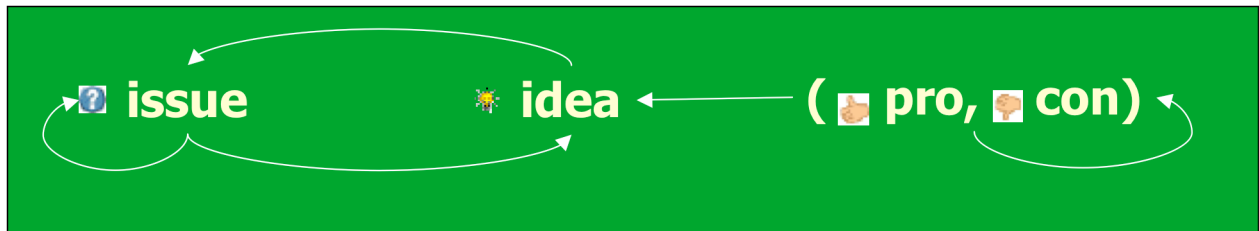
Some kinds of links do not make sense, and are not allowed by the system. It does not make sense, for example, to attach an argument to an issue, since an issue does not represent a candidate solution one can express preferences about.

Collective deliberation requires the following skills:

Unbundling

An authors' ideas should be broken down into posts each containing just *one* issue, idea, or argument, so that when people attach other posts to it, there is no ambiguity about what point they are referring to. The following statement, for example:

to produce less greenhouse gases, we should drive hybrid cars, since they burn less gas

represents three distinct points:

how can we reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
    we should drive hybrid cars
       Pro: they use less gasoline per mile

This unbundling allows us to carry on separate discussions about whether we should drive hybrid cars, whether hybrid cars use less gasoline, other ways we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and so on.

One common mistake is to combine several points in a single post. The following statement, for example:

> *Issue: what should we do about X and who should do it?*

contains *two* issues and should actually be unbundled, for example as follows:

> *Issue: What should we do about X?*
> *Issue: Who should respond to X?*

If an argument has been unbundled well, each individual point will typically be quite concise, so if your post is long, you may need to examine whether it actually includes several logically distinct points that should each be captured in their own post.

It may make sense, for novice users, to first unbundle your thoughts on paper before entering them into the deliberation map.

Typing

Once your points have been unbundled, you need to assign each point the correct type: issue, idea, pro, or con. Proper typing helps people better understand and contribute to an deliberation map.

Remember that each pro or con in an deliberation map should offer a reason for believing, or disbelieving, the validity of the post (idea or argument) that it *directly* points to. Imagine, for example, that we are discussing who will win next year's World Soccer Cup. One user suggests Italy, but you disagree because you feel Italy's new trainer is too young and inexperienced.

Who will win the 2010 world soccer cup?
    Italy
        Con: Italy's trainer is too inexperienced
            Pro: He has only six years of experience in the league

Note that the last post is a "pro" because it supports the claim it is *directly* linked to, even though it is part of a chain whose ultimate goal is to detract from some other conclusion.

Naming

Posts should be given a name that succinctly summarizes the associated issue, idea, or argument.

One common mistake is for users to name an argument after the reference source the argument was based on, rather than after the key point being made. For example:

how can we reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
    use iron fertilization of ocean to sequester carbon dioxide
        Con: see article in NY Times

is much less useful than

how can we reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
    use iron fertilization of ocean to sequester carbon dioxide
        Con: can produce "dead" (oxygen-free) zones in ocean

because the latter map summarizes the key point in the title of the post.

Locating

Posts should be linked only to the other posts that they *logically* relate to, rather than linking them *chronologically* (i.e. based on what you happened to be reading when you had a thought you wanted to contribute). Consider the following example:

Who will win the 2010 world soccer cup?
    (1) Who will survive the first round at the Cup?
    (2) Who will win the (US football) Super Bowl?
    (3) Soccer is boring
    (4) Italy will win the cup
        (4.1) I would love to be in Italy when they win the Cup
        (4.2) They have great players
            (4.2.1) but Italy's trainer is too inexperienced

Posts 1, 4, and 4.2 are located properly, while posts 2, 3, and 4.1 are clearly irrelevant to the posts they are linked to, and should be moved. Post 4.2.1 represents a subtler mistake: the argument "Italy has a terrible coach" should logically be linked to "Italy will win the Cup" rather than to "they have great players", giving the following map:

Italy will win the cup
    They have great players
    Italy's trainer is too inexperienced

After all, having an inexperienced coach does not change the fact that Italy has great players, though it does influence Italy's chances of winning the World Cup.

A second key rule is that each distinct point should only appear *once* in the deliberation map. This keeps the signal-to-noise ratio of the map as high as possible, and ensures that authors can not drown each other out by sheer repetition. The Deliberatorium system provides search and browsing tools that make it easy to find whether a not a given point has already been made in the deliberation map. If it has, you can update the post to incorporate your nuance if you like, or simply leave it as is. If the point does not already exist in the deliberation map, you can create a new post for it.

What makes a good post?

Posts, in general, should be clear and concise and focused on the point at hand.

One common mistake is for people to quote original sources at length e.g. cutting and pasting an entire article from the Web into a post. Much of this material may not, however, be directly relevant to the point you are trying to make. It is better to enter a short post that summarizes your key point, and then include a pointer (e.g. citation or URL) to the original source.

Good issues generally take the form of *open-ended* questions, i.e. that avoid excluding potentially useful ideas. One common mistake is to include ideas in the statement of an issue e.g.

> *Issue: should we drive hybrid cars to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?*

Such issue statements limit the range of possible solutions to the one(s) anticipated by (or perhaps just favored by) the original framer of the issue. A more open-ended, and therefore more generative, way of stating such an issue would be:

     how can we reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
         Drive hybrid cars

Another common mistake is to frame issues in the form "what are the benefits of X?". The strengths and weaknesses of ideas should consistently be captured as arguments so, instead of an issue like:

     what are the benefits of switching to bio-diesel?
         a carbon-neutral fuel

it should be framed as:

     what fuel should we switch to?
         Bio-diesel
             Pro: bio-diesel is a carbon-neutral fuel

A third common mistake is to create issues that lead to lists of information on a topic e.g.

     what car companies make hybrid cars?
         Ford
         Honda
         Toyota

Good issues are supposed to elicit ideas that can be put into action, not just lists of information. Information is valuable, of course, but in the context of an deliberation map, its' role is to form part of pros and cons that marshal evidence for and against different ideas.

There is often no one right way to parse a deliberation into core issues. For example, an alternative way of framing the issues mentioned above would be:

☐ ? [What kind of cars should we drive?](#)

   ☐ 💡[Hybrid cars](#)

Identifying the best set of issues is a matter of judgment. The community can converge on a useful set of issues by giving high ratings, and adding content to, the issues they consider most useful and important.

Another role for authors is to, as needed, create new higher level issues that gather related topics. This helps counteract the tendency for deliberation maps to become shallow and wide and thus more difficult to navigate. This kind of re-organization should be done with care, by the most experienced authors in the community. We recommend that authors discuss the changes with each other before making them, in order to maximize coherence in the deliberation map structure.

Comments
All posts in the Deliberatorium can have comments attached to them. The role of these comments is to allow authors to converse amongst themselves about how to improve a given post. New issues, ideas, or arguments that emerge from these discussions should not remain there, but should be moved to the deliberation map where they can be readily viewed, rated, and argued about by the wider Deliberatorium community. In an important sense, then, articles are what really 'count' because they are what are intended for public consumption; comments are just for internal discussions amongst the authors of an article

Authors are encouraged to try to take into account the comments they receive from other users of the system.

Certification
New posts, by default, are given the status "pending", and can only be viewed by other authors. Pending posts are checked by moderators and, if they are structured properly, are then given "certified" status, which makes the posts visible to the entire Deliberatorium user community. Moderators, in most cases, will not change posts directly, but will work by leaving comments on posts describing what the authors need to change in order for the post to become certified.

Etiquette
We strongly encourage authors to follow these guidelines:

❖ *Spam:* Please refrain from using the Deliberatorium to advertise products or services.

❖ *Civility*: authors should always treat each other with consideration and respect, even during heated debates. Comment on content, not on the contributor.
❖ *Focus*: Don't waste your time and energy replying to clearly offensive, biased or out-of-topic posts. These distract from the goal of generating light, not heat, on a topic.

The live and let live rule
We've saved the most important point for last. The goal of the Deliberatorium is to help address complex challenges with widespread impacts. These, by their very nature, will often be contentious problems, and people may be tempted to try to "win" arguments by sabotaging posts that express contrasting points of view. But this undercuts the whole purpose of the Deliberatorium, which is to gather the widest possible range of high-quality insights on a topic. It is therefore *critical* that people only edit posts *if their intent is to strengthen them*. If you have an opposing point of view, you can add new issues, con arguments and/or competing ideas. Because of the logic-based organization of the deliberation map, alternative perspectives on any given topic will be located right next to each other, so there is no need to undercut some other idea in order to get visibility for your own. The fundamental ethos underlying the Deliberatorium is thus: *let the best ideas win*.

In cases where authors, inadvertedly or not, weaken a post, there are several possible responses open to the Deliberatorium community. The Deliberatorium supports rollbacks on all posts, so any author can simply return a post to the state it was in before the last edit. If there are authors that repeatedly violate the "live and let live" rule, the Deliberatorium managers can "lock" the post (so only selected authors can edit it) or downgrade the role of the offending authors (e.g. to commentator or reader status).

Guidelines for Moderators

It takes practice for authors to be able to follow the author guidelines described above. And some authors may even choose to ignore these rules in the hope of winning some advantage or simply to sabotage the discussion. This is where moderators come in. Every new post is given the status "pending", and can only be viewed by other authors. Moderators are charged with checking these posts to make sure that they are unbundled, typed, named, and located correctly. Redundant posts (i.e. that cover the same point) should be merged. One key qualification for moderators, therefore, is knowing the map well enough to know which topics are being discussed where. If the posts are not properly structured, the moderators can leave comments on the post explaining what needs to be done, and in simple cases can also just make the changes themselves. Once the posts are well-structured, moderators should mark them as certified, thereby making the posts visible to the entire Deliberatorium user community.

It is important for moderators to certify well-structured posts as expeditiously as practical: this helps authors feel appreciated and motivated to contribute. We estimate that this is possible, with a reasonable work investment, if there is roughly one moderator for every 20 active authors, but this will vary of course depending on how active and experienced the authors are.

Moderators are *not*, in general, supposed to pass judgment on the contents of a post. Their role is that of an honest broker, making sure that material is structured in the deliberation map in a way that maximizes its utility for the users of the system. It is the job of the community as a whole, via comments and rating, to distinguish good-quality posts from bad. The only exception is that moderators should remove clearly inappropriate material, such as spam or abusive language.

We recommend that moderators do *not* have their "own" branch of the deliberation map, but should rather work on certifying posts throughout the map, to make sure they are familiar with the whole map and to avoid any systematic personal bias in map structure.

Moderators are supposed to be educators, at least as much as they are quality-controllers. A key measure of their success is how well they can teach authors how to write well-structured posts, and thus make their own jobs easier. They can educate authors by leaving comments on posts that need work, as well as by maintaining a FAQ section in the Deliberatorium's forum tool.

Moderators are crucial for successful deliberation. If the deliberation map is well-structured, users will be able to better understand and "see" the overall debate, locate the information they are interested in, and add new content where the right eyes are likely to see it.

Guidelines for Managers

Managers should, in general, have a relatively small role in the daily functioning of the system. They are empowered to create, upgrade, or (hopefully only rarely) downgrade user accounts, and are also able to create and delete deliberation topics.

The Deliberatorium can support either "open" or "closed" authoring. In "open" authoring, any author can edit any post, as in systems like wikipedia. In "closed" authoring, only the creator of an post, his/her assigned proxies, or a moderator/manager, can edit that post. The type of authoring is determined by the manager in consultation with the user community, and can be changed at any time for an entire discussion, or for any individual posts in a discussion. We recommend that deliberations start with open authoring, as in Wikipedia. Closed authoring may become necessary however for highly contentious topics where people repeatedly ignore the "live and let live" rule, because then authors can be assured that their posts will not be undercut, but this comes of the cost of reducing the range of individuals who are able to contribute to posts, and increases the likelihood of redundancy in the deliberation map because people may find the only way to add some important insight is to create a new post that reproduces much of the content of some already existing post.