



ALRA Guidance on Trigger Warnings

1. Reinforcing the ALRA Community

- 1.1. Everyone has triggers and traumas and there are differences in experiences, particularly depending on how we are located within intersecting oppressions (not all trauma is equal). Making trigger/content warnings integral to our practice is just one part of a wider move towards cultures of consent, and acknowledgement of imperfection and vulnerability, rather than seeing them as any kind of singular quick fix solution.
- 1.2. While recognising it is impossible to predict all possible triggers we can still encourage and engage groups in also thinking about what individuals and communities can do when people are triggered.
- 1.3. Research around this is matter is varied. There remains contention as to the impact of trigger warnings and some practitioners refer to 'content' warnings instead. Regardless of the semantics, use of these warnings is nothing new – we see them routinely at the beginning of films and television shows, and hear them prior to listening to audio books, but here, we consider their use in the educational context.

2. What are Trigger Warnings?

- 2.1. A trigger warning is a statement made prior to sharing potentially disturbing content. The content might include graphic references to topics such as sexual abuse, self-harm, violence, eating disorders, and so on, and can take the form of an image, video clip, audio clip, or piece of text (though it not limited to these mediums).
- 2.2. An example of this is the recent inclusion of a clip from the John Berger video on Ways of Seeing that included a 15 second clip of African American slaves being tied up which should have been preceded by a warning that racial violence was included in the clip. This could have appeared on the Scheme of Work or in an email to the students prior to their viewing.

3. Why are they important?

- 3.1. **Trigger warnings are not intended to censor teaching material or content.** They are m meant to help students engage with the issue - giving people the opportunity to make informed and conscious decisions, preparing as adequately as possible to consider when and how to engage with material - rather than encouraging them to avoid anything potentially painful or difficult.
- 3.2. While students may have experienced specific trauma, they may be unwilling to disclose this trauma to their teachers. We are likely unaware of past experiences they have had, so using trigger warnings helps us to support all students attending teaching or accessing content in a simple way.
- 3.3. Student performance can be negatively impacted by unexpected exposure to distressing content causing them to relive experienced trauma. In providing these warnings we are more sufficiently supporting them in their training – enabling them to be better prepared for what they might encounter in materials presented. In keeping more open communication at ALRA, trigger warnings can also facilitate informed discussions.

4. Policy and procedures for Teaching and Learning

- 4.1. **It is important to note that the context of the viewing, reading, or listening needs to be clearly assessed with your line manager before any material is included as an educational resource.**

4.2. As we are concerned that students are aware of the risk that material used in their learning might trigger unwelcome and distressing memories or thoughts, consequentially:

- (a) Staff should consider whether students are likely to encounter potentially distressing material in a lecture, class or other teaching session, in their reading, or engagement with other recommended materials.
- (b) If staff identify potentially distressing material, should notify students in advance.

5. How to use them

5.1. Trigger warnings help staff to consider, in advance, how their content is framed to students and any reasonable adjustments for students who may find the content to difficult to access. **Trigger warnings help practitioners to have wider oversight of the nature of their content and consider the impact of their presentation on students who have experienced trauma.**

5.2. As such, they should be factored into programme design and development so there is a readily accessible source of content warnings relating to course content and learning materials.

5.3. Trigger warnings could be delivered through (but are not limited to):

- group emails to the students in a module ahead of a lecture
- reading lists
- personalised emails
- verbal warnings
- a presentation slide before discussing the content.

5.4. **If staff are aware of topics individual students may find challenging, they should, where possible, engage in open conversations with those students.**

6. Student Disclosure of sensitive content

6.1. Students should be mindful of the impact of sensitive content they may be disclosing to both their peers and staff. It is advised that students who may be disclosing sensitive content warn others before doing so.

6.2. **If a student makes a disclosure of content they may find challenging** be open to this. Engage, discuss, and listen to the student. This may be a scenario where individual advisory emails are most appropriate. It may also be advisable to direct students to appropriate support such as welfare, health professionals or the police.

7. Possible themes that require trigger warnings:

- Abuse
- Acephobia
- Animal cruelty or animal death
- Biphobia
- Blood
- Child abuse/paedophilia/
- Classism
- Death or dying
- Dissection
- Eating disorders and body hatred
- Incest
- Kidnapping and abduction
- Mental illness and ableism
- Miscarriages/Abortion
- Pornographic content
- Pregnancy/Childbirth
- Racism and racial slurs
- Self-harm and suicide
- Sexism and misogyny
- Sexual Assault

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- Hateful language directed at religious groups
- (e.g. Islamophobia, antisemitism)
- Homophobia
- Homophobia and heterosexism
- Transphobia
- Transphobia and trans misogyny
- Violence

7.1. This is not an exhaustive list. Care should be given to remain responsive to the needs of individual students, and to ensure assumptions are not made on their behalf as to the nature of their individual needs.

8. Forgetting Trigger Warnings/ Unrealised Potential Triggers

8.1. Clearly, individuals respond differently to different materials and we recognise that it is not always possible to anticipate, and alert student to, all potential triggers i.e. not all triggers will be picked up by staff all of the time - slips will occur and some students' triggers may not be identified as triggers by staff. Should this occur, it is something to learn from - adapt triggers used in future and be aware of individual student needs.