

Code of Conduct

Principles for Collaboration, Teaching and Responsible Conduct

Dear Colleagues,

A very warm welcome to our Institute. We are delighted to have you with us and hope you will enjoy getting to know and contributing to our work in language teaching and/or our cultural programme.

Good collaboration depends on a shared understanding of certain basic principles. These principles apply to everyone at our Institute, regardless of background, age, gender, position or role.

Respect and Appreciation

We treat one another with respect, openness and consideration. Different experiences, opinions and perspectives are welcome. Everyone should feel able to ask questions, express a different opinion and discuss decisions constructively. Criticism should be expressed respectfully. Equally important is a willingness to listen openly to criticism and to work together to find solutions.

No one should be judged prematurely on the basis of their background, personal beliefs or individual circumstances. What matters in our work together is how people actually behave and whether they treat others with respect.

Open Communication

When questions, difficulties or misunderstandings arise, we talk about them. Problems should neither be concealed nor something anyone feels they have to resolve alone. Please speak to your designated contact person if you need support or are unsure about anything. Questions are expressly encouraged.

Our regular team meetings and teachers' meetings provide opportunities for ongoing exchange. In addition, individual conversations can be arranged at any time and can take place in an appropriate confidential setting.

Collaboration on an Equal Footing

We deliberately keep hierarchies at our Institute to a minimum. Different positions and functions entail different areas of responsibility, but this does not mean that one person's opinion is inherently more important than another's.

We want everyone to be able to contribute actively. Mutual support is an integral part of how we work together. Questions may also be put to supervisors, teachers and others in positions of responsibility, and differing views may be expressed. Respectfully expressed disagreement is not regarded as a lack of respect.

Principles for Teaching

Our approach to teaching is guided by the **Beutelsbach Consensus** (*Beutelsbacher Konsens*). It sets out three fundamental principles for dealing responsibly with differing positions and controversial issues in educational settings.

1. Prohibition against Indoctrination

Teachers must not influence learners in favour of a particular viewpoint in a way that prevents them from forming their own judgement. Teachers may express their own positions, but these must be clearly identifiable as such.

The purpose of teaching is not for learners to adopt a prescribed opinion, but to enable them to think independently and arrive at reasoned judgements of their own.

2. The Principle of Controversy

Issues that are subject to controversy in academia, society or politics should also be presented as controversial in teaching. Different positions that can be substantiated on academic or factual grounds should be given appropriate consideration.

This does not mean that every conceivable claim must be accorded equal weight. What matters is whether a position can be substantiated and understood, whether it has a sound academic or factual basis, and whether differing views are treated with respect. Respect for human rights, Germany's free democratic constitutional order and the German Basic Law must also be upheld.

3. Enabling Learners to Form Their Own Judgements

Teaching should enable learners to recognise different interests, perspectives and contextual factors, critically examine arguments and, on this basis, arrive at their own reasoned assessments. This also includes the ability to reflect critically on one's own perspective and to understand the perspectives of others.

What Does This Mean in Practice?

Example 1: Addressing a Controversial Issue

A course or class addresses an issue that is the subject of social or academic controversy. The teacher may state their own assessment openly, but does not present it as the only correct position. Instead, they make different factually or academically substantiated perspectives visible, explore arguments and counterarguments, and create space for discussion and reflection. Participants should not be pressured, either explicitly or implicitly, into adopting a particular position. What matters is that they are able to understand and critically examine the various arguments and arrive at their own reasoned assessment.

Example 2: Different Perspectives in a German-Chinese Working and Teaching Environment

In our international environment, issues may be perceived and assessed in different ways. Personal experience, cultural background, academic traditions and differing social and institutional contexts may all play a part.

When such differences become apparent in a class or course, we regard them as an opportunity to learn from one another. Different perspectives may be expressed, explained, questioned and compared. Teachers should take care not to classify a perspective as right or wrong solely on the basis of the cultural or national background of the person expressing it.

Nor do we expect individual members of staff or participants to speak on behalf of a supposedly ‘German’ or ‘Chinese’ point of view. No one should be placed in the position of representing a country or culture simply because of their background.

Instead, the aim is to understand the contexts and assumptions underlying different perspectives, to examine arguments on their merits and to engage in dialogue. Even where assessments differ, respectful and informed discussion should remain possible.

Our Approach

We understand good teaching as creating a space in which different perspectives can be made visible, questions can be asked and independent thought can flourish. Teachers have a particular responsibility in this regard: they facilitate discussion openly and respectfully, make different positions comprehensible and enable learners to form their own judgements on the basis of knowledge, argument and reflection.

Academic, Teaching and Freedom of Expression

The work of our Institute is guided by the fundamental values of an open and democratic society and by the legal framework governing our Institute as a registered non-profit association in Germany. Of particular importance is the freedom of scholarship, research, teaching and the arts protected by the German Basic Law.

Academic and scholarly exchange depends on the ability to ask questions, examine different positions and critically discuss established views. No one should be placed under pressure for expressing a position in a reasoned and appropriate manner.

At the same time, freedom does not mean that anything goes. Academic and scholarly work is guided by professional and academic standards, reasoned and transparent argument, and academic integrity.

Academic Integrity

Our work is governed by the principles of good academic practice and academic integrity. Sources and the contributions of others must be properly acknowledged. Materials, texts, data and the results of work carried out by others must not be presented as one’s own.

Information should be checked carefully and presented accurately to the best of one's knowledge. Where there is uncertainty or an error has occurred, we expect this to be addressed openly. The use of digital tools and artificial intelligence is likewise subject to the Institute's rules currently in force, as set out in your employment contract or internship agreement.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

In the course of your work, you may have access to information that is not intended for the public. This may include, for example, personal data relating to students or members of staff, internal documents, examination materials, contact details, unpublished work or internal communications.

Such information must be treated as confidential. It may only be used for its intended professional or academic purpose and may only be shared with authorised persons.

This also applies to digital communications, cloud services, messaging services and other external platforms. Non-public data and documents may only be processed or shared using systems approved or designated for this purpose by our Institute.

If you are unsure whether information or materials may be shared, please consult your designated contact person beforehand. Information about approved systems and the handling of data can also be found in our Obligation of Confidentiality and Data Protection Compliance, which you are required to sign before beginning your work at the Institute.

Use of Institute Materials and Resources

Access to IT systems, databases, teaching materials and other Institute resources is provided for specific tasks. Such access and materials may only be used within the scope of the relevant authorisation.

Personal login details must not be shared with anyone else. Internal documents, data or materials must not be copied, published or passed on to external individuals or organisations without the appropriate permission.

Questions and Uncertainties

No one is expected to know every internal rule from the outset. If you are unsure about data protection, academic integrity, the use of materials, contact with external organisations or any other matter, please speak to your designated contact person.

We expressly encourage you to ask questions at an early stage. An open question is generally much easier to resolve than a misunderstanding that comes to light later.

Sharing Responsibility

A positive working and learning environment depends on the conduct of everyone involved. We therefore value curiosity, openness, mutual respect and a willingness to communicate with one another.

If something is unclear, please ask. If you have a different perspective, we encourage you to share it. If a problem arises, we will work together to find a solution.

We want you to feel welcome at our Institute, to contribute your own experiences and perspectives, and at the same time to encounter and engage with new ones.
We look forward to working with you and hope that your time at our Institute will be both interesting and rewarding.