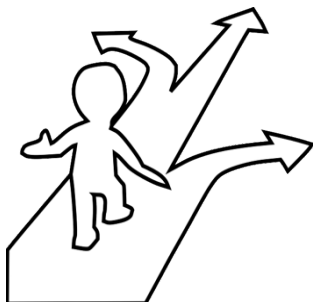


## Building Tolerance for Ambiguity



Is it more important to find one correct answer, or to experiment with possible solutions? In university you are often confronted with projects and problems that don't have a single answer. By learning to work without clear answers, you will be prepared to think creatively and effectively in many of your courses, and develop a key skill valued by many employers.

**What is Ambiguity?** Ambiguity occurs when there is more than one possible meaning, answer, or action in a situation. When a single 'right answer' can't be found, you are in an ambiguous situation.

### What is Ambiguity Tolerance?

Ambiguity tolerance describes your ability to function, and even to thrive, when you are faced with uncertain situations. These types of situations can include:

- Determining a good answer to a case study with more than one possible outcome.
- Working in cultural context where you are unsure of the appropriate ways to act.
- Communicating in a new language, even when you are unsure if your speaking or writing is entirely correct.

Consider whether you agree or disagree with the statements below:

1. There's a right way and a wrong way to do almost everything.	Agree/ Disagree
2. It is more fun to tackle a complicated problem than to solve a simple one.	Agree/ Disagree
3. What we are used to is preferable to what is familiar.	Agree/ Disagree
4. Many of our most important decisions are based on insufficient information.	Agree/ Disagree
5. A good job is one where what is to be done and how it is to be done is always clear.	Agree/ Disagree
6. A good teacher is one that makes you wonder about your way of looking at things.	Agree/ Disagree
7. I have always felt that there is a clear solution between right and wrong.	Agree/ Disagree

If you agreed with statements 2, 4, and 6, it is likely that you already are able to tolerate a fair amount of ambiguity. If you agreed with statements 1, 3, 5, and 7, it is likely that you prefer to have more certainty in many situations.

Like many skills, ambiguity tolerance is one that can be developed over time. Many university courses offer excellent opportunities to challenge yourself by growing your ability to deal with ambiguous situations.

## Building Tolerance for Ambiguity

**What is the Value of Ambiguity Tolerance?** By taking the risk to move ahead in situations where there is no clear correct answer, you will gain a valuable set of personal and professional skills. Even in careers that appear to require clear solutions (such as Accounting or Sciences), the ability to use your skills to make decisions and determine a good path forward when multiple options exist is highly valued.

### How Can I Increase my Ambiguity Tolerance?

1. Consider the value of ambiguity tolerance to your personal growth and future career. How will ambiguity tolerance enhance your own personal life and work?
2. Recognize and embrace uncertainty when completing case study assignments. These assignments are often designed with multiple possible good solutions. Your task is to apply background knowledge from your courses and the skills you are learning to create a solution that serves your client and meets ethical requirements.
3. Take opportunities to participate in new experiences. University offers opportunities to explore new situations that require you to embrace uncertainty. Learning a new language, participating in an intercultural learning opportunity, and participating in internship or co-op opportunities all afford opportunities to increase your ability to thrive in ambiguity. You may also find opportunities in your community or work to engage in experiences that support you in dealing with uncertainty. Identify your current and potential opportunities to develop ambiguity tolerance through new life experiences.
4. Embrace the learning that comes from making mistakes. Often, the desire to be right can block opportunities to try out a possible solution that may not be ultimately correct. University classes can be safe places to learn by trying. Consider mistakes as learning opportunities that are leading you to continued growth.
5. Reflect on your response to uncertainty. Take the opportunity to journal your response to a difficult case study, an assignment with an unclear solution, or a new experience. Acknowledge the challenge of dealing with uncertainty, and celebrate your progress in taking risks and making decisions in these situations.

Any one or more of the steps above will increase your skills in managing ambiguity. By continuing in your personal growth, you may even find yourself thriving in and enjoying ambiguity situations.

### References:

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