Oh Audrey! That might not be a good thing to write on your sign. Why not, Emma? The First Amendment protects my right to free speech.
It’s not **WHAT** you say, it’s **HOW** you say it. As students, we need to be aware of our school’s policies. We can be punished for bad behavior.

In that case, what else could be considered risky?

And, of course, avoid violence.

Well, there are some pretty obvious ones... You can’t encourage unlawful activities, like illegal drug use.

The big one is disrupting school, or school activities. It can basically always be punished. And, remember, our classmates have a right NOT to join the protest.
Walkouts are a common protest method. Keep in mind, if it’s during a lesson it will probably be counted as a missed class.

To avoid this, it’s best to utilize non-class time and have it during a break!

Learn where you can protest on your school’s property. You can also protest off campus.

You can’t block access to your school.

But remember!

This is more complicated than I thought...

You know what? We should share this with our student protest group online!

C’mon! If it helped me, it could help someone else, too!
First we should look up our school’s policies, since they can vary. Each school is different!

The keys to a successful student protest are:
- RESPECT
- ORGANIZATION
- CLARITY

Communicate with school officials to clarify your intent.

Know your rights and your school’s policies!

Behavior can be punished. Ideas can’t.

Be safe!

Need Help? Want to Know More?

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund: CBLDF.org, info@cbldf.org, Twitter/Facebook/Tumblr: CBLDF
National Coalition Against Censorship: ncac@ncac.org, Twitter/Tumblr: ncacensorship/Facebook: ncacorg
We’re Here to Help!
The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The First Amendment doesn’t end “at the schoolhouse gates.”
But the law does allow public schools to set their own codes and policies.

Students have a constitutional right to participate in non-disruptive protests during the school day. This means that school officials cannot retaliate against or discipline student protesters unless the protests cause, or are reasonably expected to cause, the disruption of school events or make it impossible for school officials to maintain order. Missing class is usually punishable. But punishments cannot be harsher because you missed class to protest or because of your political beliefs. Behavior can be punished. Ideas can’t.

PROTECTED

Unpopular statements
Or statements that school officials disagree with. You cannot be disciplined for the content of your protest alone.

Protests OUTSIDE school
You are free to organize and protest off campus. Don’t block access to school. Learn the restrictions on where you can protest on your school’s property.

Printed materials and clothing with messages
As long as it isn’t vulgar, likely to disrupt school operations or incite violence (like gang symbols) and doesn’t encourage illegal drug use.

Protests during non-instructional time
Take advantage of breaks and non-class time. Don’t disrupt teaching.

TIP: Make your goals clear + know your school’s policies
Communicate with school officials, clarify your intent to remain peaceful and facilitate a dialogue with those who disagree with you.

RISKY*

Advocating violence. Just don’t.
You can’t “encourage unlawful activity,” including illegal drug use.

“Vulgar, offensive or rude” language
What “offensive” means is subjective, but keep in mind that profanity and vulgar imagery have been legally accepted as reasons to shut down student speech.

Disruption to school activities
This is the big one. It’s also subjective and there is no real legal consensus. Know this: Officials can discipline students for substantial disruptions of school activities.

A disruptive walkout can be punished.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

The US has a long and honored tradition of people who knew that their civil disobedience had a price and were willing to pay it to advance their cause. For some, this is the cost of social change. Either way, it’s important to know your rights.

Note: Private schools are allowed to establish their own speech and demonstration codes. This guide is not intended as individualized legal advice and it may not stay completely accurate forever. The law is sometimes interpreted differently in different regions of the country.
RESOURCES

If you are disciplined, respond respectfully and ask for details on the basis for your punishment. If you feel your rights are being infringed upon, report the situation to a parent, trusted teacher/administrator or one of the organizations listed here.

National Coalition Against Censorship
Visit ncac.org
Email us directly: ncac@ncac.org
Call for immediate assistance: 212-807-6222

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
Visit cbldf.org
Email: info@cbldf.org
Emergency hotline: 800-99-CBLDF

Student Press Law Center
For student journalists: www.splc.org
View SPLC’s resource for student journalists
Emergency phone: 202-785-5450

If you feel you need immediate legal counsel, contact your local ACLU affiliate.
A list of local ACLU affiliates is available at www.aclu.org/about/affiliates.

KNOW YOUR SCHOOL’S POLICIES
Your school should have its behavior and discipline policies posted online or published in a student handbook. Find them, know them, use them. If you feel your school’s policies are unfair, bring it to our attention and we will investigate.