








Constructive Conversations




Develop the skills to start a genuine dialogue and advocate views

COLLABORATING | Communication Skills

→ What you will need:

-  In groups of 3-4
-  Individual, in pairs
-  30 mins preparation
-  2.5 hrs execution
-  flip-over sheet or whiteboard

→ Related Tools:

-  [Deep Listening](#)
-  [Brainstorming with Eureka](#)
-  [Fostering Collaborative Creativity](#)

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“Gain the skills to actively listen to other people and advocate for your view in a constructive way.

—Madelinde Winnubst





I. Overview

Societal transitions are challenging because they involve numerous perspectives on complex issues, making simple solutions hard to find. This tool equips students with the skills to engage in genuine dialogues with individuals with differing views on complex problems, while effectively advocating for their perspectives. Students practice this communication skill with a relevant topic.

Learning outcome



The student is able to engage in a genuine dialogue with another person on complex issues while advocating for their viewpoint





II. Learning Activity

Students gain the skills to actively listen to other people and advocate for their view in a constructive way.



1. Find a Local Issue 20 mins

First, let students brainstorm in groups of three or four about local issues on which different perspectives exist. Encourage them to think of issues where they are directly affected by and already have an opinion on. These should be 'hot' topics relevant to their local situation.

Examples of such issues may include:

- Implementation of 30km speed zones
- Speed regulations for e-bikes and/or Fatbikes
- Noise regulations in residential areas
- Opening hours of shops, bars and restaurants
- Local environmental concerns (e.g. waste management, green spaces)

Then, each student selects one issue from the brainstormed list that they are particularly interested in and feels strongly about. Once each student has selected their topic, they individually write down their opinion on the topic in a few sentences.

Tip: provide students with the rules for brainstorming and, for your inspiration, download guidelines for facilitating a brainstorming session.





2. Practice with Peers 30 mins

Students form pairs outside their group to hold a dialogue on their chosen topics. First, student 1 advocates for their view on this topic, while student 2 holds an opposing view, irrespective of their own views.

Then, student 1 starts the conversation by asking student 2 to express their opinion. Student 1 has two tasks: active listening and advocating for their views. Once the dialogue has concluded, the students switch roles.

Tip: provide students with the handout with tips and tricks for active listening and advocating views.



3. Reflect and Feedback 20 mins

In the same pairs, let students reflect on how the conversation went and give each other feedback. Ask the students to focus on aspects of active listening and advocating views.

First, ask them to write down a reflection on their own behavior in the conversation (5 mins). The following questions can help in their reflection:

- How did the conversation make you feel?
- Were you able to actively listen to your conversation partner?
- Were you able to explain your position as you wanted to?
- Do you feel you understand and/or respect each other's perspectives?

Then, let them think about the role of the other in the conversation (5 mins). What did they notice about the other person's behavior in the conversation?

- Did you feel heard by your conversation partner?
- What techniques did your partner use to show active listening?
- What did you find strong about how the other person conducted themselves during the conversation?



Now, ask them to take turns in giving each other feedback (1 minute each) using the following sentences:

- What I appreciate about you as a conversation partner is...
- What I would like to see more of from you as a conversation partner is...

Finally, instruct students to think about how they can use the feedback they've received to have an even better dialogue next time. Let students write down their own conclusions about the reflection and feedback (5 mins).



4. Go Outside ⌚ 30 mins

Instruct the students to find another conversation partner to have a conversation on this issue with. This time, they should choose someone from outside the classroom. This could be anyone, such as someone from their neighborhood, their sports team or a random person in a public space.

The student should ask this person to have a short conversation about the issue with them. Just like in the previous step, students should open the conversation by asking the other person to explain their point of view.

After the conversation, students should explain the purpose of their conversation (practicing active listening and advocating their views) and ask the other person for feedback on their discussion. Questions that can help elicit this feedback are:

- Did you feel heard during our conversation?
- Do you believe I understand and/or respect your perspective on this issue?
- Do you understand and/or respect my perspective on this issue?
- Do you have any tips for me?



5. Share Insights ⌚ 1 hr

Back in class, students share their insights with each other in the groups from Step 1. Let students start by discussing what it was like to engage in a conversation with a stranger. Encourage them to reflect on both their listening skills and their ability to advocate for their



views. Ask them to consider what went well, what was challenging, and what valuable tips they received from their external conversation partner.

After sharing their experiences, ask each group to prepare a short presentation highlighting the key things they learned about active listening and advocating for their views. They should focus on summarising important tips and advice that would be helpful for other students.

Have each group briefly present their findings to the entire class. Encourage different groups to contribute new insights and avoid repeating the same tips. Facilitate a class discussion to ensure a variety of perspectives and tips are shared.

Tip: as the groups share, collect the most important tips and insights on a flip-chart. Use this summary to wrap up, highlighting the key takeaways on active listening and advocating for views.



III. Assessment

Throughout this activity, students are tasked with collecting feedback from others, incorporating this to improve their active listening and communication skills, and reflecting on their experiences. Here, a deeper reflection is necessary to present their insights and next steps to improve their skills.



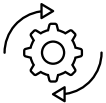
Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.



Roles

Self-assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning



Materials

Reflective questions



Assessment

Reflective questions

1. Can you describe the dynamic of the dialogue in a few sentences? Was there anything unexpected?
2. What things did you do during the conversation that helped to hold a genuine dialogue with the other person?
3. How or what will you do differently next time you are in a dialogue?
4. Did this dialogue change something about your opinions? Why, or why not?
5. What are you going to do next?





IV. Key Advice

Rules for brainstorming and **guidelines on facilitating brainstorming sessions** (Step 1) and tips and tricks for **active listening and advocating views** (Step 2) can be downloaded below.





Key Advice

Rules for Brainstorming

Establishing clear guidelines and expectations for the brainstorming process can help ensure a productive and collaborative session. The most important brainstorming rules include:

1. Promote equal participation to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share their unique perspectives.
2. Listen actively and respectfully to each other's ideas, showing openness to all viewpoints.
3. Encourage everyone to contribute their ideas, as every idea has the potential to inspire new and creative solutions.
4. Avoid judging or criticising any idea, as this can stifle creativity and discourage participation.
5. Expand on each other's ideas to generate new and innovative solutions that may not have been thought of individually.
6. Go for quantity and be visual. When generating ideas, strive for quantity. Using visual aids such as sketches, diagrams or mind maps helps express and develop ideas in a more engaging and memorable way.

Examples of brainstorming questions

- What are some ways to improve urban mobility in a specific city?
- How can we accelerate the adoption of renewable energy solutions?
- In what ways can we promote sustainable and equitable practices in coffee production?
- How can we enhance social cohesion at the university?





Key Advice

Instructions for Facilitating a Brainstorming Session

Define the Objective

Clearly articulate the objective or problem statement the brainstorming session aims to address. Ensure that all participants have a shared understanding of the goal to focus their ideation efforts.

Set the Stage

Create a conducive environment for brainstorming. Choose a comfortable and well-lit space, provide materials such as whiteboards or flip charts, and ensure that participants feel encouraged to express their ideas freely, without judgment.

Explain the Rules

Explain the brainstorming rules by using the tool '[Brainstorming with Eureka](#)'.

Facilitate Idea Generation

Employ the selected brainstorming techniques.

Document Ideas

Record all ideas on a visible medium, such as post-its, a whiteboard or a flip-chart, for everyone to see. Ensure that each idea is captured accurately and legibly. This visual representation helps participants build upon existing ideas and triggers further ideation.

Manage Time

Allocate sufficient time for each stage of the brainstorming session, including idea generation, discussion and reflection. Maintain a balance between allowing ample time for idea exploration and ensuring the session progresses within the allocated timeframe.

Facilitate Closure

Wrap up the brainstorming session by summarising the ideas generated and emphasizing their value. Discuss potential next steps for further development or evaluation of the ideas. Express gratitude for participants' contributions and encourage them to continue exploring new solutions.

Remember, as the facilitator, your role is to create an inclusive and supportive environment, encourage active participation and guide the process to achieve the desired outcomes. Adapt the instructions and techniques based on the specific objectives, participants and context of the brainstorming session.





Key Advice

Active Listening

Ask questions to understand:

- Frame your questions in a positive, non-judgmental way to understand the other person's point of view.
- Be genuinely curious. You are asking questions to understand their perspective, not to gather ammunition for changing their opinion.
- Ask open-ended questions: use questions that encourage detailed responses, such as "How did you feel about that?" or "What happened next?"

Show that you are listening:

- Use your body language to convey your attention and show interest. Nod occasionally, smile and use other facial expressions.
- Maintain an open and inviting posture. Encourage the speaker with small verbal cues like "Yes" and "I see."

Give feedback:

- Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. For example, "What I hear is..." and "It sounds like you are saying..."
- Ask questions to clarify certain points, such as "What do you mean when you say..." or "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarise the speaker's comments regularly to ensure understanding.

Avoid distractions and suspend judgment:

- Try to minimise environmental and mental distractions.
- Let the speaker finish without preparing your next question or response in your mind.
- Focus fully on the speaker's message, ensuring you comprehend it completely before thinking about your reply.





Advocating for Your View

Respond appropriately:

- Show respect and understanding in your response. Critique ideas, not people.
- Be honest and open in your feedback. Treat others as you would like to be treated.

Express your views clearly:

- Stay close to your experiences, feelings and values. Use "I" statements to express your perspective.
- Use positive language: articulate what you want rather than what you don't want.

Practice expressing your views in different ways:

- Be concise and clear. Avoid jargon and complex language.
- Use stories or examples to illustrate your points.

