



COMMUNICATION ROUNDTABLE

Broad discussion questions on communication



OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore their own ideas on communication
- Students will consider other's perspectives on communication
- Students will explain ideas about communication that are most important to them

MATERIALS

- None

TIME

- Varied

LESSON INTRO

The goals of this session are to get students into a dense and divergent discussion. Refer to the Facilitator Tips section for ideas about how to engage students in rich discussion.

COMMUNICATION THEMED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. These question prompts can be used for a discussion roundtable based on Communication Skills. As an alternative, invite students to brainstorm big questions themselves, and use those instead.
 - What is the most effective way to communicate?
 - How do great leaders communicate?
 - What is your definition of effective communication?
 - How can communicators inspire or persuade their listeners?
 - How can you tell if a speaker has been listening to his/her audience? What might you see or hear?
 - How can someone communicate that they are listening?
 - Look at the Chinese symbol for “to listen”



The symbol is comprised of the smaller symbols for the ear, mind, heart, eyes, and focus. Discuss what is implied in the symbol, and what action it requires of us.



VARIATIONS

If your group is not ready for open-ended discussions, use a discussion protocol such as a Socratic Seminar, Think-Pair-Share, or World Café.

FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

Read below the excerpt of an article by Todd Finley *Rethinking Whole Class Discussion*.
(Source: <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/rethinking-whole-class-discussion-todd-finley>)

“Whole class discussions are, after lecture, the second most frequently used teaching strategy, one mandated by the Common Core State Standards because of its many rewards: increased perspective-taking, understanding, empathy, and higher-order thinking, among others. These benefits, however, do not manifest without a skillful and knowledgeable facilitator.

Unfortunately, a preponderance of evidence demonstrates that many teachers mistakenly conflate discussion with recitation. “Typical teacher-student discourse resembles a quiz show, with teachers asking a question, the student replying, and the teacher evaluating the student’s response. This is called initiation-response-evaluation, ‘I-R-E,’ or recitation.”

In contrast to recitation, quality discussion, according to the University of Washington’s Center for Instructional Development and Research, involves purposeful questions prepared in advance, assessment, and starting points for further conversations. Teachers are also advised to:

- Distribute opportunities to talk
- Allow discussants to physically see each other
- Ask questions that “may or may not have a known or even a single correct answer”
- Foster learners talking to peers
- Encourage students to justify their responses
- Vary the types of questions

...Rather than habitually adhering to any of the hierarchical question sets during class dialogues (a non-hierarchical approach, Christenbury and Kelly’s Questioning Circles offer strategies for crafting “dense” prompts that integrate the subject, world and reader), I suggest that instructors direct their attention to modeling inquiry, emphasizing divergent over convergent questions, organizing students’ approach to question-asking and -answering, listening, and providing authentic follow-up questions. Because of the complexity of these practices, robots will not replace teachers anytime soon.

The Mechanics of In-Class Discussion

Follow-Up Questions

Ian Wilkinson defines authentic follow-up as “questions that the teacher is genuinely interested in exploring and that evoke a variety of responses from students (in other words, the answer is not pre-specified).” Good follow-up questions expand the conversation and require students to:

- Clarify their answers: Tell me more about that.
- Support their answers: What about the reading made you think that ___?
- Argue: Convince us that ___.



- Examine their responses more fully: In what other context does that idea play out?
- Consider different perspectives: What would you say to someone who thought ___?
- Predict: What do you think that we will discover in the next chapter?
- Hypothesize: How would handle a situation like ___?
- Decide: So, this leads to you to what conclusions?
- Compare: How is your answer different or the same from others?
- Generalize: What did you discover?

Avoid the Following

- Trick questions
- Inadequate wait time (less than 5 seconds)
- Lectures disguised as questions
- Sarcasm
- Questions with obvious answers
- Asking multiple questions before allowing response
- Rhetorical questions
- Yes or no questions
- Set parameters

Many learners need to be taught how to engage in an academic dialogue. Provide conversation stems on a poster board or notecards:

- "Could you tell me more about why ___?"
- "Let me explain why I see that differently."
- "Have you considered ___?"
- "What we both agree on is ___."

Lastly, I've provided a general checklist of items to consider when planning a discussion:

- ✓ Room layout (ensure discussants can see each other—circle up!)
- ✓ Clarify objectives, purpose, relevance, and ground rules
- ✓ Front-load rehearsal activities:
 - Think-pair-share
 - Quickwrite
 - Survey questions
 - Mindmaps
 - Text annotation
- ✓ Engage students with the first question, and then let students take over.
- ✓ Vary the whole class format:
 - Fishbowl
 - Future's Wheel
 - Socratic Seminar
 - Round Table
 - Case Study



- ✓ Conduct formative assessment with these questions:
 - What conclusions have we drawn so far?
 - What part of our discussion is the most confusing?
 - What questions should we focus on next?
- ✓ Strategize how you will deal with students who dominate, are off topic, inaccurate or unresponsive
- ✓ Managing hot moments in the classroom
- ✓ Plan how you will end the conversation

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

It is important to leave time at the end of the discussion to synthesize the central issues covered, key questions raised, etc. There are a number of ways to synthesize:

- You could, for example, tell students that one of them (they won't know who in advance) will be asked at the end of every discussion round to identify the major issues, concerns, and conclusions generated during discussion.
- You could also ask students individually to write down what they believe was the most important point, the overall conclusion, and/or a question the discussion raised in their mind (these can be collected and serve as the basis of a follow-up lecture or discussion.)
- You might also provide students with a set of 2 or 3 "take-home" points synthesizing what you thought were the key issues raised in discussion.

Synthesizing the discussion is a critical step for linking the discussion to the original learning objectives and demonstrating progress towards meeting those objectives.

NOTES

- **Source:** <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/rethinking-whole-class-discussion-todd-finley>; www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/instructionalstrategies/discussions
- **Educational Standards:** CASEL: Self Awareness, CASEL: Social Awareness, CASEL: Relationship Skills, P21: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, P21: Communication and Collaboration, P21: Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, P21: Leadership and Responsibility, CCRS:SL1 Have Diverse Conversations, CCRS:SL3 Evaluate Perspective and Evidence