

Discussion and Debate Introduction

# Discussion and Debate: Introduction

## Spark



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The slogan “Keep Calm and Carry On” is ubiquitous—in memes and on t-shirts, bookbags, pins, and posters. The message was originally devised by Britain’s Ministry of Information in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War II in Europe. It was intended to inspire the British people to remain stoic during turbulent times. The message has since been adapted as a motto for maintaining one’s peace of mind amid the chaos of modern life. Consider it as you begin this unit on discussion and debate. As you may know, discussions or debates about hot-button topics may often lead to misunderstandings, high emotions, and the impulse to lash out. In this unit, you will learn skills and strategies for keeping a cool head and a respectful demeanor while presenting your ideas and point of view in a discussion or debate.

Among the skills you will learn about in the unit are active listening, posing and responding to questions, summarizing viewpoints, critiquing, and appreciating different perspectives. As you read the flipbook, focus on how the students use these and other skills to engage with one another in discussion and debate.

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# Activate Prior Knowledge

In the scenarios you read about in the flipbook, the students employ their speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills to exchange ideas in a meaningful way in a discussion or a debate. By this point in your education, you have probably participated in many discussions and possibly even in some debates. Reflect on those experiences to complete the activity.

## Activity

Think about the discussion and debate skills that you consider your strengths, and write them in the left column of the chart. For example, perhaps you are a good listener, or you ask thoughtful questions. Next, identify skills that you would like to become more proficient at in the context of discussion or debate. Maybe you struggle to challenge others' ideas, or you are better at posing questions than justifying your ideas. Write these skills in the right column of the chart.

T-Chart



If possible, save your completed organizer so you can refer to it later, after you have completed the lessons in this unit, to see how your skills develop and improve.

## Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

[Hide Learning Coach Guide](#)

### Learning Goals

Throughout this unit, your student will learn about skills and strategies for participating in effective discussions and debates. Your student will also have an opportunity to apply those skills by taking part in an online discussion.

### Spark

1. Have your student read the unit title and look at the photo before they read the introductory paragraphs. Ask your student to share any associations they have with the slogan “Keep Calm and Carry On.”
2. Ask your student to provide an example of a recent discussion they have taken part in. Encourage your student to identify the basic elements of a discussion (e.g., two or more people involved, the use of language to communicate ideas, the exchange of ideas, equal parts speaking, listening, and thinking). Talk with your student about what the purpose of a discussion typically is (to answer a question, to solve a problem, to communicate an idea).
3. If your student has experience with debate, then discuss the basic elements of debate (two sides argue in favor or against a particular issue or topic) and its purpose (to win an argument with persuasive evidence and rhetorical techniques).
4. Encourage your student to describe their example of a recent discussion in more detail. Ask guiding questions to determine their

level of confidence in sharing ideas and opinions in a public forum. Do they get nervous or anxious, or are they steady and focused during a discussion? If the former, then ask your student if the motto “Keep Calm and Carry On” has any meaning for them in the context of discussion and debate.

- 5.** Clarify that your student will, over the course of this unit, learn about and practice skills and strategies that will enable them to participate in discussion or debate effectively.
- 6.** Invite your student to read the flipbook, focusing on the different skills that are the focus of each scenario.

### Activate Prior Knowledge

- 1.** Have your student read the paragraph and refer back to the flipbook as needed. Then, guide your student to complete the activity by identifying their strengths and weaknesses in the context of discussion and debate.
- 2.** Give your student a copy of the T-Chart graphic organizer and have them respond to the prompt by listing at least two discussion or debate skills they feel confident about and at least one skill they feel they can improve. Then, talk about their responses. Use the chart as an opportunity for your student to share insights about how they feel about discussing and debating with others.
- 3.** Encourage your student to save their completed organizer so they can refer to it later in the unit to see whether they have gained confidence and proficiency.

T-Chart

# Discussion and Debate: Introduction

## The Basics of Discussion and Debate

Discussion and debate are forms of communication that involve collaborating with other people to examine and explore complex ideas and gain new perspectives on them. Discussion, in the academic context, is a back-and-forth conversation about a specific topic or issue. It is more structured than everyday conversation, but it can be just as free-ranging and enlightening. Debate, on the other hand, is more formal and rules-bound than discussion. The purpose of a debate is for one side to win an argument through the persuasive presentation of evidence and use of rhetorical strategies.

Both discussion and debate require the use of these skills, which you will learn about in the unit:

- Collaborating with peers to set rules for collegial discussions
- Posing and responding thoughtfully to questions in order to relate the discussion to broader themes or larger ideas
- Respecting diverse perspectives
- Seeking clarification or verification of ideas
- Challenging others' conclusions and critiquing their presentations
- Summarizing points of agreement and disagreement
- Justifying one's own views and understanding
- Making connections to new ideas and evidence

At the end of the unit, you will have the opportunity to put these skills to use when you participate in an online discussion about the value of reading literature, such as novels and stories.

What specific goal or goals do you have as you begin this unit about discussion and debate? Why have you chosen these specific goals? How will they help you in discussion or debate situations?

## Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

[View Learning Coach Guide](#)

[Hide Learning Coach Guide](#)

### The Basics of Discussion and Debate

- 1.** Explain to your student that discussion and debate are specific forms of communication that are more structured and focused than general conversation. Clarify that, in this unit, your student will read and learn about skills and strategies that will help them discuss and debate topics effectively.
- 2.** Have your student read the bulleted list of skills they will learn about in the unit. Then, ask them to respond to the question by setting a goal for the unit vis-à-vis developing effective discussion and debate skills. You may wish to have your student respond to the question in writing so that they may return to their response after they have completed the unit to reflect on whether they have met their goal.

## Discussions

# Objective and Key Words

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## Objective

In this section, you will describe the goal of discussions and debates and the differences between them.

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## Key Words

- **active listening** – giving full attention to a speaker and responding in a way that improves mutual understanding
- **adjudicator** – a judge in a competition
- **argumentation** – the process of using logical reasoning to move from a thesis statement to a conclusion
- **claim** – a statement that is the main argument
- **consensus** – a general agreement or majority opinion
- **counterclaim** – a statement that refutes or contradicts a previous claim
- **critical thinking skills** – a person's ability to evaluate data, make connections, and draw conclusions in a rational, unbiased way
- **debate** – a formal contest on a set issue with two sides taking opposing viewpoints

- **discussion** – a group communication where ideas and information are shared
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# Discussions, Debates, and Differences

## Describing Discussions and Debates



Source: Zurijeta. Shutterstock

In late summer 2022, more than 8,500 students from 1,500 schools gathered in Louisville, Kentucky, to put their communication skills to a huge test. They were there to participate in the annual National Speech and Debate Association Tournament, a contest that has been held since 1931. For decades, young people have participated in



five days of competition and, as the NSDA website puts it, “. . . debate current events, voice their views, and share their stories.” Thousands of people in the live audience watch the event, while hundreds of thousands stream it online. Watching these students defend their positions on various issues from politics to religion to history is often inspirational and an excellent reminder of how essential communication skills are in today’s world.

As Jan Koum, businessman and computer engineer, stated, “Communication is at the very core of our society. That’s what makes us human.”

Communication skills are ones that you will not only use in educational situations and at work but also with friends, family, and associates. It is the way that you can express your emotions, beliefs, opinions, and thoughts, plus share important information and individual ideas.

An emphasis on learning how to communicate effectively and successfully cannot be overstated and is one of the main reasons behind studying and adopting the skills in both debates and discussions. Both activities intensely explore a topic or issue via interested, knowledgeable, and active participants who are responsible for contributing important information.

Participation in communication activities, such as debates and discussions, requires a combination of using active listening and critical thinking skills. While the two types of communication are quite similar, they diverge when it comes to their overall purposes.

Debates and discussions will be applied to all of your future communications with people. The skills these activities impart will make it easier to persuade your boss to give you a promotion, help you explain your position on a controversial issue with your family or friends, and hone your public speaking skills. Past vice president Hubert Humphrey once even stated that, “Freedom is hammered out on the anvil of discussion, dissent, and debate.” While both types of communication are equal in importance and often overlap, when it comes to their overall purpose, they are quite dissimilar.

In a debate, the setting is formal, and a firm set of rules governs the format and timing of the event. Two teams are assigned a topic and then instructed to either defend the idea or refute it through the process of argumentation. To present their position on the given topic, debaters rely on a blend of **evidence** and **reason** to support their claim and counterclaims. Debates are governed by rules that guarantee each person on each side is given equal amounts of time to speak; warning bells caution them if they exceed their allotted time.

When both sides have finished presenting their claims and addressing their opponent's counterclaims, an adjudicator determines who defended their claim best and declares a winner. In some instances, instead of a judge, the vote for the winner is given to the audience. Both actions emphasize the purpose of any debate: to win.

There is little question that debates can teach you and students of all ages better public speaking skills, but it also hones your research skills and manners. Participants are fully expected to do research so they are knowledgeable about the topic. In turn, all debaters are expected to follow the rules, take turns, be polite, and work together as a team.

Are discussions much different from debates? After all, they share many qualities: they focus on communication and public speaking, and they expect good manners, and knowledgeable input from others. While the two definitely overlap, it is their overall purpose or goal that is significantly different. Debates focus on competition, while discussions revolve around cooperation.

Discussions happen when a group of people get together in order to talk about a specific topic, but rather than hoping to be winners and take home a trophy, participants are working to achieve a consensus. Discussions are far more informal in how they are conducted, with no set rules, warning bells, or adjudicators/votes. While facts, documents, and statistics are often included in a discussion, the gathering is not limited to them. It is common for discussions to include a variety of people's personal stories,

opinions, and beliefs. A successful discussion is one in which the members reach a consensus that they all agree with or at least can accept as part of a compromise. Koum stated that communication is what makes us human. If this is true, debates and discussions are excellent venues for making sure that we humans stay connected.

## Question 1

How is a debate's claim like a research paper's thesis statement?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The claim is the idea that the debate will center around and support, just like the thesis statement in a paper.

## Question 2

Why do debates tend to employ warning bells?

Reveal Answer

Sample Answer: They ensure that people do not go over their allotted time for speaking, which helps them stick to their ideas.

## Question 3

What is the proper term for a statement that refutes a debate's claim?

Reveal Answer

A counterclaim

# Check-In

Think about the description of debates and discussions as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

Why would it be easier for someone who is shy to participate in a discussion rather than a debate?

- a.** Discussions tend to be shorter than debates.
- b.** Discussions do not mandate that everyone participates.
- c.** Discussions have set rules that make it easier to speak up.
- d.** Discussions do not expect all members to be knowledgeable.

Reveal Answer

- b.** Discussions do not mandate that everyone participates.

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## Question 2

Re-read the quote from Hubert Humphrey. What do you think he was saying?

Reveal Answer

Sample Answer: Humphrey was saying that the only way a country stays truly free is by examining, questioning, and analyzing issues through the processes of discussions, disagreement, and debate.

## Question 3

Which of these topics would be **most** suited for a discussion instead of a debate?

- a.** The Electoral College should be abolished.
- b.** More government money should be allocated to public transit.
- c.** The local animal shelter needs to recruit more community volunteers.
- d.** Wind farms should be the primary energy source in the future.

Reveal Answer

- c.** The local animal shelter needs to recruit more community volunteers.

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# Practice

## Activity

Ibrahim Babangida, former president of Nigeria, once stated that “Debate and divergence of views can only enrich our history and culture.” Do you agree or disagree with this quote? In the first paragraph, summarize what you think Babangida meant with this quote, and in the second paragraph, state if you agree or disagree with the statement. Be sure to give at least two reasons for your opinion.

### Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Babangida, an African political leader, was stating that he believes a nation is improved by debate on a topic with a variety of viewpoints. He believes that not agreeing is often what leads to enrichment.

I agree with Babangida because I think living in a country with people who all thought and believed exactly as I did would not only be boring, but it would not result in change and growth. Both of these elements are very important to any nation.

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## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ I explained the meaning of the quote and my opinion about it.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I included specific details and examples from the lesson about the differences between debates and discussions.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
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# Objective and Key Words

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## Objective

In this section, you will work with peers in order to understand how to set helpful rules for collegial discussions and decision making.

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## Key Words

- **active listening** – giving full attention to a speaker and responding in a way that improves mutual understanding
- **brevity** – an economic use of words
- **checker** – a person who ensures the accuracy and clarity of the information given in the discussion
- **clarity** – clearness of expression
- **collaboration** – the process of working together with one or more people in order to achieve something
- **collegial discussion** – mutually respectful conversations between student colleagues in a group or classroom environment
- **consensus** – a general agreement or majority opinion
- **facilitator** – a person who keeps the group on-task and verifies their contributions
- **materials manager** – a person who picks up, distributes, and collects materials used in a discussion
- **recorder** – a person who takes notes on important thoughts or decisions in a group discussion

- **reporter** – a person who shares the summary of the discussions;  
spokesperson for the group
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# Discussions, Decisions, and Deadlines

## Participating in Democratic Collegial Discussions



Source: William Perugini. Shutterstock

Life is full of words—written, spoken, signed, and shared. Conversations are often the ideal vehicle for solving problems, expressing concerns, exploring questions, and making decisions. The key to quality discussions is rooted in solid communication. As motivational speaker and author Tony Robbins says, “Communication is power. Those

who have mastered its effective use can change their own experience of the world and the world's experience of them." He goes on to add, "All behavior and feelings find their original roots in some form of communication."

One of the most effective methods of communication when it comes to making decisions is the democratic collegial discussion. Not only can this type of talking help you become a more confident and reliable student and speaker, but it can also help you learn another one of life's most vital skills: working creatively with others. The ability to take part in a group activity while following the rules, fulfilling your role, exhibiting respect, and achieving a goal is one that will very likely pop up throughout the rest of your life.

Take a moment to think about some of the discussions you have had in the last few months with your family, friends, or other acquaintances. What was your primary focus? Did your perspective change from when the discussion started to when it ended? Were you and the others involved in the discussion able to reach a decision or consensus, and if so, how did collaboration assist you in coming to that conclusion?

A number of the discussions you have in life will probably be informal ones in which people just happen to be chatting about an issue and opinions, facts, ideas, and questions are thrown in randomly and often spontaneously. On the other hand, collegial discussions are significantly more formal, typically taking place in a group or employment setting. The formality of these events is reflected in the fact that they feature both basic rules and key roles for group members. Some members will be assigned the role of facilitator, recorder, or materials manager. Others might be asked to serve as checkers or reporters. Collegial discussions are not random or extemporaneous. Instead, they are planned and revolve around a predetermined issue or topic. Everyone included in the discussion is expected to participate and work as part of a team to make decisions about what potential action steps or decisions need to be made.

Taking part in democratic collegial discussions means taking responsibility for your involvement and role. Even those who are not given a particular position to fulfill are

expected to follow set rules, including:

- avoid getting sidetracked into unrelated topics or side conversations
- demonstrate respect for other people's ideas and opinions, even those you may personally disagree with
- employ the communication skills of brevity and clarity whenever speaking
- exercise the skill of active listening so that you understand and can accurately respond to what others are expressing
- work creatively with others in order to make the best decisions and reach a general consensus

While learning the skills of participating in collegial-style discussions will help you as a student, they will also help you as a friend, family member, employee, and leader. As one African proverb states, "Having a good discussion is like having riches." And who doesn't want a richer life?

## Question 1

What is the main difference between regular discussions and collegial discussions?

Reveal Answer

Collegial discussions tend to take place in the classroom, include roles/positions, and rules to follow.

## Question 2

What does the term "democratic" imply about collegial discussions?

Reveal Answer

The term means "with equal participation by all," which is not a requirement in all conversations, but it is a key factor in their effectiveness.

# Check-In

Think about how collegial discussions revolve around rules and roles in order to make decisions as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

Based on what you learned about the roles of checkers and reporters in a collegial discussion, which one would require the best public speaking skills?

Reveal Answer

The reporter would require the strongest public speaking skills because they often operate as the spokesperson for the entire group.

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## Question 2

How do discussions improve a person's ability to work creatively with others?

Reveal Answer

Knowing how to stay on topic, fill a role, make decisions, and reach a consensus when working with others that you may or may not agree with can teach essential skills in working with others. Being creative means feeling free enough to express yourself and know you will be accepted, even if disagreed with.

# Practice

## Activity

Author and speaker Ken Blanchard once said, “None of us is as smart as all of us.” In your own words, explain what Blanchard meant with this quote. Then, use your analysis of the quote to describe how discussions are a key to working creatively with others.

### Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Blanchard’s quote emphasizes that, when working as a team, you will probably know more and be “smarter” than you would be just on your own. A good discussion introduces new ideas and perspectives, thus expanding any person’s viewpoint on a topic. By mutually discussing an issue and using active listening skills as others speak, we can learn from each other and gain a much more diverse and thorough understanding of an idea. In this kind of discussion, members are all working together creatively for a common goal, and this shared mission can help each person feel stronger and smarter.

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## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to each part of the prompt.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ I included both an analysis of the meaning of the quote and how it impacts collegial discussions.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I used vocabulary terms from the lesson in my response.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
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# Objective and Key Words

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## Objective

In this section, you will work with peers to understand how to pose questions that relate a discussion to broader or larger ideas.

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## Key Words

- **consensus** – a general agreement or majority opinion
  - **divergent** – differing or not matching
  - **empathy** – understanding the feelings of others
  - **evidence** – the facts, documentation, or testimony used to strengthen a claim
  - **inference** – a conclusion drawn from evidence or reasoning
  - **open-ended question** – a question that requires a deeper and more thought-out answer than a yes or no
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# Discussions, Decisions, and Deadlines

## Posing Questions in Collegial Discussions



Source: Rawpixel.com. Shutterstock

Poet Beau Taplin wrote that, “Night air, good conversation, and a sky full of stars can heal almost any wound.” While this is quite a lofty statement, a number of people would likely agree with it. A good conversation implies respect, empathy, patience, and clear communication, and each element is integral to healing wounds, as well as

connecting with others. Being capable of having profound and complex conversations about a wide variety of issues is an essential skill, not only in collegial discussions but also in personal relationships and in employment scenarios. A truly focused discussion is undoubtedly one of the most effective ways humans can explore an idea while also examining the reasoning and evidence we have for our claims and perspectives on the issue. Conversations make it possible to learn more not only about an idea but also about ourselves, our opinions, and the world we live in.

Ponder the last discussion you participated in, whether informal/casual or formal/professional. What was the primary purpose for the conversation, and what did you learn from the experience? Was the conversation lively and enthusiastic or did it fizzle out, or get lost in detoured topics? Were you able to reach any kind of consensus despite potentially dealing with some divergent opinions?

Keeping the momentum behind collegial discussions is challenging. Sometimes the conversation stalls or gets sidetracked, and then it is up to a wise and observant leader to steer the conversation in new directions. Asking questions that connect the discussion topic to broader themes and more complex issues is one of the best methods for propelling a conversation. It allows the conversation to evolve from simple, factual questions and answers to far more in-depth ideas involving analysis and inference. This moves the discussion forward further, typically leading to an animated exchange of thoughts and beliefs.

As you watch the following video, observe that the student explains how discussions can sometimes get derailed and how to prevent unnecessary detours by asking open-ended questions that appeal to the higher-level thinking skills of analysis, evaluation, and creativity.

Pay close attention to the suggestions in the video on how to start asking higher-level questions and the examples demonstrating how to connect to broader ideas.



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## Peer Model Video Transcript

Now, answer the questions.

### Question 1

What is the term for what happens when people get distracted and begin speaking about topics unrelated to the primary idea of the discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: This type of detour is often referred to as getting sidetracked.

### Question 2

Which of the following examples would be considered an open-ended question?

- a.** Did you end up being late for the meeting?
- b.** Is the next meeting going to be held on Tuesday?
- c.** What do you think about the idea of starting later?
- d.** Do you plan to bring anyone with you to the next meeting?

Reveal Answer

- c.** What do you think about the idea of starting later?

# Check-In

Consider how collegial discussions can be propelled by linking to broader topics or complex issues as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

What is the primary responsibility of an effective and observant discussion leader?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: A discussion leader is mainly responsible for monitoring the progress of a conversation and being ready to ask questions to stimulate more discussion if it starts to fade or get detoured.

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## Question 2

According to the video's narrator, what are lower-level thinking skills and three examples?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Lower-level thinking skills are those that are the easiest to answer and require the least amount of analysis. The three main ones are remembering information, demonstrating understanding of the topic's basic concepts, and applying the information learned.

# Practice

## Activity

Reflect back on poet Beau Taplin's quote about good conversation and its ability to, at least partially, help heal wounds. What role do you believe a good conversation plays in healing, and how does it compare to the other advice in the quote (the power of "night air" and "a sky full of stars")? Now that you have learned more about being part of in-depth discussions involving open-ended questions and higher-level thinking skills, explain why you agree or disagree with the quote. Be sure to include details learned from both the lesson and the video.

### Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I agree with Taplin's quote. A wound that needs to be healed is often a mental or emotional one, and there is little that helps that type of wound more than clear and honest communication. By having a conversation with an individual or a group, you can often find solutions or answers. This is especially true if participants use open-ended questions and higher-level thinking skills because then communication will be more thoughtful and insightful. While exposure to stars at night can certainly help a person feel better emotionally, they will do little to help heal a wound or find any solutions. The biggest key is conversation and really talking out an issue with others.

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## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to each part of the prompt.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I stated my opinion about the quote and supported it with information learned in the video and the lesson.

**3.** \_\_\_\_\_ I used vocabulary terms from the lesson in my response.

**4.** \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

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Civil Discourse

# Objective and Key Words

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## Objective

In this section, you will respond to questions in order to relate the discussion to bigger ideas and move conversations forward.

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## Key Words

- **active listening skills** – giving full attention to a speaker and responding in a way that improves mutual understanding
  - **collegial discussion** – mutually respectful conversations between student colleagues in a group or classroom environment
  - **justify** – to make something seem reasonable or to explain something
  - **rational conclusion** – a decision based on facts and/or logic
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# Responding to Big Ideas, Propelling the Conversation

## Responding to Questions



Source: luminaimages. Shutterstock

Every day, millions of people go online to read and participate in one of the internet's countless online discussion forums. Whether they are checking Reddit to discuss politics, Quora to ask a question, Stack Overflow to query about a programming issue,

GameSpot for video gaming tips, or some other forum they enjoy, they are looking to talk with others about topics they personally care about or are interested in.

Taking part in either a face-to-face or online collegial discussion revolves around the same basic principles: You are there to discuss a topic you care about and you get to share your perspectives, learn about others' divergent ideas, pose and respond to questions, and even, over time, reach some rational conclusions. By conversing with others, you will most likely have the opportunity to clarify your beliefs, opinions, and thoughts while you also use a combination of evidence and reasoning in order to justify your position.

If you have ever participated in any kind of discussion before, you know that there are some skills that make the conversation flow and stay dynamic, just as there are some types of behaviors that do just the opposite. Discussions tend to revolve around questions that are asked and the responses that are offered. You may agree wholeheartedly with some of those statements and disagree with others. That's normal, but it can create problems if people don't moderate their responses and engage instead, in inflammatory behaviors such as name calling, swearing, raising their voice, or getting overly emotional. Unfortunately, these types of actions can be a catalyst to bigger conflicts and have the potential to damage relationships, temporarily or permanently, within the group.

Remembering to be respectful and polite is essential to the success of any discussion. Demonstrating good manners in the face of controversy is not easy – the news is full of stories of people who are not able to do that. However, being considerate is key to maintaining a productive discussion. Using the active listening skills you have learned helps any group maintain civility and good manners. Some possible responses to use when people within a group are actively disagreeing include follow-up questions, such as:

- Could you give me an example?
- When you say \_\_\_\_\_, are you inferring that \_\_\_\_\_?
- Could you explain that idea further, please?



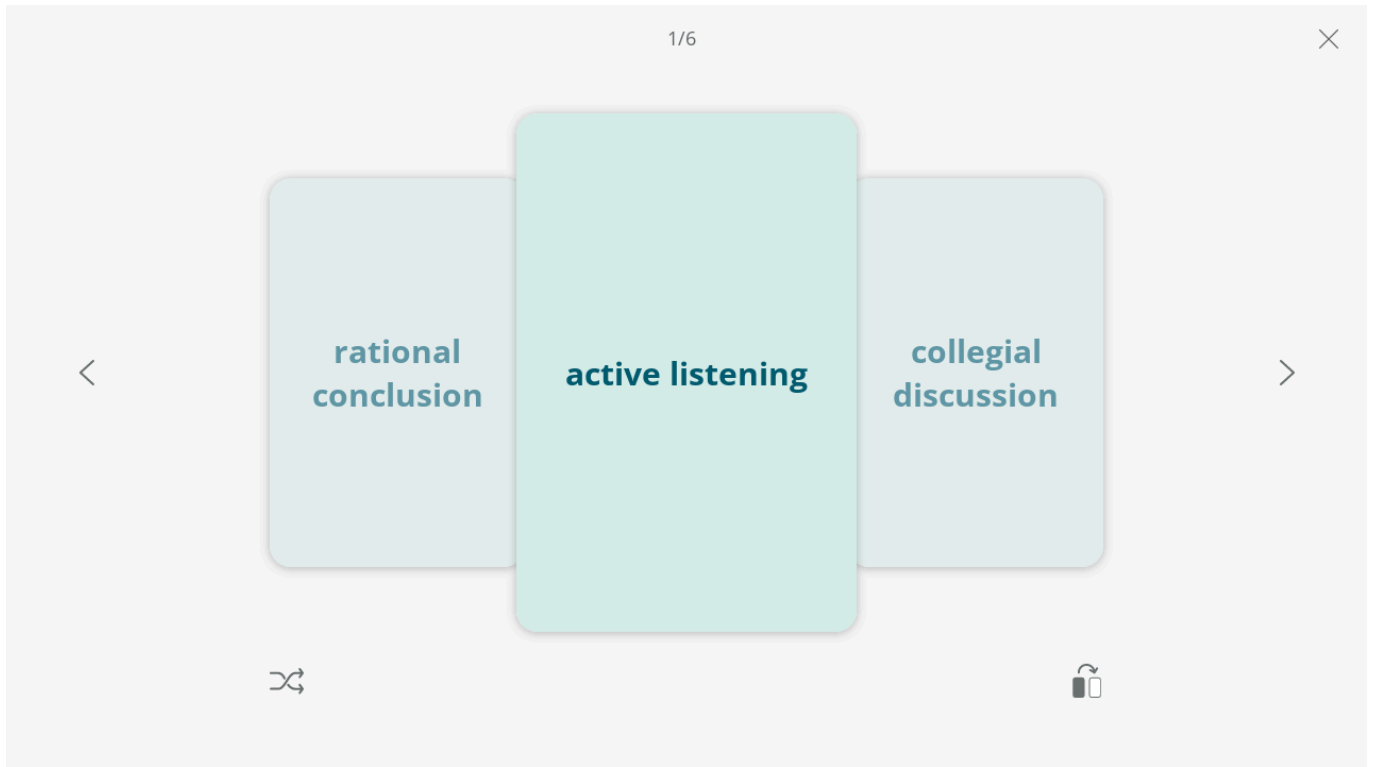
- Can you tell me more about your experience?
- What an unusual perspective—why do you think that?
- I'd love to know more, so could you please share your sources?

These questions are neutral rather than combative or argumentative, so they will probably keep the conversation flowing. By taking the time to respond respectfully to people's comments, each member will feel included and not overlooked or unheard.

Being part of a great discussion also means that the conversation does not falter or fade out, but instead stays lively and energetic. This can be managed by posing open-ended questions as well as probing ones. These questions require participants to think more deeply, analyze more thoroughly, and be ready to provide the evidence and reasoning behind their contributions. These types of questions also mean that conversation is propelled into new directions and often connects to larger themes. Whether to create bike trails in the city can become a discussion about exercise and health. A talk about how to do basic computer repairs might link to a discussion about the field of internet technology.

Discussions hone your speaking and listening skills while they also help you pose and respond to questions, explore connections to broader themes, and expose you to the perspectives of others on a mutual issue. Whether you participate in person or online, a discussion will give you an opportunity to expand your horizons, even from the desk in your room.

Use the flashcards to review the meaning of key terms before you answer the questions.



## Question 1

What type of behavior would be considered “inflammatory”?

- a.** asking questions
- b.** yelling a response
- c.** justifying your opinion
- d.** requesting sources

Reveal Answer

- b.** yelling a response

## Question 2

Which of the following is considered an open-ended question?

- a.** Did you vote in the last presidential election?
- b.** Which candidate do you think is doing the best job?
- c.** Did you see the latest presidential approval ratings?
- d.** Why do you think that reporter is trustworthy?

Reveal Answer

- d.** Why do you think that reporter is trustworthy?

# Check-In

Think about the importance of posing and responding to questions in order to have a proper conversation as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

Which type of language tends to be most conducive to a discussion?

- a.** argumentative
- b.** neutral
- c.** inflammatory
- d.** conclusory

Reveal Answer

- b.** neutral

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## Question 2

Which words best complete this sentence?

Asking questions designed to \_\_\_\_\_ conversation means that the discussion will remain\_\_\_\_\_, especially when people express \_\_\_\_\_ perspectives.

- a.** maintain; stagnant; similar
- b.** probe; personal; individual
- c.** propel; lively; divergent

**d.** justify; opinionated; erroneous

Reveal Answer

**c.** Asking questions designed to propel conversation means that the discussion will remain lively, especially when people express divergent perspectives.

## Question 3

What does it mean to connect to “broader themes and bigger ideas” in a collegial discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: It means that your topic can often connect to grander or larger concepts than the one at hand.

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# Practice

## Activity

Coach and business consultant Jesse Lyn Stoner once stated, “If we only discuss issues with people who agree with us, we stop learning and become self-righteous.” Based on what you have learned in this lesson, do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your opinion with examples, ideas, opinions, and other types of evidence and reasoning from the lesson.

### Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I agree with Stoner because I have been in discussions where everyone agrees and it isn't long before the conversation just fades away. It is only when someone has a controversial or opposing viewpoint that the conversation speeds up and more people get involved. I think there has to be at least some dissent or alternative viewpoints in the group for the discussion to be lively and fun.

---

## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the quote and then supported my opinion about it with reasons and evidence.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I included specific details and examples from the lesson about posing and responding to questions in discussions.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

# Objective and Key Words

---

## Objective

In this section, you will respond thoughtfully and be flexible when facing diverse perspectives.

---

## Key Words

- **contradictions** – an illogical or opposing statement
  - **diverse perspectives** – viewpoints informed by different backgrounds, experiences, information, and cultures
  - **empathy** – understanding the feelings of others
  - **summarizing** – providing a shortened version of something said/written, including the main points
  - **synthesizing** – combining various components into a new whole
-

# Divergent Perspectives, Contradictions, and Resolutions

## Coping with Contradictions and Opposing Ideas



Source: rumkavodki. 123rf.com

Stress! It is part of everyone's lives and, when a stressor is short term, it can actually be quite helpful. Your heart beats faster and your body releases helpful hormones; you quickly feel more alert and energetic, often giving you the drive and momentum you need to complete a project or get through a presentation. Unfortunately, most of life's stressors are not short-term, but chronic, meaning that stressors keep recurring repeatedly. That can take a toll on both your mental and physical health.



One of the main stressors you may encounter is when you are part of a discussion that involves diverse perspectives as they commonly result in some type of disagreement. The majority of discussions revolve around people's individual thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences, so disputes are almost unavoidable. How you respond and adapt and deal with those differences, however, is completely under your control—and that means you have the power to make those stressors less . . . stressful!

Most people believe that disagreeing with someone is unpleasant, and dealing with statements that are clearly contradictions to your own personal attitudes and beliefs can result in raised voices, anger, and other inflammatory behavior. On the other hand, disagreements in a discussion are integral to their success. They give you the opportunity to clarify your personal concepts and ideas to ensure their accuracy, plus justify your viewpoint with your reasons and evidence. Imagine taking part in a discussion where absolutely everyone agrees with you on not only the main ideas, but the side details as well. Chances are it would be a short and simple discussion because there would be no points to debate or deliberate.

Dealing with arguments during a discussion takes skill, patience, and flexibility. This can be done in part by summarizing what someone has said, demonstrating that you have been listening carefully and doing your best to understand a different perspective than your own. It also gives you the chance to model empathy, which can certainly help other members to see that even if you disagree with them, you understand their position. Additionally, you can also focus on synthesizing people's opinions, highlighting what ideas converge and which ones diverge. Sometimes one of the best steps to take during a discussion dispute is to suggest that people do additional research or get more information to help clear up any conflicts.

Staying patient and respectful in the face of diverse perspectives can be challenging, but it is an important skill you will use many times during your lifetime. Do it well and you will not only help to resolve some conflicts but you might just learn a great deal in the process.

Now, answer the questions.

## Question 1

How is a momentary experience of stress considered beneficial?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Brief experiences of stress can motivate you and make it easier for you to get through a project or meeting. Hormones are released, making you feel more energetic and alert.

## Question 2

What is the proper term for a statement, belief, or opinion that conflicts with your own?

- a.** synthesis
- b.** contradiction
- c.** justification
- d.** analysis

Reveal Answer

- b.** contradiction

# Check-In

Consider the importance of responding well and helpfully to contradictions as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

Which of these scenarios is the **best** example of a chronic stressor?

- a.** You have a flat tire on the way to work.
- b.** You are asked to do a brief speech at a meeting.
- c.** You have a daily conflict with a family member.
- d.** You are preparing for a job interview late next week.

Reveal Answer

- c.** You have a daily conflict with a family member.

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## Question 2

Why would a discussion group that agrees on every opinion, idea, and concept expressed most likely end up becoming tedious and uninspiring?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: If everyone in a group agrees on everything, there are no debates or close examination of new concepts. We learn when we disagree, whether we only confirm our beliefs or learn about others that are intriguing. Conflict is where the learning takes place, but only if done with good manners and empathy.

## Question 3

What is synthesizing and how does it play a role in diffusing any conflicts that arise within a group discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Synthesizing is a process that involves combining or merging what people have said in the group setting. When a group leader does that well, it highlights the areas of common ground people have, and then examines the disagreements in a more positive manner.

# Practice

## Activity

Turkish playwright and novelist Mehmet Mura Ildan once stated, “The most important strategy of life is flexibility: Do not insist on the train, neither on the direction of the train, nor on the station! Have the flexibility to take a completely different train from a completely different station in the opposite direction of the direction you want to go in the beginning!” What do you think this train metaphor represents and in what ways does the quote connect to the lesson and what it expressed about the importance of flexibility when confronting conflict in a discussion?

### Reveal Answer

Sample answer: In this quote, I believe that the train metaphor represents looking at conflict and opportunities in life and being flexible enough to adapt to changing situations. Ildan is pointing out that we need to be more flexible overall in our lives, plus be willing to make new choices if the situation requires it. This reinforces what the lesson stated about being flexible when confronted with conflict and adapting to each situation as needed. By being willing to listen to other people’s opinions and employ empathy and patience, we can learn and improve.

---

## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the quote and then supported my opinion about it with reasons and evidence.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I included specific details and examples from the lesson about responding thoughtfully to divergent perspectives.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

---

# Objective and Key Words

---

## Objective

In this section, you will clarify, verify, and challenge ideas or conclusions.

---

## Key Words

- **assertions** – strong statements that something is true
  - **challenged** – to doubt, question, or dispute the truth of a statement
  - **conclusion** – a decision based on facts
  - **justify** – to make something seem reasonable or explaining something
  - **refuted** – proved that a statement is incorrect
  - **verify** – to check whether something is true
-

# Facing Discussion Challenges

Justify, Verify, and Clarify



Source: pathdoc. Shutterstock

Nikola Tesla had a job he loved but a boss he didn't. His boss, Thomas Edison, just wouldn't listen to his ideas. Not only would he not listen, but Edison also dismissed Tesla's new concepts until, at last, Tesla had had enough. He took his ideas and his patents and quit. He sold several of them to a competing company, resulting in a bitter feud that lasted the rest of the two men's lives.

Just imagine what might have happened if these two—Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison—had managed to get past their animosity and competition and worked out their issues. Their amazing contributions to electricity and the field of science will never be



forgotten, but you have to wonder what those inventions might have been like if the two men had taken the time to resolve their conflicts.

Challenge is a normal aspect of life, and it will certainly be a common element whenever you are involved in a collegial discussion. Disagreements in this type of communication are quite inevitable, but, fortunately, they are also quite beneficial. Many members of a discussion group may feel rather uncomfortable or frustrated if they are being challenged to verify or clarify their viewpoints to each other. Having your personal assertions questioned or even refuted can be awkward or, as Tesla found out, very upsetting. However, if you can keep the right attitude, disagreements in a discussion can give each participant a few golden opportunities. You get the chance to double check your reasons and evidence for accuracy; you can justify your perspectives. In addition, you can spot any potential errors or gaps in your reasoning and examine your overall conclusions for truthfulness.

One reason that disagreements are so commonplace in most discussions is that the group's participants usually come from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, information, and cultures which, in turn, create their thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. In these instances, knowing how to verify, clarify, and justify your ideas will be essential, as will your ability to stay calm, cool, and collected if someone happens to disagree with you.

As you watch the following video, note how the students discuss whether it is best to read a book first—or see a movie based on the book. Listen carefully for the moments when one student asks the other to clarify or verify a statement they have made. Did you see the challenges made? In the end, how do they work out the issue?

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

## Peer Model Video Transcript

Now, answer the questions.

### Question 1

What are the two students in the video disagreeing about?

- a.** if the book they want to read is worth the time
- b.** whether to go to the afternoon or evening movie
- c.** if it is better to read a book or see a movie based on the book first
- d.** whether the book was adapted well into a movie

Reveal Answer

- c.** if it is better to read a book or see a movie based on the book first

### Question 2

In the video, the students did all the following except:

- a.** verify the accuracy of their statements
- b.** clarify their statements to make them clearer
- c.** make a statement about what they will do next
- d.** challenge each other's statements and opinions

Reveal Answer

- c.** make a statement about what they will do next

# Check-In

Think about the best ways to respond to challenges in a discussion as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

Why does this lesson begin with a story about Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The story highlights what happens when two intelligent and creative men are unable to resolve their differences and how the world might be even better if they had.

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## Question 2

Disagreements can be uncomfortable, but they also give each member the chance to do four important things. What are they?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Disagreements give you the chance to double check your reasons and evidence for accuracy, justify your perspectives, spot any potential errors or gaps in your reasoning, and examine your overall conclusions for truthfulness.

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# Practice

## Activity

Napoleon Bonaparte once stated, “The people to fear are not those who disagree with you, but those who disagree with you and are too cowardly to let you know.” Explain what he meant with this statement and how it relates to what you have learned in this lesson.

### Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I think that Bonaparte was saying that people who openly disagree with you are not problems, but the ones who do and never say anything are the concern. This relates to the lesson because it talks about people who disagree clearly with you in a discussion and those moments are nothing to be afraid of. It is the people in a discussion who are sitting there and saying nothing but obviously disagree with you that can cause the most disturbance.

---

## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the quote and then supported my opinion about it with reasons and evidence.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I included specific details and examples from the lesson about dealing with challenges in a discussion.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

## Discussion Conclusions

# Objective and Key Words

---

## Objective

In this section, you will critique the impact of a speaker's use of diction, syntax, and rhetorical strategies.

---

## Key Words

- **critique** – feedback and constructive criticism received from others
  - **diction** – the choice and use of words and phrases in speech or writing
  - **logical fallacy** – unsound arguments that can be proven wrong with logic and reason
  - **premise** – the basis for an argument
  - **rhetorical strategies** – words or word phrases used to convey meaning, to provoke a response, or to persuade a listener or reader
  - **stance** – your attitude toward something
  - **syntax** – the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences
  - **tone** – a way of speaking to indicate emotions and/or attitude about a subject
-

# Evaluating Diction, Syntax, and Rhetoric



Source: wavebreakmediamicro. 123rf.com

Many people think of “public speaking” as a class that you have to take and then never use again. But the opposite is actually true. The average person can use public speaking skills throughout their lifetime because these skills can help them ace job interviews, stand out in the workforce, bring people together, and make new social connections. Strong public speakers tend to become strong leaders in their fields. Perhaps best of all, learning how to give a convincing, clear, and compelling speech can help boost your



confidence, improve your critical thinking and communication skills, and even lead you to making a difference in the world. On the other hand, not learning these skills—or being so scared you avoid learning them—has been shown to have a detrimental effect on your chances of graduating from college, earning higher wages, or getting promoted.

Preparing for giving a public speech means not only thoroughly knowing the premise of your speech but also using the proper diction and syntax effectively to deliver your message. Keep in mind:

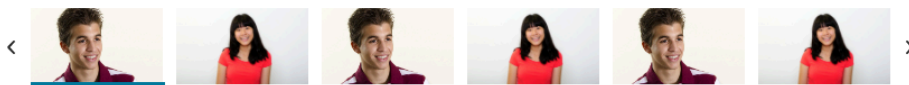
- do not combine slang/informal terms with formal terms
- avoid using sensitive language that could offend your audience
- avoid examples of logical fallacy as it will damage your credibility
- employ a variety of rhetorical strategies to help persuade your audience or encourage their action

View the image gallery to learn about some logical fallacies.



Even though I have only heard the first sentence of your speech, Sasha, I think it's going to be great.

^ Hide caption



Source: yelo34. 123rf.com; FocusDzign. Shutterstock

You also want to ensure that the words you use are said with the right tone, one that matches your stance on the topic. Finally, make sure you can clearly identify your purpose. If you aren't able to state your purpose, you will struggle to choose your stance, tone, diction, and syntax in the first place.

Once you have your speech prepared and you have practiced a few times, it is time to turn to someone you know and trust to critique your speech. Ask them to watch for and note any words, phrases, or ideas that should be clarified, revised, deleted, or added to strengthen the overall message.

As you watch the following video, listen carefully to the two students as one of them practices a speech and the other listens carefully in order to provide helpful feedback. Ask yourself if you noticed the same errors as the listening student did. Did you think of any additional ways to improve the speech as you listened to it?

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

## Peer Model Video Transcript

Now, answer the questions.

### Question 1

What best describes the meaning of “diction”?

- a.** word choice
- b.** punctuation
- c.** style and voice
- d.** rhetoric

Reveal Answer

- a.** word choice

### Question 2

What term is defined as “the reason for speaking” and why is it important to know?

Reveal Answer

That term is *purpose*, and if you don’t know why you are talking to a group of people, you will not be able to organize your speech very well.

# Check-In

Think about the impact of a speaker's use of diction, syntax, and rhetorical strategies on a speech as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

In the video, what are the three things the second student is giving feedback on?

Reveal Answer

The student is providing feedback on diction, syntax, and rhetorical devices.

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## Question 2

Which of these statements is an example of a logical fallacy?

- a.** Dogs like to go on walks, so I'd like to get a family dog.
- b.** Mrs. Cooper is also a professional chef, so her food tastes great.
- c.** Tom Hanks is a great actor, so more people should go to the movies.
- d.** The weather is getting hotter, so more people will come to the city park.

Reveal Answer

- c.** Tom Hanks is a great actor, so more people should go to the movies.

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# Practice

## Activity

The philosopher Plato once stated, “Rhetoric is the art of ruling the minds of men.” In a paragraph or two, explain what this quote means and if, after completing this lesson, you agree or disagree with it.

### Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Rhetoric refers to the art of persuasive speaking or writing, and if done right, Plato says, you can rule the minds of others. I agree with this quote because a truly effective speech, one that relies on preparation and proper diction and syntax, can truly be persuasive. It can convince an audience to do or believe something that they might not have considered before. While I don’t know if that means a speaker can rule people’s minds, it definitely means they can impact thinking.

---

## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the entire prompt.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ I stated what I thought the quote meant and how it related to the video and the lesson.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I used specific evidence from the video to support my idea.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ I included some key concepts and/or Key Words from this section in my response.
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
-

# Objective and Key Words

---

## Objective

In this section, you summarize points in a discussion and deal with inevitable disagreements.

---

## Key Words

- **active listening skills** – giving full attention to a speaker and responding in a way that improves mutual understanding
  - **contradictions** – something illogical or inconsistent, an opposing statement
  - **controversial** – provoking strong disagreement or disapproval
  - **justify** – to make something seem reasonable or to explain something
  - **perspective** – an evaluation or assessment of a situation or facts
  - **summarize** – providing a shortened version of something said/written, including the main points
  - **synthesize** – to combine various components into a new whole
-



# Discussions, Disagreements, and Diverse Perspectives

## Dealing with Disagreements and Contradictions



Source: worradirek. Shutterstock

When Arizona State University began making plans for its first philosophy summer camp for high school students in 2022, they had to start by choosing a theme. They chose to focus the event on disagreement, since it is a common occurrence in everyone's lives. "We are constantly bombarded with the idea that we should hate

people that have different beliefs than us,” stated Angela Barnes, a PhD candidate in philosophy at ASU. “The polarization of ideas and the news outlets covering them make it seem as though you just have to pick a side—that critically engaging with the other side is a waste of time. My other instructors and I disagree,” she added. The theme of the camp was designed to help students “examine and learn from people who think differently than them.” The staff hopes that these skills will help students think more critically by knowing all sides of an argument. One of the students who attended the camp stated “One thing that impacted me the most was definitely the argument structures, specifically how to not include logical fallacies in my arguments and how to listen to other arguments.”

Disagreements and similar conflicts are decidedly inevitable in the average person’s daily life. Most are little more than a momentary quibble with a sibling over a chore or an unfortunate misunderstanding between yourself and a parent, friend, or employer. Undoubtedly, one of the primary places you will encounter conflict is when participating in a discussion. When a group of individuals of various backgrounds, interests, and experiences gathers in order to discuss an issue, there are bound to be some diverse perspectives that irritate or upset other participants. This is especially true if the topic is a controversial one, such as politics or religion. This predictable dissent is not only normal in a group discussion but also commonly works to initiate changes and progress. Accepting the inescapable as well as the inherent value of conflict is vital. However, so is learning how to respond to inflammatory behavior in a responsible, mature, and helpful manner.

Coping with conflict within any discussion begins not with talking but with listening and the employment of active listening skills. By listening carefully, even to thoughts and ideas that you may personally disagree with strongly, you can both absorb and reflect the other person’s message. Then, you can in turn summarize their claim. You can utilize a variety of prompts, including, “So, if I am understanding you correctly . . .” or “It seems like what you are saying is . . .”. Follow your summary by asking if the other person felt it was accurate. If you accidentally misunderstood something or didn’t hear it, you can quickly revise your summary, giving you and the other participants a

common starting point. You can summarize what several people are saying and then combine them into a statement that synthesizes their main points.

Another essential way you can respond well to conflict within a discussion is by using neutral language, avoiding emotional commentary that involves calling people names, swearing, or raising your voice. These behaviors do not help settle a disagreement.

They have the potential to damage any relationships you have within the group. If you feel yourself getting upset, take a few deep breaths. Count silently to ten. Rely on reason and evidence, not contradictions, to justify your statements and opinions. As former Arizona senator Barry Goldwater once stated, “To disagree, one doesn’t have to be disagreeable.”

If there is a disagreement within the group, remind participants that the conflict is between their opinions and ideas, not between themselves as people. Avoid using blanket statements, or over-generalizations that frequently center on words like “all,” “always,” and “never.” They are rarely accurate. Finally, be extremely careful of your overall tone when you speak. At least half of any message’s meaning comes via nonverbal communication rather than through actual spoken words.

Listen to the podcast to hear three students discuss a controversial topic. Notice how they use strategies to examine opposing views and practice good manners.

Justify Your Views

## Justify Your Views Transcript

Disagreement and conflict are unavoidable aspects of life regardless of your age, location, or environment. Fortunately, that is a good thing, because disagreements give us all the opportunity to examine our thoughts and beliefs on a topic, hear opposing points of view, and practice our good manners. As Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi said, “Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress.”

### Question 1

What word means almost the same as “conflict”?

- a.** perspective
- b.** disagreement
- c.** contradiction

**d.** evidence

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

**b.** disagreement

## Question 2

Complete the sentence with the best pair of words. \_\_\_\_\_ language centers on avoiding any kind of \_\_\_\_\_ behaviors.

- a.** Summarized; nonverbal
- b.** Controversial; diverse
- c.** Synthesized; contradictory
- d.** Neutral; inflammatory

Reveal Answer

**d.** Neutral language centers on avoiding any kind of inflammatory behaviors.

# Check-In

Think about the ways to handle conflict and disagreements in discussions as you answer these questions.

## Question 1

How does synthesis differ from a summary?

- a.** Synthesis looks at the minor details, while a summary focuses on the main points.
- b.** Synthesis is a combination of multiple viewpoints, while a summary often represents only one perspective.
- c.** Synthesis is done in order to highlight differences, while a summary shows commonalities.
- d.** Synthesis relies on neutral language, while a summary typically contains inflammatory language of some kind.

Reveal Answer

- b.** Synthesis is a combination of multiple viewpoints, while a summary often represents only one perspective.

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## Question 2

What did Barry Goldwater mean in his quote, “To disagree, one doesn’t have to be disagreeable,” and how does the lesson support that idea?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Goldwater was saying that you can disagree with someone and still use good manners. That idea is reflected in everything the lesson taught about summarizing, using neutral language, and avoiding blanket statements.

## Question 3

Complete the sentence with the correct set of words.

In any \_\_\_\_\_, it is essential to remember that your argument is with a person's \_\_\_\_\_, not the \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.** claim; ideas; argument
- b.** summary; philosophy; person
- c.** disagreement; opinions; individual
- d.** discussion, appearance; attitude

Reveal Answer

- c.** In any disagreement, it is essential to remember that your argument is with a person's opinions, not the individual.

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# Practice

## Activity

An online quote states that “maturity is being able to have your opinions and beliefs challenged, without feeling personally challenged or attacked.” Write a paragraph defending this statement and then explain what people need to do in order to make it accurate when taking part in a discussion.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer:

I totally agree with this quote because I have been in a discussion with people who do not disagree with me, but instead attack me as a person. It is very upsetting, and it just ends up stalling the conversation because now people are too upset to listen to others or even make their own points without resorting to immature behaviors like name calling and swearing.

After reading this lesson, I can see that the way to avoid this type of situation is to rely on neutral language and avoid any kind of blanket statements. They over generalize to the point of being irrelevant. Summarizing someone’s opinion that I disagree with also helps because it shows that I am listening and following what is being said, even if I think it is wrong.

---

## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the quote and explained why I think it is correct and how it can be implemented.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I included specific details and examples from the lesson about handling disagreements in discussions.



4. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

---

# Objective and Key Words

---

## Objective

In this section, you will learn to make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

---

## Key Words

- **contradictions** – an illogical or opposing statement
  - **diverse perspectives** – viewpoints informed by different backgrounds, experiences, information, and cultures
  - **evidence** – the facts, documentation, or testimony used to strengthen a claim
  - **reasoning** – statements of support for claims
  - **synthesize** – combine various components into a new whole
-

# Making New Connections

## Responding to Evidence and Reasoning



Source: Bavorndej Praktik. 123rf.com

Playwright and activist George Bernard Shaw once said, “Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” He was making an important point: it is essential for human beings to be able to change our minds when we are shown new or additional information and evidence and are exposed to diverse perspectives. If we can't, we will never grow, evolve, or progress.

Each one of us has our own unique set of beliefs, ideas, and opinions, but it is essential to keep an open mind and adapt and shift when presented with information we did not know or hadn't considered before. When we are exposed to a different set of opinions, we might begin making new connections. As we synthesize what we have learned, we can focus on reasoning effectively and accurately and, as Shaw recommended we do—change our minds, or at least shift our opinions because of what we learned.

One place to practice the art of listening and considering divergent opinions and contradictions to our own is when you participate in a collegial discussion. In these discussions, as with most, a variety of beliefs, thoughts, and opinions are represented, as they should be. While having an obvious disagreement can feel quite uncomfortable for many of us, that type of conflict is essential for a dynamic conversation. If everyone in the group agrees on every single idea and discussion point brought up, the conversation tends to fade away. Actively expressing different opinions can truly propel a conversation.

The fact that each person in a discussion group has their individual and varied backgrounds, experiences, information, and cultures is definitely beneficial as it enriches any discussion. There's no question that differences of opinion are unavoidable, but these conflicts are actually great lessons. They provide each person with the opportunity to learn more about an issue and then, just maybe, adjust or change their stance on it.

When you participate in a discussion, along with its inevitable moments of disagreement, listen carefully to the claims and support given by other members. Watch for errors, as well as any type of logical fallacy that demonstrates a mistaken belief or idea. Listening fairly to new ideas and opinions, even those that clash with yours, requires people to keep an open mind. Ask yourself if the person speaking is reasoning effectively. Are they making logical and clear points, and presenting compelling details and reliable research? If so, then listen closely as these moments can lead to sparking a new connection or link for you. You might put facts or concepts together in a new way or see an angle or perspective you were not aware of before. You might even be

inspired to do a little more research and find out additional information on the topic before making a final decision about it! If you do, Shaw would be proud—and you’d make that progress he mentioned.

Now, answer the questions.

## Question 1

If you and another person are having a disagreement, it is most likely because one viewpoint is \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.** lacking any supporting evidence.
- b.** based on an illogical perspective.
- c.** a clear contradiction to your opinion.
- d.** presenting an overabundance of reasoning.

Reveal Answer

- c.** If you and another person are having a disagreement, it is most likely because one viewpoint is a clear contradiction to your opinion.

## Question 2

Why is it considered helpful to “synthesize” people’s opinions and ideas within a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Synthesizing means taking multiple thoughts and viewpoints and merging them into one. It is helpful in a discussion because it indicates that each person is being listened to and their opinions considered and valued.

# Check-In

Reflect on the most beneficial ways to make new connections in light of evidence and reasoning.

## Question 1

How can you make new and potentially important connections during a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Making new connections implies that you have listened carefully to what everyone in the group has said, even if those ideas contradict your own, and then considered those concepts fairly, with the possibility of changing your position on an issue.

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## Question 2

Which words best complete this sentence?

Encountering \_\_\_\_\_ within a discussion gives each person an opportunity to listen to \_\_\_\_\_ perspectives and possibly make new \_\_\_\_\_.

- a.** contradictions; diverse; connections
- b.** connections; illogical; perspectives
- c.** opinions; uncommon; stances
- d.** conversations; similar; friends

Reveal Answer

- a.** Encountering contradictions within a discussion gives each person an opportunity to listen to diverse perspectives and possibly make new connections.

## Question 3

What are two actions that could arise from carefully listening to other people's opinions on an issue?

- a.** A desire to do more research because of a confused position on the overall concepts presented
- b.** A tendency to engage in inflammatory behavior and a possible loss of friends within the group
- c.** A broader understanding of a topic, as well as a potentially new stance or attitude about it
- d.** A reliance on using logical fallacies and an aversion to expressing personal and contradictory opinions

Reveal Answer

- c.** A broader understanding of a topic, as well as a potentially new stance or attitude about it

Need a little extra support?

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# Practice

## Activity

Look at the table of controversial topics below. Choose one from Column A that you would enjoy discussing in a group of your peers. In Column B, list the points you would make to support your personal view point. In Column C, write down several of the contradictions you might encounter from others in a discussion on this issue. In Column D, write down a statement that synthesizes the two opinions. Finally, in Column E, write down some of the new connections you might make after taking part in this discussion.

A table for analyzing multiple perspectives on controversial issues by outlining personal viewpoints, identifying contradictions, synthesizing opinions, and forming new connections

Column A: Topic	Column B: Your Points	Column C: Possible contradictions	Column D: Synthesis of opinions	Column E: New Connections
We should/should not take the money being				



spent on space exploration and use it to explore oceans instead.				
Social media is obviously helpful/harmful to teens and young adults.				
Happiness is/is not more important than success.				

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer:

Sample answer: Example filled in below.

<b>Column A: Topic</b>	<b>Column B: Your Points</b>	<b>Column C: Possible contradictions</b>	<b>Column D: Synthesis of Opinions</b>	<b>Column E: New Connections</b>
We should/should not take the money being spent on space exploration and use it to explore oceans instead.				
Social media is obviously helpful/harmful to	Social media makes people feel more connected to	Social media has been shown to spread unreliable/false information.	Social media can be used in positive ways to initiate change and	Social media can help increase connections with others but it carries

teens and young adults.	society. Social media facilitates local, state, and national change. Social media allows for quick dissemination of public health and safety information.	Social media exposes users to identity theft and privacy issues. Social media tends to promote cyberbullying.	share information, but it can go in negative directions that threaten safety and privacy.	inherent dangers that must be acknowledged and guarded against.
Happiness is/is not more important than success.				

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## How Did I Do?

Assess your response to the Practice activity by completing this checklist. If necessary, go back and revise your work.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the prompt without veering off-topic.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ I responded to the prompt and then filled out each column of the chart for the topic I chose.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I included specific details from the lesson about making new connections and reasoning effectively.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

**Discussion Participation**

# Discussion and Debate: Apply

Show What You Know



Source: fizkes. 123RF

In this unit, you focused on skills and strategies necessary to participate in oral discussions and debate effectively by implementing these learning goals:

- Describe the goal of discussions and debates and the difference between them.
- Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g. informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
- Pose questions that relate to a discussion to broader themes or larger ideas in order to propel conversations.
- Respond to questions that relate to a discussion to broader themes or larger ideas in order to propel conversations.
- Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives.
- Clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
- Critique the impact of a speaker's use of diction, syntax, and rhetorical strategies.
- Summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding.
- Make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

Today, you will have an opportunity to participate with your Learning Coach in an oral discussion about a selected issue. In your discussion, you will apply what you have learned from completing the lessons in this unit.

First, spend a few minutes discussing your understanding with your Learning Coach, using these activities as a guide. Notice that the activities are open-ended—there are no “correct” answers—but they will help you to focus on applying the learning goals you mastered in this unit.

- Watch or listen to a discussion, such as a recorded interview or a local community meeting, and critique it. Share with your Learning Coach your thoughts about how effective the discussion was and give reasons for your thinking. Offer suggestions for how the discussion could have been more effective.
- Think of a discussion you have had recently in which you found yourself persuaded to change your perspective. Explain to your Learning Coach how and why you adjusted your viewpoint.
- Choose one new skill or strategy from the unit that you think will make your future discussions more effective. Tell your Learning Coach why you think this skill or strategy will be useful.

Now, review your notes and get ready to answer the discussion-related questions that follow.

# Discussion and Debate: Apply

## Show What You Know

### Question 1

In your opinion, what is the most significant difference between a debate and a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: I think the most significant difference between a debate and a discussion is the level of formality. A debate takes place in an formal setting and has firm rules that govern the format, structure, and timing. Two teams are assigned a topic and then are instructed to either defend or refute it within strict time limits, and the winner is determined by an adjudicator. In comparison, a discussion is an open and free-flowing form of communication in which the participants share ideas, without worrying about who is ultimately right.

### Question 2

Which role do you feel most comfortable taking on in an collegial discussion —facilitator, recorder, materials manager, checker, or reporter? Why would this be your chosen role?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The role I feel most comfortable taking on in an collegial discussion would be facilitator. Being the person who keeps the group on task and verifies their contributions would help me stay completely focused and engaged in the discussion.

### Question 3

How do open-ended and higher-level questions prevent a discussion from getting derailed?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Open-ended and higher-level questions help connect the topic under discussion to broader themes and deeper issues. They help keep participants in the discussion focused on the issue or topic at hand. For example, if a discussion were drifting off-topic, a question such as, “Why do you think this topic is important?”, would bring everyone’s focus back to the topic and urge them to think about it on a deeper level.

## Question 4

What is the effect of responding to a question with inflammatory language on a discussion? How about neutral language? Which is preferable and why?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The effect of inflammatory language is to inject emotions and strong feelings into the discussion, which can make people feel uncomfortable and want to withdraw. Neutral language allows participants to respond thoughtfully and without judgment, so it is much preferable in a discussion. Neutral language keeps the conversation going, even if people disagree.

## Question 5

What are the benefits and drawbacks of diverse perspectives in a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: One benefit of diverse perspectives is they provide a broader view of the topic or issue under discussion. When participants share different points of view, they may expand one another’s understanding. One drawback is that

differing perspectives may lead to contradictions and disagreements in the discussion, which can be uncomfortable. That said, working through disagreements can lead to everyone learning something new.

## Question 6

Suppose someone in your discussion group challenges your assertion. How can you handle this challenge effectively?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: I can take the challenge seriously and use it as an opportunity to justify or explain my position better and clarify my ideas by providing more examples and evidence.

## Question 7

Suppose someone offers a critique of your rhetorical strategies during a group discussion. What are they criticizing? How can their critique ultimately help you?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: By offering a critique of my rhetorical strategies, the other person is finding flaws in my use of persuasive language and techniques. If the other person suggests that my rhetoric is not persuasive, then I need to reconsider my approach in talking about the subject.

## Question 8

What is the connection between active listening and summarizing points of agreement and disagreement in a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer



Sample answer: Participants in a discussion need to use active listening to be able to understand and then briefly restate the points of agreement or disagreement in a summary. If participants are not listening thoughtfully, they will miss key points.

## Question 9

What happens when participants in a discussion synthesize what they have learned?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: When they synthesize what they have learned, they combine new ideas from the discussion and apply their reasoning to make new connections and draw their own conclusions.

## Self-Assess

Compare your answers to Questions 1–9 with the sample answers. If you did well, move on to Try This. If you need more practice or review, use this chart to revisit the sections mentioned.

### Missed Questions in Sections to Review

Question Missed	Section to Review
1	Discussion and Debate
2	Rules and Roles for Collegial Discussions
3	Pose Questions to Propel a Conversation
4	Respond to Questions to Propel a Conversation
5	Respond to Diverse Perspectives
6	Clarify, Verify, or Challenge Ideas and Conclusions
7	Critique a Speaker's Diction, Syntax, and Rhetorical Strategies
8	Summarize Points of Agreement and Disagreement and Justify Views
9	Make New Connections

# Discussion and Debate: Apply

## Try This

Choose one of the activities and use it as the basis for an oral discussion with your Learning Coach. You may wish to take time to do some research before initiating the discussion so that you come to the discussion prepared to talk about evidence from texts and other research findings. Draw on your prepared ideas by providing evidence, examples, and anecdotes to support a thoughtful and well-reasoned discussion. In addition, be sure to use the other skills and strategies you learned in this unit as you discuss.

### Activity 1

The modern world is driven by technology and the ability to access information quickly. People can communicate with one another instantly via a tap on a screen, and they can click a button to listen to media at twice the normal speed. In such a fast-paced world, it feels almost quaint to sit down and read a piece of fiction. In your discussion, consider the following questions: Should people read stories and fiction? What value does literature have in a technology-driven world?

### Activity 2

Think about all the topics you have studied as part of your education thus far. Was personal finance one of them? For many reasons, many young Americans are not formally taught how to manage money. As a result, they find themselves ill-equipped to handle their own finances once they are out in the “real world.” Do you think financial literacy should be a required part of any young person’s education? Why or why not?

### Self-Assess

Use the rubric to decide whether your oral discussion with your Learning Coach fulfills the standards associated with participating in an effective and collegial discussion.

## Discussion and Debate Rubric

