

Discussion and Debate Introduction

Discussion and Debate: Introduction

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“Words have power.” That’s a crucial idea to consider as you begin this unit on discussion and debate. Think about the power of words to change people’s minds and

alter their lives. Those words don't need to be broadcast loudly through a megaphone in order to deploy that power. Words shared in a quiet conversation can be as potent as those bellowed from a rooftop. As you may know, discussions or debates about important topics can occasionally be derailed by misunderstandings, high emotions, and the impulse to lash out. In this unit, you will learn skills and strategies for clearly and effectively articulating your perspectives in a discussion or debate while keeping a cool head and a respectful manner.

Activate Prior Knowledge

People participating in an effective discussion or debate employ an array of speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills to exchange ideas in a meaningful way. By this point in your education you have probably participated in many discussions and some debates. Reflect on those experiences, using the concept web to complete the activity.

Activity

Think about the communication skills that you have used when participating in academic discussions or debates. Write each skill in one of the outer boxes in the concept web. Then, number the skills in the order of your proficiency. For example, perhaps you are an excellent listener but you struggle to challenge others' ideas.

Question

Save your completed organizer so that you can refer to it later, after you have completed the lessons in this unit, to see if your proficiency at some skills has changed. Renumber the skills in the chart to reflect your improvements.

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

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- 1.** Have your student read the unit title and look at the photo before reading the introductory paragraphs. Ask your student to share any thoughts they may have about the power of words. Encourage them to give specific examples or anecdotes.
- 2.** Ask your student to provide an example of a recent discussion they have taken part in. Encourage them 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 purpose a discussion typically has (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 is true, then assure your student that they will learn skills and strategies over the course of the unit that will enable them to communicate effectively and with confidence.

Activate Prior Knowledge

1. Have your student read the paragraph before guiding them to complete the activity by using the concept web organizer to identify and rank their strengths and weaknesses in the context of discussion and debate skills.
2. Give your student a copy of the concept web graphic organizer and have them respond to the prompt by writing up to six communication skills in the squares in the organizer. Then, have them rank the skills from one to six according to their proficiency, with one being the skill they are most proficient at and six being the least. Talk with your student about their responses. Use the chart as an opportunity to share insights about how they feel about their skills of discussing and debating with others.
3. Encourage your student to save their completed organizer so that they can refer to it later in the unit to determine which skills they become more proficient at.

Concept Web

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 is a back-and-forth conversation about a specific topic or issue, while debate is a more formal and rules-bound exchange. The purpose of a debate is for one side to win an argument through the persuasive presentation of evidence and the use of rhetorical strategies.

Read the flipbook for an overview of the skills involved in effective discussion and debate.

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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

Refer back to your completed concept-web organizer and compare the skills you listed to those in the bulleted list. Use the list to make any changes or additions to your organizer. Then, answer the questions.

Question

What communication skills do you consider yourself good at right now? Think of a specific example or anecdote about a time when you used them effectively. Which communication skills do you think need improvement? Why?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I'm good at asking and answering questions during discussions because I want to understand other people's perspectives. Recently, I had a discussion with a friend about something in the news, and I didn't understand her point of view, so I asked a lot of probing questions. I need to work on collaborating with peers during discussions, because I tend to interrupt a lot. I need to learn to set and respect ground rules.

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 impact of social media on users.

Learning Coach Guide

This section will help you guide students through their learning.

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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 flipbook to get an overview of the skills they will learn in the unit.
- 3.** Guide your student to read the bulleted list of skills. Then, ask them to respond to the question by returning to their completed organizer and using the information they have learned from the flip book to make any changes.
- 4.** Have your student respond to the questions. You may wish to have your student respond in writing, so that they may return to their responses after they have completed the unit to reflect on how they have improved.

Discussions

Objective and Key Words

Objective

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

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
- **evidence** – the facts, documentation, or testimony used to strengthen a claim
- **extemporaneous** – performed without any preparation or without notes

- **reason** – statements of support for claims
-

Discussions, Debates, and Differences

Describing Discussions and Debates



Source: Cathy Yeulet. 123rf.com

In autumn 2022, dozens of students from 24 countries gathered on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia to showcase their speaking skills. After preparing and practicing for a year, these students were ready to compete in front of a panel of judges at the 4-H State Public Speaking Contest. The various speaking categories included

business pitches, extemporaneous speaking, technology-enhanced, and humorous and dramatic interpretations. The students ranged in age from only eight to 18. Erin Stanley, an educator for 4-H, stated, “Public speaking is a skill that many find nerve-wracking. However, these youths knocked it out of the park!”

While you may not plan to participate in any national speaking contests, that does not mean that communication skills won't play a huge part in your life, at home, school, work, and in your personal relationships. Being able to communicate clearly and effectively gives you the ability to express your emotions, beliefs, opinions, and thoughts, plus share important information and individual ideas and concepts.

Learning how to communicate effectively and successfully cannot be overstated, and that is why participating in both debates and discussion groups is so essential. These two activities deeply and intensely explore a topic or issue via interested, knowledgeable, and active participants who are responsible for contributing important information.

Participation in debates and discussions requires a careful combination of active listening and critical thinking skills. Both help ensure that people are listening and responding in responsible and mature ways.

Perhaps one of the most powerful facts about debates and discussions is that they are not simply something you do as part of your education. They will guide and determine all of your future communications, whether personal or professional. The skills these activities impart have the ability to increase your success in persuading your boss to give you a promotion, explaining your position on a controversial issue with your family or friends, and honing your public speaking skills for future classes, meetings, and other gatherings.

While debates and discussions are equal in importance and have a tendency to overlap, when it comes to their overall purpose, they are rather dissimilar. A debate's setting is traditionally formal with a firm set of rules in place to govern the format and timing of the event. Two individuals or teams are assigned a specific topic and then instructed to

either defend the idea or refute it through the process of argumentation. In order to present their position on the given topic, debaters carefully blend evidence and reason to support their claim and counterclaims. Debate rules guarantee each person on each side is given equal amounts of time to speak; warning bells caution them if they exceed their allotment. When both sides have finished presenting their claims and addressing their opponent's counterclaims, an adjudicator typically determines who defended their claim the best and declares a winner. In some instances, instead of a judge, the audience is asked to vote for a winner. Regardless of who determines the debate's outcome, debates have one purpose: to win. This type of communication is definitely competitive.

While debates certainly teach strong public speaking skills, they also tend to sharpen your research skills and even your overall manners. Debate team members are expected to do research, so they are current and knowledgeable on the topic. (You can just imagine what it would be like to make a claim and then attempt to defend it if you *haven't* done any research!) In addition, everyone participating should follow the rules, take turns, be polite, and work as a unified team.

Obviously, discussions and debates share mutual qualities: they focus on communication and public speaking skills, they expect good manners, and all participants should be knowledgeable on the issue at hand. The primary difference between the two types of communication is in their goals. Debates revolve around competition, while discussions center on cooperation.

If you have ever sat down with your family to talk about household rules, gathered with friends to explore the possibilities of a new video game, or sat down with fellow volunteers or employees to determine the changes needed in a work policy, you have been part of a discussion. Discussions happen when people get together in order to talk about a specific topic, but rather than hoping to win, participants work to reach a consensus. Unlike debates, discussions tend to be generally informal, and do not include any set rules, warning bells, or adjudicators/votes. While facts, documents, and statistics might be included in a discussion, a discussion is not limited to them. Commonly, discussions are made up of a mixture of people's personal stories, opinions,

thoughts, and beliefs. Hopefully, they then culminate in a consensus that members either agree on or are at least willing to compromise on.

Learning how to perform well in both debates and discussions can be incredibly beneficial. And, with enough work, it may just allow you to “knock it out of the park” as well.

Question 1

How does a debate's claim compare to a research paper's thesis statement?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: A debate's claim is the statement of what the two sides will center on, which is the role a thesis statement plays in a research paper.

Question 2

In what primary way do debates and discussions differ?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: The main difference is in the overall goal. With debates, it is to win while, in discussions, it is to reach a consensus.

Check-In

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

Question 1

Why would it be more enjoyable for a student who enjoys doing research to participate in a debate rather than in a discussion?

- a.** Discussions never center on factual ideas or issues, so no research is required.
- b.** Debate team members are expected to do research, while it is usually an option in discussions.
- c.** Discussions divide up the research responsibilities among members rather than relying on one person.
- d.** Debates rely on intense and in-depth research that often requires months to fully accomplish.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

- b.** Debate team members are expected to do research, while it is usually an option in discussions.

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Question 2

Reread the quote from Erin Stanley and then explain what she meant with the idiom of “knocked it out of the park”?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Stanley was saying that public speaking is hard for most people, but the group of 4-H members in the contest did a great job and she was impressed.

Question 3

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

- a. Voting should be mandatory for all adults in the United States.
- b. Funding should go to improving American infrastructure rather than to foreign countries.
- c. The city park needs more young people to volunteer for their monthly cleanup events.
- d. Handwriting or penmanship is no longer a skill that should be taught in schools.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

- c. The city park needs more people to volunteer for their monthly cleanup events.

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Practice

Activity

Reverend and motivational speaker Jesse Jackson once said, “Deliberation and debate is the way you stir the soul of our democracy.” Do you agree or disagree with this quote? In the first paragraph, summarize what you think Jackson 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. In the last paragraph, give an example of when you have discussed an idea with others and ended up changing your mind or revising your opinion on an issue.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Jackson is saying that our democracy is only possible if we are allowed to deliberate or discuss, as well as debate, a variety of ideas. He believes that without it, our democracy would falter.

I agree with Jackson, because, if people were not allowed to discuss and debate ideas, then we would not be living in a democracy. Instead, we would more likely be a country based on a tyrant or a dictator’s decisions, rather than those made by the people.

I was certain that the driving age should be lowered to 14 because, at that age, I felt mature enough and responsible enough to drive. However, after doing some research online about brain development in young people and then spending time discussing the ideas with my friends and family, I changed my mind. While I think that some young people might be ready at 14, the vast majority of them are not psychologically developed enough for such a huge responsibility.

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.
-

Objective and Key Words

Objective

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

Key Words

- **active listening** – giving full attention to a speaker and responding in a way that improves mutual understanding
- **brevity** – an economical 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
- **consensus** – a general agreement or majority opinion
- **empathy** – understanding the feelings of other people
- **extemporaneous** – performed without any preparation or unrehearsed
- **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 the group
 - **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: Matej Kastelic. Shutterstock

Countless messages are coming at us all the time. Life overflows with words that are written, spoken, signed, and shared and the conversations they inspire are often the ideal vehicle for solving problems, expressing concerns, exploring questions, and making decisions. The key to any effective and worthwhile discussion is solid

communication. As author and talk show radio host Dr. Gary Chapman writes, “Verbal communication is essential in order to understand what is going on inside other people. If they do not tell us their thoughts, their feelings, and their experiences, we are left to guess.”

One of the most successful methods of communication is the democratic collegial discussion. This type of conversation helps you evolve into a more confident student and speaker, plus it plays a huge role in helping you learn how to efficiently and effectively work creatively with others. Being able to participate in a group activity, while intentionally following the rules, fulfilling your individual role, exhibiting respect for others, and reaching a goal are skills that will most likely be needed throughout the rest of your life.

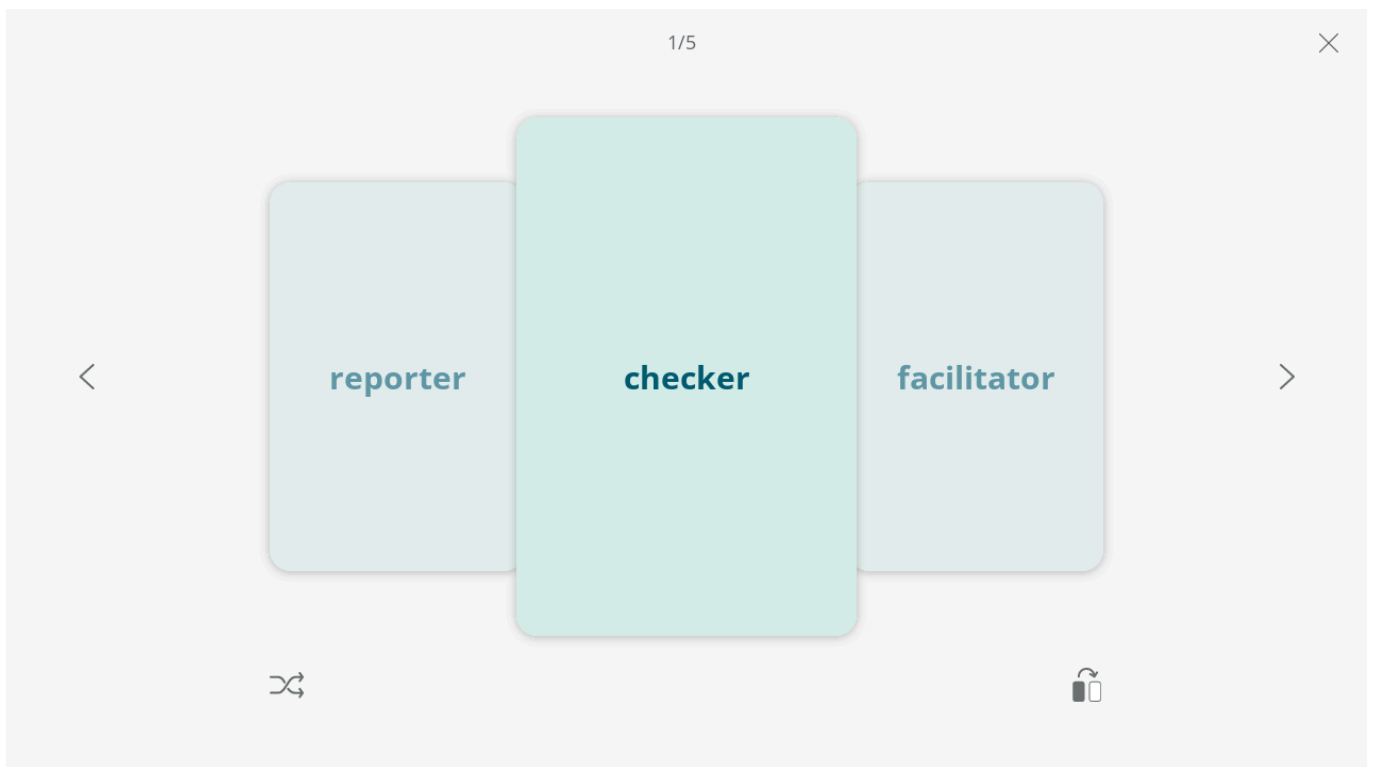
Pause for a moment and reflect on discussions you may have had in the past few weeks or months. They might have been with family members, close friends, or fellow employees. Think about what your primary focus was in these discussions and then ask yourself if your perspective changed between the beginning of the conversation and the end. Did you and the people you were talking with reach a decision or consensus and, if so, what role did collaboration play in helping you come to that conclusion?

Undoubtedly, the majority of the discussions you have in life will be informal ones as you and others chat about an infinite number of topics and issues. Chances are people will just toss out a variety of random and spontaneous combination of their opinions, facts, ideas, beliefs, and questions. Conversely, collegial discussions are significantly more formal as they tend to occur within the classroom or employment setting. They commonly feature a set of basic rules and key roles for group members. You may be asked to fulfill the role of:

- facilitator
- recorder
- materials manager
- checker

- reporter

Use the flashcards to review the meanings of the terms before continuing the lesson.



Collegial discussions, unlike informal conversations, are neither random nor extemporaneous, but rather planned and revolve around a predetermined issue or

topic. Everyone in the group is expected to participate and collaborate, working together as a team to make decisions about potential action steps that need to come next.

Participating in a democratic collegial discussion requires you to take full responsibility for the role you have been given. Even if you do not have a specific position, you still need to follow the basic rules, which include:

- avoiding getting detoured by unrelated topics or side conversations
- demonstrating a combination of respect and empathy for other people's ideas and opinions, even those you may personally disagree with
- remembering to use brevity and clarity whenever you are speaking
- practicing your active listening skills so that you understand and respond to others' expressions
- working creatively with other members so that you can all make the best decisions and reach a general consensus

Dr. Chapman reminded us that communication truly is the best way to understand “what is going on inside other people.” As he adds, not communicating means we are left to “guess” what others are thinking and feeling. It is too easy to be wrong when we have to guess, and that is true whether your conversation is with friends and family or in a collegial setting. In other words, stop guessing and start communicating. Who knows what you might discover?

Question 1

What are two ways that personal discussions differ from collegial discussions?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Personal discussions are often spontaneous and random.

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

Question 2

Why is the adjective “democratic” often added when describing collegial discussions?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The word itself means “with equal participation by all.” While that is not a requirement in personal discussions, it does tend to be in collegial discussions as it plays a key role in their effectiveness.

Check-In

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

Question 1

Based on what you learned about the roles of materials managers and reporters in a collegial discussion, which one would require the best organizational skills?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The materials manager would need to keep track of various documents and other materials and would need to be quite organized in order to do so effectively.

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Question 2

What role does a person's ability to work creatively with others play during a collegial discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Knowing how to stay on topic, fill a role, make decisions, and reach a consensus when working with others that you may/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 Christopher Babson once said, “When we are fully present, we have access to our greatest power, creativity and ability to communicate and perform exceptionally at whatever we are doing.” In your own words, explain what Babson means by the term “fully present” and how it impacts people. Then, use your analysis of the quote to describe how being “fully present” will impact a collegial discussion and the ability to work creatively with others.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Based on Babson’s quote, I believe that being “fully present” means to be in the moment, not distracted or preoccupied with other thoughts. It means to focus on the now, not the earlier/later. When you are part of a discussion group, it is essential that you are “fully present” because otherwise you will not fulfill your role or contribute to the discussion. You will not be able to work creatively with others because your attention has been elsewhere. Being part of a collegial discussion means that all members are working together creatively for a common goal.

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.

Objective and Key Words

Objective

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

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
 - **perspective** – point of view or assessment of a situation
 - **propel** – to move forward
 - **reasoning** – statements of support for claims
-

Discussions, Decisions, and Deadlines

Posing Questions in Collegial Discussions



Source: Rawpixel. Shutterstock

A proverb states, “Conversation is food for the soul” and many people would agree with that. A good conversation can be exhilarating and invigorating for everyone involved. It calls on each person to demonstrate respect, empathy, and patience, all while giving people the chance to connect with each other. Having a deep conversation about important topics is a skill that will commonly be applied not only in collegial discussions but also at work and with family and friends. A focused and dedicated discussion is certainly one of the most effective ways human beings can explore an idea, allowing each participant the chance to examine the reasoning and evidence behind their claims and personal perspectives on the issue.

Reflect on the last discussion you had, whether it was informal/ casual or formal/professional. Do you remember the primary purpose of the conversation and did you learn anything new from it? Was the conversation animated and enthusiastic or did it dwindle away or become sidetracked with detoured topics? Was the group able to reach any kind of consensus despite potentially dealing with some divergent opinions?

Keeping the momentum behind collegial discussions can be challenging. It is not uncommon for the conversation to atrophy or detour, and then it is time for an attentive and perceptive group leader to reroute the conversation into better, more effective directions. One method for achieving this is through asking questions that connect the main topic to broader themes or deeper issues. This tends to help the conversation evolve from simple, factual questions and answers to far more in-depth ideas involving analysis and inference. In turn, this propels the discussion, typically leading to a dynamic exchange of thoughts and opinions.

As you watch the following video, observe how the two students discuss Andy Warhol. While they start with the basic facts about the artist, they use a variety of questions to propel the conversation into deeper ideas. Some questions are exploratory, while others are relational, or cause and effect. Each one helps keep the conversation going and the students learning.

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Peer Model Video Transcript

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

What is one of the best ways to propel a conversation and keep it on track?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Asking questions that are deeper and go beyond the basic facts into more profound or complex ideas.

Question 2

Which of the following questions would tend to lead a group to deeper topics or ideas?

- a.** Who is Stephen King?
- b.** When was his first book published?
- c.** Where are most of his stories set?
- d.** Why are horror books so popular?

Reveal Answer

- d.** Why are horror books so popular?

Check-In

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

Question 1

Why does a discussion leader have to stay vigilant of what people are discussing?

Reveal Answer

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

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Question 2

According to the students in the video, what type of question is best for finding raw information and why?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Exploratory questions because they are based on the facts and details about a topic.

Practice

Activity

Reflect back on what you learned in the lesson and the video about asking effective questions within a discussion, and then complete the exercise below in which you label each question as being “E” (exploratory), “R” (relational) or “CE” (cause and effect).

1. How many gallons of bottled water are sold in the U.S. each year?
2. What is the number-one packaged beverage in this country?
3. Why do so many of the people who buy bottled water not recycle them?
4. How has the surge in bottled water impacted the planet’s environment?
5. Why are some cities deciding to ban single-serve plastic water bottles?
6. Why do so many people believe that bottled water is healthier than tap water?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

1. _____ E _____ 1. How many gallons of bottled water are sold in the U.S. each year?
2. _____ E _____ 2. What is the number-one packaged beverage in this country?
3. _____ R _____ 3. Why do so many of the people who buy bottled water not recycle them?
4. _____ CE _____ 4. How has the surge in bottled water impacted the planet’s environment?

5. _____ CE _____ 5. Why are some cities deciding to ban single-serve plastic water bottles?
6. _____ R _____ 6. Why do so many people believe that bottled water is healthier than tap water?

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 determined whether each question was exploratory, relational, or cause and effect.
 3. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Civil Discourse

Objective and Key Words

Objective

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

Key Words

- **active listening skills** – giving full attention to a speaker and responding in a way that improves mutual understanding
 - **blanket statements** – generalized statements that tend to include “always” or “never”
 - **justifying** – making something seem reasonable or explain something
 - **probing** – investigating something completely
 - **rational conclusion** – a decision based on facts and/or logic
 - **superlatives** – highest in degree of comparison, i.e., *-er*, *-est*
-

Responding to Big Ideas, Propelling the Conversation

Responding to Questions



Source: piksel. 123RF

If you have ever given a presentation, taken part in a debate, or been involved in a discussion, you know that answering and responding to questions is an integral part of the communication. You likely also know that it can be challenging and uncomfortable to deal with some of those questions. It might help you to follow the advice of three professors from Kansas State University who suggest that anyone in these situations uses a four-step process they call: Smile-Breathe-Think-Talk. “When asked a question, it is normal to get anxious and excited at the same time,” they wrote in an online higher-education newsletter. They say to start by taking a moment to smile since it helps us to stay calm and feel more positive. Next, they recommend taking a deep breath or two. “Our breathing allows us to further regulate our emotions and provides a pause so that we do not rush into an answer to the question,” they write. Breathing should be followed by thinking about our answer and then, finally, it is time to respond. “If we wait to talk until after thinking,” the professors stated, “it is less likely we will think of a better answer while we are delivering a hastier answer.”



Source: fizkes. Shutterstock

This four-step process illustrates valuable lessons to remember whenever you take part in a collegial discussion. These discussions are especially designed for asking and answering questions, allowing participants to explore a topic from multiple perspectives. They also provide each group member the opportunity to clarify their initial issues or opinions. Most importantly, participating in a dynamic discussion group commonly leads each person to connecting to broader, more complex concepts. For instance, a family discussion about what is and is not allowed for you to post on social media could lead to a discussion about maintaining online privacy and safety or, even further, to an in-depth discussion about identity theft.

A successful discussion is one that flows and stays in motion but, in order to maintain that, members need to focus on the use of open-ended questions since they require fuller, more detailed responses than simple, one-word replies like “yes” or “no”. Open-ended questions propel discussions forward, as do probing questions, or those that ask for additional evidence or information, clarification, evidence, or reasons.

Undoubtedly, asking open-ended questions that inspire others to think more deeply and analyze more carefully is vital, but it is not enough. For any discussion to be truly effective, members must also practice and hone their ability to respond responsibly to those questions.

There is little question that, for the majority of people, hearing an idea or opinion that they strongly disagree with is rather unpleasant. Remembering our manners can be tough, while exhibiting inflammatory behavior, such as name calling, swearing, or raising our voices is often much easier. Unfortunately, these types of responses only tend to exacerbate a conflict, and run the risk of damaging potential relationships within the group.

Responding to questions well is a skill that can be learned, of course, and it begins with awareness and a reliance on active listening skills since no one should respond to a question if they have not carefully listened to what was said in the first place.

Distressed, overly emotional responses tend to destroy or squash people’s motivation to talk, ruining any chance of reaching any type of rational conclusion. The use of blanket statements and superlatives also tend to detract from a good conversation as they tend to be too generic. Your statements justifying your opinions and ideas will have far more impact if they are carefully thought out and calm.

When a disagreement arises within a discussion, keeping it moving forward requires a blending of skill and wisdom. Employing some basic follow-up questions to statements can help, and include:

- Could you please give me an example?

- When you say _____, are you implying that _____?
- Could you explain that idea further?
- Can you tell me more about your experience?
- What a different perspective. Why do you think that?
- Where did you learn that? I'd love to know more about it. Can you share your sources?

These questions support and encourage the flow of conversation because they are neither combative nor argumentative. It also ensures that every group member feels that their contributions are valued.

Discussions help people pose good questions, explore connections to larger concepts, and respond to people's diverse ideas on the issue. Doing so in a calm and respectful manner is possible—and necessary. As Robert Quillen, journalist and humorist, stated, "Discussion is an exchange of knowledge; an argument an exchange of ignorance."

Question

What is the meaning of the term "blanket statement"?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Generalized statements that tend to include generic or general terms like "always" or "never."

Check-In

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

Question 1

Which statement about collegial discussions is the most accurate?

- a.** They are based only on people's opinions and not on facts and other statistics.
- b.** They tend to revolve around examples of both bad manners and inflammatory behavior.
- c.** They falter and fade away if the leader doesn't remember to ask close-ended questions.
- d.** They depend on each individual's involvement, giving each person the chance to grow.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

- d.** They depend on each individual's involvement, giving each person the chance to grow.

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Question 2

What impact do probing questions tend to have on a discussion and why?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Probing questions are those that are looking for more information.

This tends to move the conversation forward and keep it dynamic.

Question 3

Why do some types of inflammatory behavior squash people's motivation to speak up in a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Inflammatory behavior, such as calling people names or raising your voice, can scare or intimidate people and make them less likely to voice their thoughts on an issue.

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Practice

Activity

Reflect back on the four-step process that the three professors from Kansas State University outlined at the beginning of the lesson to complete the chart. In the first column are the four steps the instructors listed. In the second column, explain the purpose of these four steps.

Understanding the Purpose of the Four-Step Reflection Process

Four Steps	Purpose
Smile	
Breathe	
Think	
Talk	

Show Answer

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 question by completing the chart, based on the information about the four-step process.
 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 learn to respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives.

Key Words

- **clarify** – to make something clearer
 - **diverse perspectives** – viewpoints informed by different backgrounds, experiences, information, and cultures
 - **empathy** – understanding the feelings of others
 - **evidence** – the facts, documentation, or testimony used to strengthen a claim
 - **flexible** – able to adapt to new situations
 - **justify** – make something seem reasonable or explain something
 - **reason** – statements of support for claims
-

Diverse Ideas, Disagreements, and New Connections

Responding to Diverse Perspectives



Source: Jenkedco. Shutterstock

Chances are you've heard the statement, “In this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes.” History is not sure who said it first—it might have been Benjamin Franklin or perhaps Mark Twain, but either way, it's a statement that just begs to be added to. In this case, you might add that another life certainty is that everyone encounters people

that do not agree with their personal opinions, beliefs, or ideas. Everyone has different experiences, backgrounds, and cultures that help form that wonderful diversity.

Katherine Phillips, former senior vice dean at Columbia Business School, was quite familiar with the challenge of responding well to diverse perspectives. She worked closely on the subject for decades, along with a team of scientists, psychoanalysts, and other experts. In an article for *Scientific American* written a few years ago, she stated, “The first thing to acknowledge about diversity is that it can be difficult.” She recognized that diversity can often cause everything from discomfort and conflict to disrespect and lack of unity, so what good does it actually do for people? In Phillips's opinion, “Diversity enhances creativity. It encourages the search for novel information and perspectives, leading to better decision-making and problem-solving. She adds, “Even simply being exposed to diversity can change the way you think.”

Most people would agree with Phillips's bottom line: diversity can be really difficult, but absolutely worth it. Unquestionably, the world is full of people with different perspectives from ours, and many times we agree with them. However, some viewpoints may make us flinch, and internally, we may be understandably shaking our heads and muffling a passionate retort. These moments are potent reminders that, although disagreements are inevitable, arguments are always optional. Responding to the diverse perspectives we encounter on a regular basis takes a combination of politeness, patience, and practice. Having empathy definitely helps because, if we take the time to really try “walking in another person's shoes,” we tend to gain enormous insight and understanding into why other people believe or act the way they do. It also helps significantly if we can be flexible, shifting and adapting to the environment and situation we find ourselves in at any given moment.

Since disagreements are unavoidable, it is vital that we learn the best ways to respond to them in a respectful and thoughtful manner. One activity that helps prepare us for facing differing opinions is the collegial discussion. Obviously, since these discussions revolve around people's thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences, differences are unavoidable. However, your response to those divergent perspectives is not predestined; they are an element you can, most certainly, control and determine.

Virtually no one enjoys being disagreed with, but, if done with respect and thoughtfulness, that opposition can be quite valuable; leading to understanding others better, finding common ground, and making new connections. Disagreements give you the valuable opportunity to clarify your attitudes, justify your viewpoints, and examine your reasons and evidence. You can develop your ability to be flexible, and even shift your stance if the new information and ideas you've just been exposed to inspires you to do so.

As you consider the various ways you can respond well to divergent ideas and perspectives, focus on Phillips's extra advice. She wrote, “The pain associated with diversity can be thought of as the pain of exercise. You have to push yourself to grow your muscles. The pain, as the old saw goes, produces the gain. In just the same way,” she continues, “we need diversity . . . if we are to change, grow, and innovate.”

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

What is the connection between compassion and empathy?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Compassion encourages us to understand what other people are feeling, which is at the center of empathy. It suggests that we take the time to look at something from someone's perspective so that we can better understand it.

Question 2

Why are divergent perspectives considered inevitable?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Everyone has different opinions, experiences, backgrounds, and cultures, so diversity is unavoidable.

Check-In

Think about the importance of responding thoughtfully to diverse perspectives as you answer these questions.

Question 1

What are three ways that disagreements are beneficial not only within a collegial discussion but in life itself?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Any three of the following: They allow members to encounter new ideas; they inspire people to clarify their viewpoints; they encourage people to justify their reasoning; they make it possible to make new connections; they give people the chance to practice good manners; they give people the opportunity to be flexible.

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Question 2

What are two traits that discussion group members should demonstrate when a disagreement arises?

- a.** flexibility and empathy
- b.** preparation and judgment
- c.** respect and intolerance
- d.** evidence and research

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

a. flexibility and empathy

Question 3

For what reason does Katherine Phillips compare dealing with diversity to exercising?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: She believes that, like exercise, diversity can be uncomfortable and even painful, but it is through that experience that everyone gains.

Need a little extra support?

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Practice

Activity

IDEA is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to improving student learning and they have sponsored many articles about diversity. In one written by two university professors, students are encouraged to play a type of “what if” game where they imagine a situation or issue from someone else’s viewpoint. Choose a topic from the list below. In the first column, write your opinion on the issue. Then, fill out what you think the specified people with other points of view might say as provided. Finally, answer the question of why it is important to look at other’s opinions than your own on controversial issues.

Exploring Diverse Perspectives on Controversial Issues

Topic	Your Opinion	2nd opinion	3rd opinion
People should be vegetarians.	Do you agree or disagree and why?	What would a cattle farmer say?	What would a doctor say?
The world needs more robots.	Do you agree or disagree and why?	What would a factory worker say?	What would a high-tech company employee say?

Alternative medicine should be taken more seriously.	Do you agree or disagree and why?	What would a medical doctor say?	What would a homeopath say?
Teenagers should have after-school jobs.	Do you agree or disagree and why?	What would a teacher say?	What would a parent say?

Show Answer

Listening to other's opinions and thoughts on a controversial issue is helpful because it reminds us all that there are other viewpoints to consider. While we may not change our minds, it gives us the chance to consider other factors and see the world through someone else's eyes, even if just for the moment.

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 why I think the specified other will have a certain opinion .
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 learn to clarify, verify, and challenge ideas or conclusions.

Key Words

- **assertions** – a strong statement that something is true
 - **challenged** – doubted, questioned, or disputed the truth of a statement
 - **clarify** – to make something clearer
 - **conclusion** – a decision based on facts
 - **justify** – make something seem reasonable or explaining something
 - **refuted** – proved that a statement is incorrect
 - **verify** – check whether something is true
-

Facing Discussion Challenges

Justify, Verify, and Clarify



Source: Roman Samborskyi. Shutterstock

It was 1976 and Americans were trying to decide on who they wanted for president. For the first time in over a decade, since the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960, the two top contenders, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, were debating on national television. Although they had three debates in total, it was Ford and Carter's second debate that was most remembered—and seemed to have the most influence on election day. When asked a question about the Soviet's domination of Eastern Europe, President Ford

misspoke. He not only startled Carter and the debate moderator but also the millions of voters watching at home. The obvious mistake made Ford look uninformed. It threw him off for the rest of the debate. Julian Zelizer, a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University stated, “Saying things the wrong way and not being clear in front of the cameras can be a total political disaster.”

While misspeaking in a collegial discussion certainly doesn't come with such serious consequences, it can still mar the event. It often occurs when someone is feeling exceptionally challenged by another group member. Disagreements in discussions are inevitable. Fortunately, they can also be beneficial.

Discussion group members might feel uncomfortable or frustrated if their comments and contributions are challenged or if they are asked to verify or clarify their viewpoints. Having your personal beliefs or assertions questioned or even refuted can be truly irritating. However, if you can maintain a positive and open-minded attitude, disagreements can give you some wonderful opportunities. You get the chance to double-check your reasons and evidence for accuracy. You can justify your perspectives. You can more easily discover any potential errors or gaps in your reasoning. Finally, you can examine your overall conclusions for truthfulness.

Disagreements are commonplace in most discussions because the group's participants usually come from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, information, and cultures. This, in turn, blends to form their thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. Knowing how to verify, clarify, and justify your ideas in these scenarios will be essential, as will your ability to stay calm, cool, and collected if someone inevitably disagrees with you.

As you watch the following video, pay attention to how the student explains his group's pledge and what each member is promising to do, including challenging, clarifying, and verifying their ideas and conclusion. Listen carefully to the explanation the student provides for each action and why they are so vital for the new group to succeed.

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

What is the slogan of the new group in the video and what does it stand for?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: It was CCV and it stood for Challenge, Clarify, and Verify.

Question 2

In the video it states that when a student challenges another one, what are they potentially looking for?

- a.** verification
- b.** flaws
- c.** conclusions
- d.** facts

Reveal Answer

- b.** flaws

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 look at the 1976 presidential debate?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The story highlights what happens when one of the two intelligent and informed candidates slips and says something that damages his credibility.

Need a little extra support?

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Question 2

Why would a positive and open-minded attitude help you respond productively to challenges in a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: This type of attitude makes it easier to stay calm, listen, and then justify your perspective in a logical, relatable manner.

Practice

Activity

Austrian British philosopher, teacher, and commentator Karl Popper once stated, “The growth of knowledge depends entirely upon disagreement.”

Explain what Popper meant with this statement and how it relates to what you have learned in this lesson.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I think that Popper was saying that people cannot learn and grow and evolve unless there is disagreement involved. I do not think I agree with this quote, although I understand what Popper intended. I think that disagreement is definitely required in discussion groups because otherwise the conversation will likely falter and not develop. However, in general, I believe that the growth of knowledge is centered more on the ability to keep learning new information rather than disagreement.

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

- **audience** – the intended group of listeners
- **critique** – feedback and constructive criticism, received from others
- **diction** – the choice and use of words and phrases in speech or writing
- **logical fallacy or fallacious reasoning** – unsound arguments that can be proven wrong with logic and reason
- **premise** – the basis for an argument
- **purpose** – the reason for writing or speaking, such as to persuade or inform
- **rhetorical strategies** – words or word phrases used to convey meaning, to provoke a response or 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
-

Discussions and Debates

Discussion Conclusions: From Purpose and Audience to Diction, Syntax, and Rhetoric



Source: 270058. Shutterstock

“There's an app for that!” has to be one of the most common statements the world has learned in the last decade. No matter the topic, there seems to be some kind of artificial intelligence (AI) to support it. This is even true now for public speaking. A free platform known as Yoodli was designed by former Google, Facebook, and Apple

engineers and product managers to help people develop their public-speaking skills. With this app, people can record their speeches and then keep track of their stats just like sports figures do. This AI, however, measures your use of filler words, pace, volume, stutters and stumbles, and more. Not only that, but Yoodli offers you several fun games to play centered on an element of public speaking. For example, you can play a game where you have to create instant analogies or incorporate random terms into a discussion.

Whether you have the right app or not, there is no question that public speaking skills are ones that the average person can use throughout their lifetime. They can help you 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. The ability to give a convincing, clear, and compelling speech can often, in return, boost your confidence, and improve your critical thinking and communication skills. Not developing those skills, or being so scared you avoid learning them, can detrimentally affect your chances of graduating from college, earning higher wages, or getting promoted.

Preparing for giving a public speech means not only thoroughly knowing the basic premise of your speech, but also implementing proper diction and syntax in order to ensure the proper delivery of your message. Remember to avoid:

- mixing slang/informal terms with professional/formal terms
- using sensitive language that could offend your audience
- using examples of logical fallacy as it will damage your credibility

On the other hand, make sure that you do employ a variety of rhetorical strategies to help persuade your audience or encourage their action. Pay close attention to the tone to ensure that it matches your stance on the topic. Finally, make sure you can clearly identify your purpose. If you aren't able to state that, it will be almost impossible to choose your stance, tone, diction, and syntax in the first place.

Once you have prepared for and practiced your speech, it is time to ask someone you know and trust to critique your speech. Instruct them to pay especially close attention to and note any words, phrases, or ideas that should be clarified, revised, deleted, or added to strengthen the overall message. Or heck, you can always check out Yoodli!

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

What best describes the meaning of “syntax”?

- a.** word choice
- b.** word punctuation
- c.** word order
- d.** word tone

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

- c.** word order

Question 2

What term means the same thing as your point of view on an issue?

- a.** stance
- b.** premise
- c.** fallacy
- d.** purpose

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

- a.** stance

Check-In

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

Question 1

Why would you choose someone you know and trust to critique your speech?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: If you trust them, you know they will be kind but honest in their overall feedback.

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Question 2

Practice

Activity

Constance Hale, critic, journalist, and author of several books on language, once stated, “Our word choices give a sentence its luster, and they deserve intense attention.” What do you think she meant by “luster” and how does her statement relate to what you have learned in this lesson?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: I believe that Hale was saying that the words we choose, whether written or spoken, are what have the ability to make a statement “shine”. She was saying that choosing our words very carefully is essential and deserves a great deal of attention and thought. This ties in directly with the rest of the lesson and its emphasis on impacting the audience in the ways we want to by using the best words in the best order as we can.

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 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 will summarize points of agreement and disagreement in a discussion including, when necessary, your own views and understanding.

Key Words

- **active listening skills** – giving full attention to a speaker and responding in a way that improves mutual understanding
 - **perspective** – an evaluation or assessment of a situation or facts
 - **summarize** – providing a shortened version of something said/written, including the main points
-

Discussions, Disagreements, and Diverse Perspectives

Dealing with Disagreements



Source: jcjgphotography. Shutterstock

Get out your vocabulary list and add a new term that has only recently been created: *erisology*. The term was created by a Swedish engineer and blogger in Sweden named John Nerst who defines it as “the study of disagreement.” He based the word on Eris, the Greek goddess of discord. Over the few years since Nerst first created the term, it has grown and has been referenced in articles and spurred more than one thousand

people to join the Erisology forum on Reddit. Nerst's motivation for developing the idea was his frustration in seeing how people disagree and argue online. According to him, "Erisology is the study of disagreement, specifically the study of unsuccessful disagreement. An unsuccessful disagreement is an exchange where people are no closer in understanding at the end than they were at the beginning, meaning the exchange has been mostly about talking past each other and/or hurling insults. A *really* unsuccessful one is where people actually push each other apart, and this seems disturbingly common."

How do you feel when you imagine having a disagreement with someone? If you're like most people, you feel some anxiety or trepidation. Perhaps just making sure you go through life avoiding all types of conflict would be the best decision? It's an understandable desire, but it is also entirely unrealistic. Conflict is inevitable in daily life and happens consistently with family, friends, employers, and others. One environment where you will certainly encounter some type of disagreement is within a discussion. Whenever a group of people gathers to discuss a topic, it is guaranteed that it will feature some diverse [perspectives](#). Contemplate what a huge variety of beliefs, experiences, opinions, and attitudes about issues people have in the world, especially with controversial topics, such as politics or religion. Even though it may feel uncomfortable, dissent is normal. It is an integral part of making changes and evolving towards understanding. Accepting the inherent value of conflict is vital, but, just as important is learning how to respond to it in a responsible, reinforcing, and reliable way.

While it may feel as if the first step in coping with conflict involves talking, it should actually begin with the implementation of [active listening skills](#). They make it possible for you to truly hear, absorb, and integrate a person's message, even if it is one you disagree with. By actively listening, you will be able to [summarize](#) a speaker's main points both concisely and clearly, plus recap the points you agree on and those that you don't. Follow up your summary by making sure you "got it right." Did you accurately remember what was said? Did you hear everything and understand it? Taking this extra step will help prevent potential misunderstandings and makes it more likely that you and others can find a starting point on which you agree.

As you provide your summary, focus on neutral language and avoid the use of any word or phrase that could be construed as emotional or inflammatory. Also, eliminate any blanket statements as these types of generalizations are virtually never accurate. Finally, when disagreeing with what someone has said, remember that the conflict is with a person's opinions and ideas, not the person themselves.

As you watch the video, pay attention to how the two students use summarizing to make sure they understand each other's viewpoints and can find places of commonality. How does their discussion impact their opinions?

Video cannot be displayed on Print Preview

Peer Model Video Transcript

Question 1

In addition to summarizing their opinions on the Supreme Court decision, what did the two students in the video do?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: They provided reasons that justified or clarified their views on the issue.

Question 2

What issue are the two students in the video addressing in their presentation?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: They are preparing an oral presentation about whether a person arrested for a crime could be questioned by authorities without being aware of their Fifth Amendment rights.

Check-In

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

Question 1

Why do active listening skills play a part in making an accurate summary?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: You cannot give an accurate summary with the speaker's main points if you haven't listened carefully to hear and understand those points.

Need a little extra support?

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Question 2

What is the harm in using "blanket statements"?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: They tend to use words such as *always* and *never* which are generalizations and rarely accurate.

Practice

Activity

Entrepreneur and author Kristin Kimberly Marquet, founder of Marquet Media in New York City, had advice for people dealing with disagreements. She relies on the concept of “taking a walk in someone else’s shoes.” As she puts it, “Approaching the situation from a different viewpoint is one way to disagree . . . in a polite manner without offending them. Whenever I disagree with someone on my team, I try to be tactful by asking them in a respectful tone to look at the issue or circumstance from my point of view. Then we evaluate each approach to see which one will produce the best outcome.” Based on what you learned in this lesson and your personal experience, do you agree or disagree with the recommendation to see things from a different viewpoint, in order to help mitigate a conflict? Support your response with examples and reasons.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: I definitely agree with what Marquet said about walking in another person’s shoes. We often think that people do not have reasons or knowledge behind their opinions, but it is when we try to see things from their point of view that we tend to realize that isn’t true. Their culture, background, experiences, and knowledge all blend to create their opinions and beliefs, just as mine do. If I stop and look at things from their perspective, I might have a much better and clearer understanding of why they think the way they do. This happened to me once when my little brother kept bugging me to let him hang out with me and my friends. I found it so annoying and truly believed he was doing it just to bother me. However, when I realized how we looked in his eyes—older, more fun, interesting, mysterious—I realized he genuinely wanted to spend time with us. I still say no sometimes, but now I often let him because I can see how much it means to him.

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 described a personal experience and how it connected to what I learned in this lesson.
 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 Word

Objective

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

Key Words

- **contradiction** – 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
 - **synthesize** – combine various components into a new whole
-

Making New Connections

Responding to Evidence and Reasoning



Source: Dragon Images. Shutterstock

Philosophy professor and author Peter Kreeft once said, “An open mind is not an end in itself but a means to the end of finding truth.” His statement reflects one of the most common and understandable definitions of open-mindedness, which the University of Pennsylvania describes as “the willingness to search actively for evidence against one's favored beliefs, plans, or goals, and to weigh such evidence fairly when it is available.” Having an open mind does not mean, as the University reminds us, that we are

“indecisive, wishy-washy, or incapable of thinking for one's self.” In other words, all of us need to be open to changing our beliefs and opinions when we are shown new information and evidence and exposed to diverse perspectives. Without this ability to change, none of us can evolve and develop as human beings!

Every person in the world has their own unique set of beliefs, ideas, and opinions. Take a moment and think about some of yours. Ideally, those elements should shift and be modified as people get older and are presented with information they hadn't known or ever considered before. By encountering new viewpoints and experiences, people tend to find themselves making new connections. As they synthesize what they have discovered, people can improve their ability to adapt to change and, as Kreeft explains, keep an open mind when pursuing the truth.

A key environment for practicing the ability to hear and consider diverse opinions and contradictions is within the setting of a collegial discussion. These discussions tend to include people with a variety of beliefs, thoughts, and opinions, so dissent is inevitable. While being involved in an obvious disagreement can feel awkward and uncomfortable, that type of conflict is essential for creating and maintaining a dynamic conversation. If all group members agree on every individual idea and discussion point mentioned, the conversation will tend to dissipate. On the other hand, actively expressing different opinions can truly propel a conversation forward into new and fascinating directions.

Each person in a discussion group has their individual and varied backgrounds, experiences, information, and cultures, so differences of opinion are quite common and to be expected. Fortunately, that's a positive thing. These conflicts are actually great lessons, providing each person with the opportunity to learn more about an issue and then, perhaps, adapt to a change in their stance on it.

When participating in a discussion, along with its inevitable moments of disagreement, listen carefully to the claims and support provided by all of the other members. Pay special attention to any possible errors, as well as logical fallacies, that reveal a mistaken belief or idea. Listening to new ideas and opinions, especially those that clash

with yours, definitely requires people to keep an open mind. Is the person speaking making logical and clear points? Are they presenting compelling details and reliable research? If so, then pay close attention because you may just have the opportunity to spark a new connection or link in your beliefs or opinions. Moments of disagreement can lead to putting facts or concepts together in a new way or seeing an angle or perspective you were not aware of before. Perhaps you might even be motivated to do additional research and learn new information on the topic. If you do, according to Kreeft, you will be that much closer to truly discovering truth.

Now, answer the questions.

Question 1

Which word from the lesson is synonymous with *disagreement*?

- a.** evidence
- b.** perspective
- c.** contradiction
- d.** reasoning

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

- c.** contradiction

Question 2

Why does *synthesizing* people's opinions and ideas within a discussion facilitate the conversation?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Synthesizing implies that you have taken everyone's opinions, thoughts, beliefs, and comments and merged them together to reflect an idea or concept. To do so means listening to everyone's opinions and that enhances rapport and understanding.

Choose a topic from the lesson to discuss with your Learning Coach or teacher. Use at least three key words from the lesson in your conversation. As you discuss the topic, share what content you struggled with during the lesson. What did you do that helped you learn it? Also, think about what content you found interesting. Why was it interesting?

Check-In

Think about the best way to make new connections in light of evidence and **reasoning**.

Question 1

What is the most likely reason a conversation fizzles out during a discussion?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: People agree on every point being made and so there is virtually nothing to discuss further or explore more deeply.

Need a little extra support?

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Question 2

Why does encountering diverse perspectives assist people in making new connections and adapting to change?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Hearing new perspectives introduces you to new information that you were not aware of before, and that, in turn, can help you make connections to your own opinions and thus help you adapt or even change your stance on a topic.

Question 3

What does paying close attention and keeping an open mind to contradictory opinions often result in?

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Hearing a perspective that clashes with yours often helps you to develop a new, or revised, stance towards an issue.

Practice

Activity

Think of an emotional issue that you have a strong opinion or belief about, and then think about what the opposite position on it might be. Write out your opinion, and then come up with three valid reasons to support the opposite position. Finally, how do those reasons impact your original opinion?

Analysis of Personal Opinion Versus Opposing Viewpoint

Column A: Issue	Column B: Your personal opinion	Column C: Three valid reasons for taking the opposite position	Column D: Overall impact on your opinion

Reveal Answer
Hide Answer

Sample answer:

Analysis of Personal Opinion Versus Opposing Viewpoint

Column A: Issue	Column B: Your personal opinion	Column C: Three valid reasons for taking the opposite position	Column D: Overall impact on your opinion
Funding ocean exploration versus space exploration	I believe that money should be spent here on Earth where it can do people the most good, not on planets and space since the average person will never be able to go there.	<div><div>1.</div><div>Space research has actually resulted in many helpful discoveries to help people on Earth.</div></div> <div><div>2.</div><div>The space industry provides millions of jobs for people around the globe.</div></div> <div><div>3.</div><div>Because space exploration is often done in tandem with other nations, it fosters unity and cooperation.</div></div>	Although I still believe money should primarily go to exploring Earth, I can see that space exploration has more advantages than I realized, so I would be open to learning more and adapting my opinion.

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.
 3. _____ I included specific details from the lesson about making new connections and reasoning effectively.
 4. _____ I used correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
-

Discussions Participation

Discussion and Debate: Apply

Show What You Know



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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 questions as a guide. Notice that the questions 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.

- Recall a formal discussion that you participated in recently. Compare and contrast it to a typical informal conversation with a friend or family member. How were the two interactions similar and different?
- Some people question the value of face-to-face discussion, given that they can communicate remotely and through written texts and emails rather than conversation. Why is it important to develop effective oral discussion skills?
- Critique a conversation that you participated in or witnessed by giving it a starred review (5 stars being the best). Explain your review. What is one thing that you and the other participant or participants did well? What is one thing that could be improved?

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

Discussion and Debate: Apply

Show What You Know

Activity 1

Identify at least three qualities shared by oral discussions and debates.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Both oral discussions and debates focus on communication and public speaking skills. Both require that participants demonstrate good manners and active listening, and both provide a forum for sharing knowledge and information.

Activity 2

Explain the connection between collaboration and consensus.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: Consensus is a general agreement or a majority opinion that the participants reach over the course of a discussion. The participants must collaborate or work together thoughtfully in order to work through any differences of opinion to reach a consensus.

Activity 3

Explain what exploratory, relational, and cause-and-effect questions are and how the use of these questions affects an oral discussion?

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Exploratory questions help the participants in a discussion determine what they do or don't know about the topic. Relational questions help participants discover connections between facts and details in the discussion. Cause-and-effect questions lead participants to understand causal links between

ideas. All of these questions help propel the conversation forward and deepen the participants' interest in and understanding of the topic or issue.

Activity 4

Explain the effect of using blanket statements and superlatives when responding to a question during an oral discussion.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The use of blanket statements and superlatives tends to detract from an effective oral discussion because they are too generic. Statements that generalize or that exaggerate will not be persuasive, and they imply that you have not given your response much thought.

Activity 5

Explain the most effective way to respond to diverse perspectives in a conversation.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: The most effective way to respond to diverse perspectives is to demonstrate politeness, patience, and empathy. By considering the other person's experiences, you can broaden your perspective and understanding, but it is not easy. That's why patience and politeness are key. It's easy to react rudely or brusquely to different experiences, but the conversation will be more successful if you are kind, flexible, and empathetic instead.

Activity 6

Explain what it means to clarify, verify, and justify one's ideas during a discussion.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: Clarification involves restating the ideas in a clearer way, while verifying requires providing additional facts and evidence to support the truth of the ideas. Justification means explaining the ideas by making them seem reasonable and correct.

Activity 7

Explain the value of receiving a critique of your diction, syntax, or rhetorical strategies during a discussion.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: While it can be uncomfortable, a critique of my word choices, sentence structure, and use of persuasive techniques can help me understand that I should try to make my contributions to the discussion more effective.

Activity 8

Describe an effective summary of a discussion.

Reveal Answer

Sample answer: An effective summary uses neutral language and avoids inflammatory language and blanket statements or generalizations to outline the key points of agreement or disagreement in a discussion.

Activity 9

Explain why it is helpful to synthesize other people's opinions and ideas during a discussion.

Reveal Answer

Hide Answer

Sample answer: When I synthesize what others think and say during a discussion, I combine the new ideas I learned and apply my own reasoning to make new

connections and draw conclusions. Synthesizing helps me take new information and build on what I know.

Self-Assess

Compare your answers to Activities 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, information-oriented world, it feels almost quaint to sit down and read a piece of fiction. In a discussion with your Learning Coach, consider the following questions: Should people bother reading stories and fiction? What value does literature have in a technology-driven world?

Activity 2

Think about some of the people who are lauded as geniuses in society today. Consider the qualities they are said to possess and the myths that may have formed around them. Do you think these individuals were born with an innate talent for whatever it is they do, or do they secretly—or overtly—work very hard? Share your thoughts about what it means to be a genius today—or at any time in history—in a discussion with your Learning Coach.

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

