

Active Learning: Techniques to Spark Discussion Resources

Books:

- *The Discussion Book: 50 Great Ways to Get People Talking*, by Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill
- *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, 2nd Edition, by Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill
- *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom*, 3rd Edition, by Stephen D. Brookfield
- *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners*, by Ron Ritchhart, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison
- *Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education*, by Landis
- *500 Tips on Group Learning*, by Sally Brown
- *Promoting Active Learning: Strategies for the College Classroom*, by Chet Meyers
- *Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples, and Tips*, by Melvin L. Silberman and Elaine Biech
- *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*, by James M. Lan
- *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*, by Elizabeth F. Barkley
- *Story Smart: Using the Science of Story to Persuade, Influence, Inspire, and Teach*, by Kendall Haven

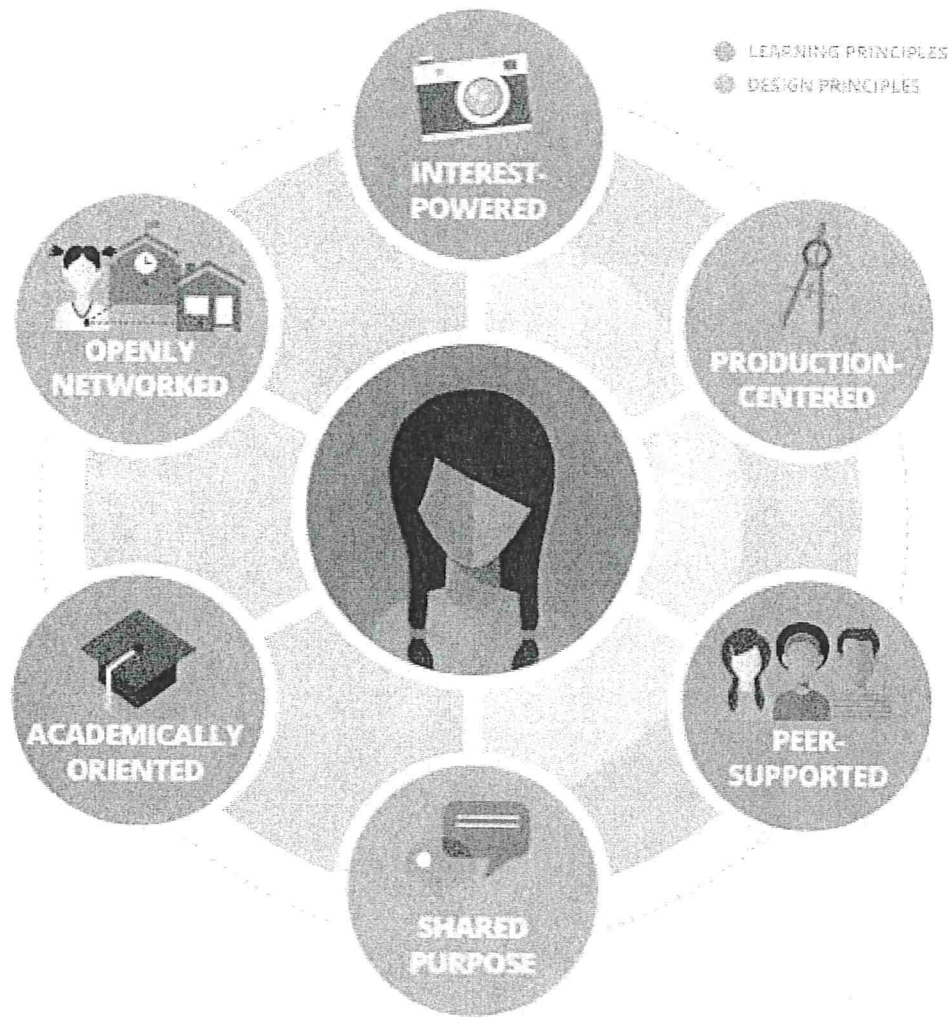
Web Links:

- *Active Learning For The College Classroom*, California State University,
<http://www.calstatela.edu/dept/chem/chem2/Active/main.htm>
- *163 Questions to Write or Talk About*, The New York Times,
<https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/12/163-questions-to-write-or-talk-about/>
- *How to Lead a Discussion*, Stanford Teaching Commons,
<https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/small-groups-and-discussions/how-lead-discussion>
- *Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education*,
<http://www.difficultdialoguesuaa.org/images/uploads/Start Talking full book pdf.pdf>

Articles:

- *From Safe to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice*, by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/75c5/6a5dba81efd0954597ea39eb7d55acc7a202.pdf>
- *Making Connections: 3 ways that faculty members can help students link course content to the world around them*
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Small-Changes-in-Teaching-/235230?cid=RCPACKAGE>

Principles of Connected Learning



“Making, creating, and producing are powerful paths to deeper learning and understanding. Connected learning asks learners to experiment, to be hands-on, and to be active and entrepreneurial in their learning, recognizing that this is what is now needed to be successful in work and in life.”

-Connected Learning Alliance

person speaks. Indeed, the first person to speak has the easiest task of all because he or she does not have to use a previous speaker's comments as the springboard for her remarks.

Conversational Roles

Students often find it helpful to know at the outset of a discussion the sort of conversational role they are required to play. Knowing that they have a particular task to fulfill seems to remove some of their performance anxiety. Any roles assigned must, of course, be alternated so that everyone takes their turn. It is an abuse of this exercise to assign the quietest role to the most annoyingly vociferous student each week, no matter how much you are tempted to do this. Here are some commonly used conversational roles:

- *Problem, Dilemma, or Theme Poser.* This participant has the task of introducing the topic of conversation. She draws on her own ideas and experiences as a way of helping others into conversation about the theme.
- *Reflective Analyst.* This member keeps a record of the conversation's development. Every 10 minutes or so she gives a summary that focuses on shared concerns, issues skirted, and emerging common themes.
- *Scrounger.* The scrounger listens for helpful resources, suggestions, and tips that participants have voiced as they discuss how to work through a problem or situation. She keeps a record of these ideas that is read out before the session ends.
- *Devil's Advocate.* This person listens carefully for any emerging consensus. When she hears this she formulates and expresses a contrary view. This keeps groupthink in check and helps participants explore a range of alternative interpretations.

- *Detective.* The detective listens carefully for unacknowledged, unchecked, and unchallenged biases that seem to be emerging in the conversation. As she hears these she brings them to the group's attention. She assumes particular responsibility for alerting group members to concerns of race, class, and gender. She listens for cultural blindness, gender insensitivity, and comments that ignore variables of power and class.
- *Theme Spotter.* This participant identifies themes that arise during the discussion that are left unexplored and that might form a focus for the next session.
- *Umpire.* This person listens for judgmental comments that sound offensive, insulting, and demeaning and that contradict ground rules for discussion generated by group members.
- *Textual Focuser.* Whenever assertions are made that seem unconnected to the text being discussed, this person asks the speaker to let the group know where in the text the point being made occurs.
- *Evidential Assessor.* This student asks speakers to give the evidence for empirical generalizations that are stated as self-evident fact but that actually seem more like opinion.
- *Synthesizer.* This person attempts to underscore links between different contributions.

Conversational Moves

An alternative to assigning conversational roles is to use the conversational moves exercise. Here the teacher pastes a number of conversational moves (speaking directions) on 3 × 5 cards and then randomly distributes these among participants at the beginning of a

Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning

There are times when students feel so confused by new concepts that they don't know what questions to ask. Guided reciprocal peer questioning provides students with higher order open-ended questions to generate a focused discussion in a small group setting. The questions are generic prompts students use to generate specific content-based questions. The instructor gives a mini-lecture in class and then provides a list of open-ended questions. Below is a selection of question formats, including questions that encourage synthesis, comparison and contrast, and extrapolation to other contexts. Students are then given a few minutes to individually prepare several content-specific questions aided by these open-ended questions. The students form groups and take turns asking their questions and discussing possible answers.

Explain why _____ .

Explain how _____ .

What is the meaning of _____ ?

Why is _____ happening?

What is the main idea of _____ ?

What is the solution to the problem of _____ ?

What if _____ ?

What conclusions can I draw about _____ ?

What is the best _____ and why?

What do you think causes _____ ? Why?

How does _____ affect _____ ?

How does _____ relate to what I've learned before?

What is the difference between _____ and _____ ?

How are _____ and _____ similar?

How would I use _____ to _____ ?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of _____ ?

What is another way to look at _____ ?

What is a new example of _____ ?

What would happen if _____ ?

Why is _____ important?

How does _____ apply to everyday life?

<https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/small-groups-and-discussions/sample-small-group-exercises>

Types of Questions

Clarity - "What do you mean by that? Can you put that another way?"

Linking - "How is that similar to what we read earlier? How does your viewpoint compare to Amalfi's?"

Open-ended - "What's happening here? What interests you about this issue?"

Synthesis - "What stands out from what we discussed? What big question still lingers?"

Evidence - "How did you come to know this? What experience is your analysis based on?"

Understanding - "Why do you think this is happening? How do you explain this situation?"

Priority - "What matters to you most about this? How do you explain this situation?"

- *The Discussion Book*, Brookfield

Exhibit 2.3. Questions Designed to Prompt Three Kinds of Thinking.

Field	Critical Thinking	Creative Thinking	Practical Thinking
Psychology	Compare Freud's theory of dreaming to Crick's.	Design an experiment to test a theory of dreaming. How might catastrophe theory be applied to psychology?	What are the implications of Freud's theory of dreaming for your own life?
Biology	Evaluate the validity of the bacterial theory of ulcers.	Design an experiment to test the bacterial theory of ulcers.	How would the bacterial theory of ulcers change conventional treatment regimens?
Literature	In what ways were Catherine Earnshaw and Daisy Miller similar?	Write an alternative ending to <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , uniting Catherine and Heathcliff in life.	Why are lovers sometimes cruel to each other and what can we do about it?
History	How did events in post-WWI Germany lead to the rise of Nazism?	How might Truman have encouraged the surrender of Japan without A-bombing Hiroshima?	What lessons does Nazism hold for the multiethnic war in Bosnia during the 1990s?
Mathematics	How is this mathematical proof flawed?	Prove [a given proposition]	How is trigonometry applied to the construction of bridges?
Art	Compare and contrast how Rembrandt and Van Gogh used light in [specific paintings].	Draw a beam of light.	How could we reproduce the lighting in this painting in an actual room?

Source: Material supplied by Robert J. Sternberg, formerly of the Department of Psychology, Yale University; now provost at Oklahoma State University. Used by permission.

Seven Levels of Listening

- 1 Not listening:** Not paying attention to or ignoring the other person's communications.
- 2 Pretend listening:** Acting like or giving the impression that you are paying attention to another person's communications, but in actuality not really paying attention to that individual.
- 3 Partially listening:** Only focusing on part of the other person's communication or only giving it your divided attention.
- 4 Focused listening:** Giving the other person your undivided attention to his or her communication.
- 5 Interpretive listening:** Going beyond just paying attention but really trying to understand what the other person is communicating.
- 6 Interactive listening:** Being involved in the communications by asking clarifying questions or acknowledging understanding of the communication.
- 7 Engaged listening:** Being fully engaged in communications involves listening to the other person's views, feelings, interpretations, values, etc., concerning the communication and sharing yours as well with the other person(s). In engaged listening, both parties are given the opportunity to fully express their views, feelings, and ideas.

Nonverbal Listening Test

Answer as many of the following questions as you can in the next 5 minutes.

1. What does the term *nonverbal communication* mean?

2. Give three examples of positive nonverbal communications:

1)

2)

3)

3. Give three examples of negative nonverbal communications:

1)

2)

3)

4. Rank order from most influential to least the following forms of nonverbal communications as the best indications of what a person may actually be communicating to you:

 Body posturing

 Position of arms and hands

 Eye contact

5. How much of the meaning of a spoken statement comes from the actual words spoken? (check one)

☐ a) 75%

☐ b) 7%

☐ c) 20%

Handout 13-A (concluded)

6. If someone speaks in a monotone, what does this mean and what influence does this have on his or her communications?

7. "Vocal variety" means which of the following? (check one)

- ☐ a) Traveling comedy shows of the 1920s
- ☐ b) The ability of a speaker to use inflections and pitch
- ☐ c) The ability of the speaker to use breathing techniques and do impersonations

8. During a meeting between you and a co-worker, he or she moves a chair from behind the desk and asks you to sit down to discuss something. You could interpret this nonverbal communication to mean: (check one)

- ☐ a) He or she is trying to conclude this meeting quickly.
- ☐ b) He or she is distracted.
- ☐ c) He or she is ready to listen to you attentively.

9. When a person crosses his or her arms during a conversation, this is an indication that: (check one)

- ☐ a) The person may not be in agreement.
- ☐ b) The person is totally supportive of the other person's views and opinions.

10. Nonverbal communication skills are important to be a good communicator. (check one)

- ☐ a) True
- ☐ b) False

Listening Bad Habits

Following is a list of ten bad habits of listening. Check those listening bad habits that you are sometimes guilty of committing when communicating with others. Be honest with yourself!

- ☐ I interrupt often or try to finish the other person's sentences.
- ☐ I jump to conclusions.
- ☐ I am often overly parental and answer with advice, even when not requested.
- ☐ I make up my mind before I have all the information.
- ☐ I am a compulsive note taker.
- ☐ I don't give any response afterward, even if I say I will.
- ☐ I am impatient.
- ☐ I lose my temper when hearing things I don't agree with.
- ☐ I try to change the subject to something that relates to my own experiences.
- ☐ I think more about my reply while the other person is speaking than what he or she is saying.