



Perspectives

Handbook

*An Instructor's Guide
to Using Perspectives On Your Campus*

Preface

Perspectives is a blended learning program that distills rigorous behavioral science research into practical skills to improve learners' communication and openness to diverse perspectives. The program draws on key concepts from psychology to explain *why* we see the world so differently from one another.

This handbook shows how to embed *Perspectives* into courses and co-curricular settings and offers a practical framework and ready-to-use strategies to help students' learning transfer beyond the program.

The guide has four main sections:

1. What's in *Perspectives*?

This section outlines the full *Perspectives* curriculum—key concepts, lesson takeaways, peer-to-peer conversation guides, and assessment options.

2. Implementing *Perspectives*

This section covers how to run the full *Perspectives* program—when to start, how to pace it, assess learning along the way, and support peer-to-peer conversations—whether in class or co-curricular settings.

3. *Perspectives* Learning Tracks

This section explains how to implement the learning track option of *Perspectives*, which offers instructors the choice to use a shorter version of the full *Perspectives* program.

4. Practicing Dialogue

This section helps instructors deepen dialogue skills in their roles. It offers simple practices to prepare students for dialogue and tools for navigating tension, conflict, or misunderstanding.

This handbook is here to help you integrate *Perspectives* into the places you engage students and, ultimately, spark more meaningful conversations on campus. It's not exhaustive—we encourage you to adapt, expand, and experiment. And we'd love to hear from you: How did you use *Perspectives*? What worked, what didn't, and what did you learn along the way?

1. What's in *Perspectives*?

At its core, the *Perspectives* curriculum teaches vital practices for navigating difficult conversations. Its model rests on CDI's five principles of constructive dialogue:

1. Let go of winning

Treating a conversation as a zero-sum battle, where one side wins and the other loses, triggers defensiveness, reduces the chances of learning, and strains relationships. When you focus on winning, you often lose. Instead, try approaching conversations with curiosity and a desire to understand. You'll find it can be contagious.

2. Ask questions

There's so much hidden beneath people's statements. Asking thoughtful questions can reveal the context, values, and motivations behind their views, creating new possibilities for connection across differences.

3. Share stories

Stories move us emotionally. They add context to facts and figures and allow us to share our perspectives without telling someone else their view is wrong. Shifting from debating to sharing why an issue matters to you—and inviting others to do the same—fosters mutual understanding.

4. Respond rather than react

In the heat of difficult conversations, our fight-or-flight response often takes over, leading us to react in ways we later regret. But if you pause to regain control of your emotions, you can respond rather than react—enabling you to make deliberate choices that move conversations forward.

5. Find what's shared

Finding common ground—whether big or small—can anchor a conversation in the midst of conflict. When we connect meaningfully with people who differ from us and focus on what we share, trust can grow and understanding can deepen—even when differences and disagreement remain.

Perspectives Lessons

Perspectives includes six sequential lessons, each lasting up to 30 minutes. The first two lay the foundation, using social and moral psychology to explain why dialogue across differences can be such a challenge. The remaining four offer practical, research-backed tools for engaging across divides.

Perspectives uses personalized practice at key skill moments, replacing static activities with real-time practice and responsive feedback. As students learn core dialogue skills — expanding their view, checking for values, asking questions, responding to stories, perspective-taking, and looping — they receive immediate, AI-powered adaptive feedback on what they did well, what they missed, and how to improve.

Each lesson has concept or skill focus areas, as outlined in the grid below.

Lesson	Concept or Skill Focus Areas
1	Intuitions first, reasoning second Confirmation bias
2	Moral foundations theory Perception gap and moral empathy gap
3	Asking questions Listening for values
4	Sharing stories Responding to stories
5	Staying calm through conflict Responding to conflict
6	Finding shared views within disagreement Connecting across differences

Below is a brief overview of each lesson, highlighting core concepts and key takeaways.

Introduction

Perspectives starts with an introduction to constructive dialogue—what it is, why it matters, and how it shows up in everyday life. It explores the personal, academic, and societal benefits of engaging across differences and encourages students to reflect on where dialogue fits into their own experiences. It also introduces the limits of dialogue, offering guidance on when to lean in and when it may be best to step away.

Lesson 1: The Divided Mind

Rooted in social and cognitive psychology, Lesson 1 examines how the way our brains process information combines with prevalent cognitive biases to shape some of our most profound disagreements. A key takeaway from the lesson: when you feel a strong reaction—whether it's agreement or outrage—pause and ask: **“Why would a smart, reasonable person see this differently?”**

Topics covered in this lesson include:

- **The Elephant and the Rider** – the metaphor explaining how much more powerful our automatic thinking (elephant) is than our controlled thinking (rider).
- **Intuitions First, Reasoning Second** – the principle for understanding how our thinking works most of the time.
- **Confirmation Bias** – the tendency to accept information that aligns with beliefs we already hold and reject information that contradicts them.

Lesson 2: Us and Them

Lesson 2 explores the psychology of where our differences in values and worldviews come from. It offers frameworks for better understanding opposing views. A key takeaway from the lesson: when you hear a view you strongly disagree with, pause and ask: **“What are the values underlying this view?”**

Topics covered in this lesson include:

- **The Perception Gap** – our tendency to assume that people from other groups hold views that are more extreme than they actually are.
- **Moral Foundations Theory** – the idea that people's worldviews are built on six core

foundations—care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority, and sanctity—which people prioritize differently based on their background and experiences.

- **Moral Empathy Gap** – the habit of focusing so much on *our own* moral lens that we overlook the values driving someone else’s beliefs.
- **Checking for Values** – a three-step skill for examining the values beneath someone’s stated position: hedge your assumptions, identify the underlying value, and check for understanding.

Lesson 3: Tell Me More

Lesson 3 focuses on the power of channeling curiosity and intellectual humility amidst disagreement, and introduces the skill of asking constructive questions. A key takeaway from the lesson: after someone shares their view with you, follow up with **“Can you tell me more about...”** and see what you can learn from the response.

Topics covered in this lesson include:

- **Warrior and explorer mindset** – the difference between approaching conversations like a warrior, who is focused on winning, and an explorer, who is curious and focused on learning and understanding.
- **Ask questions** – constructive questions are open-ended, curious, and invite personal experiences (rather than debate).

Lesson 4: Share Stories

Lesson 4 explains why stories are crucial to constructive dialogue. It introduces skills to share and respond to stories. A key takeaway from the lesson: next time you’re in a tough conversation, **focus on the why**. Instead of just stating your view, share the story behind it—and invite the other person to do the same.

Topics covered in this lesson include:

- **The Power of Storytelling** – In heated discussions, focus on telling compelling stories rather than trying to persuade with facts.
- **Tell HIT Stories** – The most impactful stories in dialogue are Honest, Important, and To the Point.
- **A Formula for Responding to Stories** – Acknowledge what someone shared, then ask a thoughtful question to better understand their perspective or help them reflect more deeply.

Lesson 5: Navigating Conflict

Lesson 5 examines key skills to de-escalate and navigate conflict. A key takeaway from the lesson: next time you feel a disagreement heating up, **pause to regain control and then choose how to respond.**

Topics covered in this lesson include:

- **Fight or flight:** Conflict can activate our brain's ancient threat response, making it hard to think clearly or stay in control.
- **Slow down:** Taking a slow, deep breath helps calm your nervous system and gives your rational brain time to re-engage.
- **Four ways to *respond* rather than *react* to conflict:** Consider the other perspective, uncover what's really at stake, looping, and AIR the issue.

Lesson 6: Moving Forward Together

Lesson 6 describes how we can move forward in community together, despite disagreement and difference. It examines different strategies we can employ to find what we share with others, including those with whom we disagree.

Topics covered in this lesson include:

- **Break free of boxes** – Resist the urge to reduce people to labels. Look for the full, complex person behind the assumptions.
- **Find agreement within disagreement** – Search for points of agreement, even when disagreement exists.
- **Seek both/and possibilities** – Look for creative solutions that draw on the strengths of both positions.
- **Step outside your circle** – Build relationships through shared experiences with people you might not otherwise interact with.



Peer-to-Peer Conversations

In addition to the six lessons, *Perspectives* includes three optional **peer-to-peer (P2P) conversations**—guided, 30-minute dialogues in groups of 3–4. These sessions give students low-stakes practice using *Perspectives* skills in real-life conversations.

Each P2P follows a consistent structure:

- Personal connection
- Intention-setting
- Prompts for structured sharing
- Reflection

Instructors group students (ideally with diverse perspectives) and keep groups consistent across all three P2Ps.

Here's a look at what each P2P covers.

Peer-to-Peer 1: What We Bring

This P2P comes after Lesson 2 and invites students to share the values that show up most in their lives.

Students will:

1. Learn about the structure and purpose of peer-to-peers
2. Exchange brief introductions and respond to an icebreaker question
3. Agree to group intentions
4. Participate in three separate go-rounds, sharing first about a person who has shaped their worldview, then about a value that they hold, and finally about a value that they've adopted recently
5. Respond to one another and discuss
6. Talk about the experience together before adjourning

Peer-to-Peer 2: How We Share Our Story

This P2P comes after Lesson 4 and invites students to share personal experiences that have shaped their worldview.

Students will:

1. Exchange brief introductions and respond to an icebreaker question
2. Review the agreed-upon group intentions
3. Share in a timed go-round with their group about an experience that explains why they hold a certain belief or value
4. Practice responding and asking constructive questions
5. Talk about the experience together before adjourning

Peer-to-Peer 3: How We Respond to Conflict

This P2P comes after Lesson 6 and invites students to reflect in new ways about a conflict they've had with someone in their life.

Students will:

1. Exchange brief introductions and respond to an icebreaker question
2. Review the agreed-upon group intentions
3. Share about a moment they experienced interpersonal conflict with a friend, family member, roommates, or classmate, and practice perspective-taking in retrospect
4. Talk about the experience together, and their overall take-aways from the peer-to-peer conversation, before adjourning

Peer-to-Peer Set-Up

Peer-to-Peer guides are available for download on the online platform. Each includes clear, step-by-step instructions for students to follow.

To set students up for success, instructors should take four key steps:

1. **Frame the experience** – Introduce Peer-to-Peers as a way to turn learning into real dialogue practice. Let students know they can come to you with concerns before they begin.
2. **Group students intentionally** – Form small, diverse groups of 3–4. Aim for a mix of perspectives—across background, upbringing, or worldview—and keep groups consistent across all three P2Ps.
3. **Establish communication expectations** – Assign a rotating point-person in each group to coordinate meeting times and locations.
4. **Create accountability** – Have students submit a short reflection on their experience—what they learned, what stood out, and how they'll apply it.

If possible, consider running Peer-to-Peers during class or co-curricular meetings to ensure participation and follow-through.



Quizzes

Perspectives includes two quizzes: one after Lesson 3 and another after Lesson 6. These quizzes reinforce key concepts and help students solidify their learning. Instructors can track quiz results through their dashboard if desired.

Questionnaires

As a research-focused organization, CDI builds tools grounded in evidence. *Perspectives* includes psychologically-valid assessments that measure changes in key outcomes—like openness to diverse viewpoints, effective listening, intellectual humility, and comfort using conflict resolution skills.

Instructors don't see individual results, but institutions receive aggregate data. We encourage instructors to treat the questionnaires as required parts of the program, as they show whether students are gaining lasting benefits from *Perspectives*.

2. Implementing *Perspectives*

Integrating *Perspectives* into your course or co-curricular space is simple. This section explains registration, onboarding, and how to fit the program into new or existing curricula.

Registration & Onboarding

If you're not ready to register for *Perspectives*, you can preview the program as your learners would experience it. If you are ready to register for *Perspectives*, you can create an account, configure your program, and start adding learners.

Information on previewing and registering for *Perspectives* is all here:
www.constructivedialogue.org/perspectives.

Please contact CDI Support at info@constructivedialogue.org for questions or concerns.



Curricular Logistics

Making Room for *Perspectives*

Perspectives is flexible—it can be used as homework, in-class work, or shortened to learning tracks. You can grade it, add your own assessments, and build on the content however you choose.

Framing

Before launching *Perspectives*, set the stage with clear framing.



First, explain the “why.” Share your reasons for assigning the program. Consider:

- Why do dialogue skills matter in your course, co-curricular space, or campus community?
- Why is *Perspectives* a good fit for your students?
- What do you hope they’ll gain?
- How should conversations look and feel after completing it?

Second, set expectations. Clarify what students can expect:

- How much time will it take?
- When are lessons and peer-to-peer conversations due?
- How will P2Ps be scheduled?

Third, make it relevant. Connect the program to students’ broader lives. Explain:

- How will you look for these skills in action?
- Where do you hope students will keep using them—on campus and beyond?

Framing it this way boosts student buy-in and engagement with the material.

Pacing

Perspectives is flexible in pacing, but a 3–4 week rollout is ideal. It gives students time to absorb each lesson, maintain momentum, and fit in peer-to-peer conversations without losing continuity.

Three-week rollout option

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1	Intro + Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Peer-to-Peer 1
Week 2	Lesson 3 Midpoint Quiz	Lesson 4	Peer-to-Peer 2
Week 3	Lesson 5	Lesson 6 End-of-Program Quiz	Peer-to-Peer 3

Four-week rollout option

	Tuesday	Thursday
Week 1	Intro + Lesson 1	Lesson 2 Peer-to-Peer 1
Week 2	Lesson 3	Midpoint Quiz
Week 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5 Peer-to-Peer 2
Week 4	Lesson 6 End-of-Program Quiz	Peer-to-Peer 3

Assessment

Perspectives offers flexible assessment options. Instructors can use a pass/fail model based on lesson completion or award credit for completing all lessons, P2Ps, and quizzes. Alternatively, they can grade students using quiz scores, which are viewable in the online dashboard.

Custom assessments—like written reflections or point-based scoring for each component—are also possible but must be tracked manually outside the platform.



Written Reflections	Assign short (250-word or less) written reflections after each lesson to assess student comprehension and engagement.	
Component Scoring	Assign a set number of points for the completion of each lesson and peer-to-peer conversation. Add quiz scores (if used) to create a composite grade.	
	Example Scoring Rubric	
	Completed Lesson 10 points each	___/60 points
	Completed P2P 10 points each	___/30 points
	Quiz 1 Score 10 points max	___/10 points
	Quiz 2 Score 10 points max	___/10 points
Total	___/110 points	

3. Perspectives Learning Tracks



Learning tracks offer a flexible way to deliver *Perspectives* when time is limited. Each track is a curated excerpt of the full program, focused on a key theme.

Learning Track 1: The Inner Workings of Our Minds

The first learning track covers lessons 1 and 2 of *Perspectives*. It focuses on the mindsets behind dialogue, how our brains process information, and the origins of our values and beliefs. It includes one peer-to-peer conversation and a final quiz.

Learning Track 2: Constructive Dialogue Skills

The second learning track covers lessons 3-6 of *Perspectives*. It focuses on dialogue skills: letting go of winning, asking questions, sharing stories, navigating conflict, and finding common ground. It includes two peer-to-peer conversations and a final quiz.

Implementing Perspectives Learning Tracks

Implementing a learning track works just like the full *Perspectives* program. Each track includes all the same features. The main difference is time—learning tracks require less of it. Below are recommended rollout plans for each track.

Learning Track 1: One-Week Rollout

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1	Intro + Lesson 1	Lesson 2 + Quiz	Peer-to-Peer

Learning Track 2: Two-Week Rollout

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1	Intro + Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Peer-to-Peer 1
Week 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4 + Quiz	Peer-to-Peer 2

4. Practicing Dialogue

The following resources are designed to help instructors and educators bring dialogue-related practices and activities to their students right away. These activities can be used to practice skills that students encounter in *Perspectives* or spark engagement and conversation in curricular or co-curricular places. They are grouped by purpose.



To Set the Stage for Dialogue

Establishing Group Intentions – Group intentions are shared goals that clarify what students can expect in a space and how they’re expected to engage. When students help shape these intentions, they’re more likely to take ownership and stay engaged—even when conversations get uncomfortable.

Minute Meet-Ups – In this icebreaker, students rotate through partners, answering quick prompts before switching. It’s a fast, low-pressure way to build connection before diving into deeper conversations.

Quickfire Questions – This trust-building activity invites students to take turns in the “spotlight” while peers ask quickfire questions. It fosters curiosity, connection, and student-led sharing—participants may answer or pass on any question.

Rapid Relate – Finding what’s shared is a core principle of constructive dialogue. When we disagree, we often focus on differences. But finding commonalities can be a glue that holds a conversation together. This activity helps students practice this skill.

To Invite Conversation

Structures for Dialogue – The structure of group sharing—not just the topic—shapes the quality of dialogue. This resource outlines creative formats for inviting student voices and sustaining constructive conversation.

To Practice and Improve Dialogue Skills

Foundations Exchange – Students share their top moral foundation value with a partner. Their partner then asks questions to learn where and how that value originated.

Listening Sessions – One student shares from a prompt while the other listens silently. This builds listening skills and creates space for uninterrupted sharing.

To Rebuild and Reflect Afterward

The Debrief – A key part of dialogue is “talking about talking”—shifting focus from the topic to the conversation itself. Debriefs help make this happen, giving students a chance to reflect and learn from each other.

Conclusion

As noted in the Preface, this guide isn't exhaustive—and there's more available. Visit our [website](#) and [Resource Library](#) for additional activities, and sign up for our [newsletter](#) for updates and training opportunities. Interested in live facilitation training? Explore our [professional development opportunities for educators](#).

Most importantly, build on what you've learned. Make this guide your own—and let us know how you use it.