



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 help improve learners' communication, sense of belonging, and openness to diverse perspectives. The program teaches key concepts from psychology to explain where our differences in beliefs, worldviews, and values come from.

This handbook explains how to effectively integrate the *Perspectives* program and its takeaways into both curricular and co-curricular spaces on higher education campuses. It also provides a robust framework and set of activities to bring dialogue into your classroom and ensure students' learning from *Perspectives* lasts.

The guide has four main sections:

1. *What's in Perspectives?*

This section describes the curriculum of the full *Perspectives* program. It provides an overview of the program material and a snapshot of key concepts and insights from each lesson. It details the peer-to-peer conversations and assessment options that accompany each lesson.

2. *Implementing Perspectives*

This section focuses on the logistics of implementing the full *Perspectives* program. It contains guidance on when to introduce *Perspectives*, how to pace the program, how to assess what students learn, and how to support the peer-to-peer conversations. This section is designed to help instructors integrate *Perspectives* into their course or as part of co-curricular student programming.

3. *Perspectives Learning Tracks*

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

4. *Creating a Resilient Space for Dialogue*

This section is designed for instructors who want to take *Perspectives* learnings to the next level, and see the skills of constructive dialogue reflected more deeply in their approach to working with students. It includes simple activities and routines designed to prepare and

support students to engage in constructive dialogue. It also provides a framework and tools for intervening in dialogues during moments of tension, conflict, or misunderstanding.

Our goal in creating this handbook is to support instructors as they work to integrate the *Perspectives* program into their context, and to support them in using it to start to transform the nature of conversations on college and university campuses.

This is by no means meant to be an exhaustive guide. We would invite instructors to find new, innovative ways to use *Perspectives* and build upon its teachings. We hope you will take time to share such work with us. How did you implement *Perspectives*? What worked? What didn't? What did you learn along the way?

1. What's in *Perspectives*?

Perspectives consists of **six lessons** and **three (optional) peer-to-peer conversations**. Each lesson can be completed by participants independently in 30 minutes or less. The peer-to-peer conversations (more information below) are also designed to be completed in 30 minutes.

The six lessons of *Perspectives* are meant to be completed in order, as they follow a curricular narrative. The first two lessons are foundational. They break down key insights from social and moral psychology to explain why and how talking to people who are different from us can be such a challenge. The remaining four lessons offer evidence-based practices to help participants engage in dialogue across differences.

Throughout *Perspectives*, participants will learn vital practices for navigating difficult conversations based on CDI's five principles of constructive dialogue:

1. Let go of winning

Approaching a conversation like a zero-sum battle, where one side wins and the other loses, sets up an adversarial dynamic that will typically lead others to put up their defenses. This dynamic minimizes the possibility of learning and often damages relationships. By striving to “win,” you’re actually setting yourself up for failure. Instead, try entering conversations with curiosity and the goal of understanding. You’ll find it can be contagious.

2. Get curious

There is so much hidden beneath people's statements. Asking questions can play a powerful role in uncovering the context, motivations, and values that inform another person's views. When you lead with questions that invite others to share something meaningful or that seek out the nuances of someone's perspective, you'll quickly discover new possibilities in conversations across differences.

3. Share stories

Stories move people emotionally. They offer context to facts and figures. And they can allow you to convey your own views without telling someone else their view is wrong. Stories can be

a powerful tool to replace frustrating disagreements with constructive ones. Instead of telling someone what you think, tell them a story about why an issue matters to you or how it affects you. And then invite them to do the same.

4. Navigate conflict with purpose

It's normal for tensions to rise when discussing sensitive and controversial issues. We are biologically wired to activate a fight, flight, or freeze response to these heated moments. These responses often leave us feeling like we have less control over our actions and are more likely to say or do something we later regret. By identifying when your fight, flight, or freeze response is starting to take hold and pausing to regain control of the situation, you are much better positioned to move forward with intention.

5. Find what's shared

The commonalities we find with each other – both big and small – can be the glue that holds a conversation together through conflict. Finding what's shared is about purposefully seeking out those similarities and using them to move forward together, even in the middle of a disagreement.

Perspectives Lessons

Here's a brief overview of each lesson, including the key concepts each lesson covers and the insights participants should take away from the lesson.

Introduction

Perspectives begins with an introduction that orients students to constructive dialogue. It describes the benefits of engaging with diverse perspectives, suggests the possible contexts in which students could be using dialogue in their lives, and introduces boundaries and gray areas to engaging with difference of opinion.

Lesson 1: The Divided Mind

Lesson 1 covers foundational concepts from psychology about how we process information, cognitive biases we are prone to, and how this can lead to disagreements.

Key Concepts:

- Automatic and controlled thinking (dual process theory)
- Metaphor of the elephant and the rider
- Confirmation bias

Insights:

1. Our brains have two thinking “systems”: automatic and controlled thinking.
2. Our reasoning often follows our intuitions, rather than the other way around.
3. Due to how these two systems operate, we are prone to consistent errors in our reasoning, and we’re often unaware of it.
4. These mistakes can shape how we interpret facts and can lead to seemingly intractable disagreements.

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.

Key Concepts:

- Perception Gap
- Moral Foundations Theory

Insights:

1. We tend to assume “the other side” is more extreme than they are.
2. We all share the same 6 moral foundations: care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority, and sanctity.
3. Our life experiences play a powerful role in shaping our moral worldviews.
4. Liberals and conservatives tend to rely on the foundations in different ways and to different degrees.
5. We can listen for moral foundations to better understand why people believe what they do.

Lesson 3: Get Curious

Lesson 3 focuses on the power of channeling curiosity and intellectual humility amidst disagreement, and introduces the skill of asking constructive questions.

Key Concepts:

- Intellectual humility
- Warrior mindset vs. explorer mindset
- Illusion of explanatory depth
- Belief updating
- Pause, ponder, pursue
- Constructive questions

Insights:

1. Mindsets have the power to shape the dynamics of difficult conversations.
2. Intellectual humility can be applied to all aspects of life, including conversations with people we disagree with. Intellectually humble people tend to have better life outcomes.
3. Bringing an explorer mindset to conversations can help you deepen your understanding of the other person and make them more receptive to engaging in conversation with you.
4. Issues tend to be more complex than we think they are, but we can learn more about them and then choose to update our beliefs based on new information.
5. Asking constructive questions with genuine curiosity can change a conversation for the better.

Lesson 4: Storytelling

Lesson 4 describes how to share your story, and how to respond to others so they know you're listening. Finally, it breaks down ways to invite more dialogue despite disagreement.

Key Concepts:

- Telling your “HIT” story: Telling stories that are Honest, Important, and To the point
- Responding to others’ stories: Acknowledge, Mirror, Restate Values and Feelings, Empathize
- Inviting more dialogue by asking about story details and meaning, stating your opinion respectfully, and inviting them to share their thoughts

Insights:

1. Storytelling can be an effective way to deepen understanding because it begins by engaging people’s intuitions and makes them more receptive to your reasoning.
2. Stories should be honest, important, and to the point, but you don’t need to have firsthand experience with something to share a personal story about why you care.
3. The way you respond to a story can convey that you’ve listened to and empathized with it.
4. After listening to another person’s story, you can invite more dialogue and share your own views, even if you disagree.

Lesson 5: Navigating Conflict

Lesson 5 introduces the key skills for navigating conflict with purpose.

Key Concepts:

- Fight/Flight/Freeze Response
- Detect, Pause, Redirect
- Own your part, express concern, address the issue, and take a break
- BIN framework: Behaviors, Impact, Needs
- Consider the Context

Insights:

1. Our brains automatically and instantaneously set off our fight, flight, or freeze response when we feel threatened.
2. We can regain control of ourselves — and the conversation — if we slow down our FFF response.
3. We can use different strategies to redirect ourselves and the conversation out of the panic zone, including: own your part, express concern, address the situation, and take a break.
4. Before making assumptions about where others are coming from, we can consider their context more charitably.

Lesson 6: Moving Forward Together

Lesson 6 describes how we can move forward in community together, despite disagreement and difference. We can do this by finding what's shared.

Key Concepts Covered:

- Break free of boxes
- Find agreement within disagreement
- Seek both/and possibilities

Insights:

1. Moving forward together starts with finding what's shared, even while you still might disagree with each other. There are three key techniques to doing this:
 - a. **Break free of boxes** – Make connections where you didn't think they were possible before.
 - b. **Find agreement within disagreement** – Search for points of agreement, even while disagreement exists.
 - c. **Seek both/and possibilities** – Discover new solutions that draw on the strengths of both while mitigating the downsides.

Peer-to-Peer Conversations

In addition to the six lessons, *Perspectives* also includes three **peer-to-peer conversations** (P2Ps). P2Ps are optional guided conversations students can have with two or more peers. They provide students with low-stakes practice opportunities to start applying the skills from *Perspectives* in real-life conversations.



Each P2P is designed for a group of three students to complete in 30 minutes, and follows a similar structure:

- Connect with each other on a personal level
- Set norms for the conversation
- Engage in a structured dialogue with prompts
- Reflect on the experience

Instructors are responsible for grouping students. Groups should be 3-4 students total and remain the same for all three P2Ps. When possible, try to arrange groups of students who hold different beliefs and values.

Here's an overview of what each P2P includes.

Peer-to-Peer 1: What We Bring

This P2P follows *Perspectives* Lesson 2, and draws on learnings from both Lesson 1 and Lesson 2.

Students will:

1. Introduce themselves to their peer-to-peer groups.
2. Learn about the structure and purpose of peer-to-peers.
3. Agree to communication norms.
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. Talk about the experience together before adjourning.

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

This P2P follows *Perspectives* Lesson 4, and draws on learnings from both Lesson 3 and Lesson 4.

Students will:

1. Reconnect through a go-round prompt.
2. Review the agreed-upon conversation norms.
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 Connect Through Difference

This P2P follows *Perspectives* Lesson 6, and draws on learnings from the entire course, with special attention to Lesson 5 and Lesson 6.

Students will:

1. Reconnect through a go-round prompt.
2. Review the agreed-upon conversation norms.
3. Read a specific conflict scenario and discuss their reactions to the scenario, the values underlying their beliefs, and any uncertainties they may feel about the topic.
4. Talk about the experience together, and their overall take-aways from the peer-to-peer conversation, before adjourning.

Assessment



Perspectives includes two quizzes – a midpoint quiz after Lesson 3, and an end-of-program quiz after Lesson 6. Quizzes assess how well students understand and remember key concepts and practices presented in *Perspectives*. They are a great way for students to solidify their learning as they go.

If instructors would like to track student quiz results, they can do so in their dashboard.

Research

As a research-focused organization, CDI prioritizes building the most effective tools possible. Embedded in *Perspectives* are psychologically-valid assessments that evaluate whether students are improving along several crucial outcomes after completing the program, including things like attitude to people who are different from them, psychological safety, belonging, intellectual humility, and comfort using conflict resolution skills, among others.

Individual instructors do not have access to these results, but these analytics are included when using *Perspectives* at the institutional level. We encourage instructors to treat the questionnaires as required parts of the program, as they help explain whether and how students are experiencing lasting benefits from *Perspectives*.

2. Implementing *Perspectives*

Setting up and integrating *Perspectives* into your course or co-curricular space is simple. This section covers all there is to know about registration and onboarding. It also provides basic guidance on fitting *Perspectives* into a new or existing course.



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 can be assigned as homework, completed in-class, or as learning tracks. You can assign grades to the program, create your own assessments, and expand upon student learning in creative ways.

Framing

Before starting *Perspectives*, it can be helpful to frame the experience.



First, explain to students why you're asking them to complete this program. This answer is different for every instructor, so we'd encourage you to consider the following questions and communicate your answers to students:

- Why do constructive dialogue skills matter in the scheme of their learning in your course, co-curricular space, or campus as a whole?
- Why do you think this program is a good fit for your students?
- What do you hope students will get out of the program?
- How do you envision conversations looking and feeling in your classroom or co-curricular space after the program is done?

Second, let students know what they can expect to experience through their involvement in *Perspectives*. Consider your answers to these questions, and communicate them to students:

- How much of a time commitment is this program?
- When will students be expected to complete the lessons?
- How and when will peer-to-peer conversations happen?

Finally, share next steps. Let students know, in concrete terms, where and how *Perspectives* will continue to be relevant for them in their lives on and off campus. If students know there is a reason for doing this that exists beyond completing the program, then they are much more likely to meaningfully engage with *Perspectives*.

Consider these questions, and make the answers clear to students before *Perspectives* begins:

- How will you expect to see the mindsets and skills of dialogue in your work with students?
- When and where do you hope students will continue to use these skills?

Pacing

Perspectives can be rolled out as quickly or as slowly as an instructor chooses, but we'd recommend a 3 or 4-week rollout sequence (see examples below). This pacing gives students time to digest the concepts from each lesson, but keeps up a degree of learning momentum, while providing sufficient time for peer-to-peer conversation meetings.

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



There are many options for assessing student performance in *Perspectives*. Instructors can choose to treat *Perspectives* as a *pass/fail assignment*, where students receive credit for every lesson they complete, or receive course credit upon completing all of the lessons, peer-to-peer conversations, and quizzes.

Instructors can also choose to *assign students a grade* based on their quiz scores. Each student's lesson completion and quiz scores are all accessible by instructors through the dashboard.

Instructors might also choose to design their own unique assessments to *Perspectives*, though those assessments cannot be tracked within the administrator dashboard and must instead be tracked by instructors manually. Below are two examples of how instructors might choose to assess student comprehension: *written reflections* that are submitted separately, and *component scoring* which gives each piece of the program its own point value.

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 are a feature of *Perspectives* that provide instructors additional ways of customizing how they bring the program to their students. Sometimes there isn't enough time for the full *Perspectives* program. Learning tracks are **excerpts of the full *Perspectives* program designed around key themes.**

There are two *Perspectives* learning tracks: *The Inner Workings of Our Minds* and *Constructive Dialogue Skills*.

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 needed to engage in constructive dialogue. Students will learn about how their brains process information and how people form values and beliefs. It includes one peer-to-peer practice activity and a final quiz.

Learning Track 2: Constructive Dialogue Skills

The second learning track covers lessons 3-6 of *Perspectives*. It focuses on the skills needed to engage in constructive dialogue. Students will learn and practice the five principles of constructive dialogue: let go of winning, get curious, share stories, navigate conflict with purpose, and find what's shared. It includes two peer-to-peer practice activities and a final quiz.

Implementing Perspective Learning Tracks

Implementing learning tracks is very similar to implementing the full version of *Perspectives*. All of the features that accompany the full version are available with each learning track option: peer-to-peer conversations, quizzes, and the administrator dashboard. The only major difference is the amount of time needed to complete each learning track. Below are our recommended rollout plans for each learning 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. Creating a Resilient Space for Dialogue

While the six lessons of *Perspectives* lay the groundwork for students to start engaging in constructive dialogue, it really is only the beginning of this work. Dialogue is a life-long skill: one that has a low floor for entry but a high ceiling for mastery. This section is for instructors who want to not only implement *Perspectives*, but also infuse dialogue into the culture, practices, and routines of their classroom or co-curricular space.

The PSI Framework

We recommend a framework we call “**Prepare – Support – Intervene,**” or **PSI**, for building dialogue-ready spaces. This model intentionally places *prepare* and *support* first. This is not to imply that *intervening* in moments of tension isn’t important, but building a culture that supports constructive dialogue in advance can mitigate the need for intervening altogether.

Focusing on building a culture of constructive dialogue will likely:

- 1) Provide more options for intervening in an uncertain situation;
- 2) Empower instructors to intervene, rather than avoiding or escalating the conflict, and;
- 3) Support transitions or reconciliations after high-tension moments.

The chart below describes the PSI approach in brief, including how each stage aligns with *Perspectives* lessons. We also reference specific activities that are included later in this guide.

Stage	Description	Focus Area	Activities	<i>Perspectives</i> Anchor
Prepare	What an instructor does to make a group or community ready for constructive dialogue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish expectations and purpose • Build trust and cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norms • Hopes and Concerns • Spotlight • Minute Meetups 	Lesson 1 Lesson 2
Support	Ways to infuse constructive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use dialogue structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group work structures 	Lesson 3 Lesson 4

	dialogue skills into everyday moments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice dialogue skills and mindsets • Talk about talking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions Game • Listening Sessions • Talking about talking 	Lesson 5 Lesson 6
Intervene	How to de-escalate rising pressure or interpersonal conflict.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain dialogue in moments of tension • Maintain relationships and practices for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deciding when to intervene • Intervention strategies 	

Prepare

Prepare describes what an instructor does to make a space ready for constructive dialogue. This includes setting expectations for the course or program, establishing norms based on those expectations, and helping students begin to make connections and build trust with each other.



This stage is well-suited to pair with the first two lessons in *Perspectives*. With its focus on how we think and reason, consider using Lesson 1 as pre-work to setting norms. Lesson 2 is a strong complement to activities that seek to help students build connections among themselves.

While there is no single best way to prepare a classroom or common space for dialogue, the following key areas of focus, and recommended activities for each, are proven starting points.

Establish Expectations

Students should know and be able to articulate why they are participating in a class or co-curricular activity. Often, instructors use a syllabus or description to make their expectations clear, but that is

usually not enough. These activities help the instructor establish the boundaries of a learning space or working group while including students in that process.

Co-Creating Resilient Group Norms: Norms are explicit standards that describe both what students can expect to experience in a common space, and how they should expect to participate in that space. By including them in the process, students have the opportunity to shape and own the types of respectful and honest conversations they want to have. This connection can help students participate in conversations even through discomfort.

Hopes and Concerns: Having students reflect on their hopes and concerns around engaging with one another about topics that matter to them is a key piece of preparation for dialogue. Students should know and articulate to others their purpose for engaging – their reason for wanting to discuss topics, despite potential discomfort. If conversations get tense, this will serve as their north star, and make navigating the conversation much easier. This reflective and intention-setting activity allows students to consider and share their hopes and concerns around engaging in constructive dialogue about issues they care about, and listen to others do the same.

Build Trust and Cohesion

We encourage instructors to think of building trust and cohesion among students as a critical foundation on which to effectively build dialogue practices. It can often feel irrelevant to course curriculum or group purpose. But without a sense of trust and group cohesion, conversations about controversial or sensitive topics are much more likely to turn into tense or divisive interactions. And then instructors may end up spending more time putting out fires that they could have potentially avoided. Group distrust can be a distraction from learning, and proactive cohesion-building exercises can mitigate distrust.

The following two activities can help begin to build that foundation.

Spotlight: This trust-building activity creates a student-driven opportunity to learn new things about their peers while practicing asking questions and being curious. Students take turns being in the “spotlight,” during which time other students can ask them questions that they can choose to answer in quick succession. Students can always pass and decline to answer a question.

Minute Meetups: In this icebreaker activity, students cycle through different partners in quick succession and take turns answering prompts given by the instructor before turning to a new

partner for a new prompt. It is a quick and accessible way to make students feel more connected to their peers prior to engaging in deeper conversation topics.

Support



Support describes what an instructor does to build students' constructive dialogue skills and create opportunities for dialogue. This includes teaching students to ask constructive questions, using structures that enable dialogue to thrive, and building in time for students to reflect. The competencies laid out in *Support* are: help students practice dialogue skills and mindsets, create dialogue structures, and talk about talking.

Lessons 3-6 of *Perspectives* make great pairings with this work. These four lessons introduce students to the principles of constructive dialogue, as well as practical strategies for using those principles. Students can be well-served by having additional opportunities to practice these skills – and that is precisely what these suggested focus areas and activities aim to do.

Practice Dialogue Skills and Mindsets

The skills and mindsets that support constructive dialogue can be practiced in a multitude of ways, using a variety of topics or course material. Two core skills for constructive dialogue are asking questions and listening, and the activities outlined below help students to build and strengthen those skills in the classroom and beyond. Instructors can choose to focus both of these activities on course curriculum and discussions about readings, films, or other assignments.

The Questions Game: In pairs, students take turns sharing a stance they hold (a political belief, value, or ideology), and their partner listens and only asks questions (rather than responding) in order to learn as much as they can about their partner's views and why they hold those views.

Listening Sessions: This activity challenges students to practice listening to better understand where their partner is coming from. It also gives students the chance to share without fear of being interrupted.

Create Dialogue Structures

Dialogue structures can make sharing easier for all types of communicators. Simply inviting students to speak in front of all their peers may inadvertently encourage the same students to share – those who feel comfortable speaking in front of large groups – while others stay silent. Using different group sizes, as well as formal structures within those groups, can help infuse a classroom or co-curricular program with many more student voices and ideas.

Structure for Group Dialogue: This resource lists out group discussion structures that invite conversation and make it easier for students to share with their peers. Instructors can choose to use these approaches to invite students' voices in any type of group space around any topic.

Talk About Talking

Talking about talking refers to shifting the conversation to discussing the conversation itself, rather than the topic at hand. Athletes often watch videos of their performances, analyzing both their strengths and weaknesses in order to develop and hone their craft. Talking about talking is similar. It creates the opportunity for students to debrief what happened, reflect on strengths and growth opportunities, and consider how the next conversation could look. Oftentimes in more heated conversations about controversial topics, group norms fall by the wayside (this is okay and quite normal), and processing what happened afterward is where students can learn what to avoid in the future. This is when students can start to have deeper conversations about what matters to them, how they want to be in community together, and what might get in the way.

The Debrief: One way to prompt your students to talk about talking is through the debrief, when students turn their attention from the conversation itself to how it went and what happened. This guide breaks down the components of a debrief.

Intervene



Intervening is what an instructor does to address and deescalate rising pressure or intensifying interpersonal conflict. It can look like intervening with a question, redirection, correction, or observation of dynamics. Instructors might also intervene by restructuring the dialogue (for example, from full-group to small groups, or from pairs to a go-round) in order to break up an unhealthy or unproductive dynamic.

There are many reasons why an instructor may feel the need to intervene in a student conversation. Some common reasons instructors might want to intervene are:

- Sharing is uneven – either 1-2 students are dominating the conversation, or some or all students are disengaged from the conversation.
- One or more students become frustrated, angry, or upset by the way the conversation is unfolding.
- A student makes a statement based on misinformation.
- A student says something harmful or ignorant about a group of people.

Intervening is all about redirecting the discussion so that it can continue more constructively. Of course, there are behaviors that require more drastic measures. There is no magic formula to determine whether a behavior requires an intervention or needs to be paused or ended, but it's important to note that threats of harm, harassment, and bullying should be condemned and reported immediately.

Deciding When to Intervene

There are costs and benefits to all decisions a facilitator makes in a moment of tension or conflict

between students, and there are no easy answers in the moment. Start by considering:

1. Is this uncomfortable and vulnerable, but still constructive?
2. What might I be missing? Who else might be affected by this?
3. What are the benefits of intervening? What could be the drawbacks of intervening?
4. What might happen if I *don't* intervene? Does saying nothing send a message?
5. How might my role as the teacher or instructor affect how the student or group takes the intervention?

If you've decided it's the right choice to intervene, rather than let the conversation continue without stepping in, try to embody the following values:

- You have compassion for everyone in the room and assume student context charitably
- You are curious and recognize that you probably don't know the whole story
- You are staying committed to the purpose of the gathering/dialogue (such as "to understand each other better")
- You are prioritizing the needs of the group, as well as your own needs – take a minute, debrief with a colleague, reflect and notice your reactions, draw boundaries for the types of conversations you cannot have without feeling overwhelmed.

Intervention Approaches

If there is one thing we hope instructors take away from this guide about interventions, it's the realization that there are so many different options to intervene in inappropriate or stalled conversations. The grid below describes a variety of approaches that can help recenter a conversation that is spiraling out of control.

Intervention	Description	Examples:
Ask questions	We often bring assumptions that we know what someone is talking about, but it's best to give them the chance to say it themselves. Simple and open-ended questions are best.	<p><i>"Can you tell me more about what you mean?"</i></p> <p><i>"Why do you think that is?"</i></p> <p><i>"What makes you say that?"</i></p> <p><i>"Why is that important to you?"</i></p>
Acknowledge meaning	Acknowledge the bigger picture feelings , values , and interests that are being	<p><i>"I can see many people feel frustrated!"</i></p> <p><i>"It's clear to me that many of you are</i></p>

	expressed in order to defuse the tension.	<i>concerned about freedom and liberty being upheld on this campus.”</i>
Change course	Changing the structure of a conversation slows things down and can deescalate an argument. You can do this by asking students to pause, think then speak , or changing the conversation to a go-round, small groups, or pairs .	<p><i>“Let’s pause and turn-and-talk to the person next to you about how you’re feeling.”</i></p> <p><i>“Let’s stop and go around the circle to share one thing you’d like to say.”</i></p>
Talk about talking	Turn students’ attention to the way the conversation itself is happening by facilitating a temperature check, norms check-in, or asking the group to weigh in on how to move forward.	<p><i>“How’s this conversation feeling for others?”</i></p> <p><i>“Given that things are starting to move quickly, this might be a good time to revisit our norms. What is a norm you all think we could do better at right now? Which norms are you seeing us upholding particularly well so far?”</i></p>
Address the breach	Be specific about the breach that has occurred by naming the norm and offering another approach that might work better, or guiding students through using the BIN Framework (Behavior, Impact, Needs).	<p><i>“When I heard you say [statement], it [had this effect on me]. In the future, I’d prefer if you say [this] instead.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am noticing some interrupting, which was something we wanted to avoid in our norms. I’d like to invite you to keep to those norms by speaking one at a time.”</i></p>

Conclusion

As we mentioned in the Preface, this is not meant to be an exhaustive guide. Indeed, it does not even cover all the resources we have available for instructors. Please check out our website – particularly our [Resource Library](#) – to find even more activities. Sign up for our [newsletter](#) to stay on top of new updates, releases, and training opportunities. If you're interested in live trainings to deepen your knowledge and expertise in dialogue and facilitation, check out our [professional development opportunities for educators](#).

But more importantly – build on what you learn. Take this guide and make it your own. And please, let us know what you do with it!