

Spectrum of Beliefs

Summary

This activity prepares students to share personally about their stance on key issues and belief systems by arranging themselves across a physical spectrum between “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree.” It is a great way to ease students into sharing about difficult topics (since they share their positions silently), and for educators to learn which particular issues or topics are the most interesting to their class of students. If students want to discuss topics where there is most disagreement in the group, this is a way to learn which topics to choose.

Outcomes

- Students will become aware of the different perspectives and beliefs that exist among their peers
- Students will have the opportunity to share more deeply about their values and experiences

Details

For Who?	Secondary school and older; any level of experience with constructive dialogue
How Long?	20 minutes for the activity; 30-40 minutes for debrief/dialogue
Supplies Needed	Two pieces of paper to place on opposing walls or on the floor: “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree”

Activity Purpose

It is often hard to know the range of views that exist in any group, and many students are reluctant to share if they feel their view might be controversial or judged by others.

For this reason, students often focus only on what is *agreed* upon, rather than what makes them *different*. But surfacing differences can be a powerful source of learning.

This exercise creates accessible opportunities to share differences and to understand how our differences shape our experiences. It surfaces political beliefs in a way that encourages constructive dialogue.

Detailed Agenda

1. Set the Stage

Instructions:

- First, arrange the room with the two furthest walls each representing a stance: “Strongly Agree,” and “Strongly Disagree.” This can also happen on the floor if there is enough space, with a dividing line created by a string or a rope.

Suggested Language:

- *“Everything between these two polar opposites is a spectrum – the middle of the spectrum can be thought of as neutral or unsure.”*
- *“I will read through a series of statements, one at a time. When you hear a statement, please move silently along the spectrum, based on your opinion or stance on that statement.”*

2. Instruction Tips

- Read statements twice so participants can really think through their answer before moving.
- Each statement should be followed by a 10-second pause, allowing participants time to think and move accordingly.
- After students stand somewhere, ask them to look around and notice who is near them and who isn’t.
- Remind the group that the goal of the activity is to see where their classmates fall on the various prompts. Be honest, and don’t just follow your friends!
- Everyone should stay silent until the end – they are responding to the statements with their bodies, not their words.

Suggested Prompts

- I like cats better than dogs.
- I prefer warm climates over cold climates.

- I am a morning person.
- Education is important to me.
- Religion is important to me.
- I think people make assumptions about me or my family that are untrue.
- I think that there are things in my country that need to improve.
- I think that my country's political leaders accurately represent my views.
- I feel comfortable sharing my views openly at this school.
- I've had people unfairly stereotype me based on where I am from.
- I've had people unfairly stereotype me based on how I look.
- When people succeed, it's because of hard work.
- The government should be responsible for taking care of its citizens.
- The media is a good place to learn about the world.
- People agree about politics more than they disagree about politics.
- It is better to be a member of a group than a leader of a group.

Wrap-up

Debrief Questions

- What did you notice about this exercise?
- What did you learn about your peers?
- What did you like about this activity? What was challenging about this activity?
- What questions do you have for your classmates about some of the beliefs that surfaced within this activity?

Instructor Considerations/Modifications

- This activity can be used for a variety of purposes. Instructors can – and should – tailor the prompts to specific topics being taught in their class, or the specific topics that the class is interested in exploring, and can choose statements that are more or less divisive, depending on the group.
- For a more student-led activity, instructors can choose to ask students to generate their own list of statements in advance.