

Structures for Dialogue

Summary

Beyond the topic of conversation, structuring group sharing is key to sustaining a constructive dialogue. This resource lists and describes creative approaches to inviting student sharing.

Purpose

Sharing honestly with peers is challenging for anyone. Changing group structures can:

- Spark conversation in hesitant groups
- Invite contributions from students who share differently
- Keep discussions engaging and dynamic
- Disrupt unproductive dynamics

List of Structures

Structure	Description	When Useful?
Think Then Share	Share a prompt and give students predetermined time to think about their response before sharing in pairs, small groups, or a go-round.	When there is unequal sharing in a group
Go-Round	Share a prompt, give a minute for students to think, and invite a go-round with a prescribed amount of time per share (ex: 1 word, 1 sentence, 1 minute). Students can “pass” if they’re not ready to share.	As a warm-up, opener, closing, or reset button in the middle of a dialogue
Turn-and-Talk or Pair Share	Share a prompt and invite students to get into pairs to discuss their responses. When time is up, invite pairs to share what they discussed.	When there is unequal sharing in a group

Small Groups	Break into smaller groups (3-5 people each) to discuss a topic, question, or prompt. Bring them back together to share what came up.	When there is unequal sharing in a group
Popcorn Style	Spontaneous share-out without needing to raise hands.	When a group is ready for a less structured style of conversation
Fishbowl	Ask a group to self-divide by their stance on a topic. One group sits in a circle and discusses their experiences of the topic while the outer group listens. After an open Q&A led by the outer group, switch roles.	When there are two divergent beliefs or identities represented in the group that want to understand each other better
Values Spectrum	Participants physically position themselves along a spectrum to represent their stance on given prompts, then discuss.	When a group is new or avoidant, use this to uncover topics for dialogue or explore hidden disagreements
Gallery Walk	Dialogue questions related to the topic at hand are posted on walls around the room. Students spend 5 minutes at each station in small groups to discuss before moving to the next prompt.	When the group needs to move around and shake up dynamics
Chalk Talk	A topic is written on a white board and students silently add their thoughts, questions, and ideas in writing. As they see what others are writing, they add comments, circles, or stars to the visual display. Once all thoughts are on the board, invite conversation.	When not all students are sharing verbally