

Structures for Group Dialogue

Summary

When it comes to constructive dialogue, structuring group sharing into different forms can be half the battle. This resource provides a list, with descriptions, of the different approaches teachers can use to bring structure to student sharing.

Purpose

Sharing what is real and honest can be difficult at any age. Changing group structures has the capacity to:

- Catalyze a conversation when a group is avoidant or doesn't know where to start
- Keep a conversation interesting and dynamic
- Interrupt unproductive dynamics when they arise

List of Structures

Name	Description	When Useful?
Go-Round	A simple, time-bound way to invite students to share their answer to a prompt. Share the prompt, give a minute for respondents to think, and ask someone to start off the go-round. The sharing will continue around the circle from there. Students can “pass” if they don't want to share. Pre-determined time constraints are important. Examples of time constraints: one minute, one sentence, one word. The key to a go-round is that everyone has equal time to share and be heard.	Warm-up, opener, closing, or as a reset button in the middle of a dialogue.
Turn-and-Talk or Pair-Share	Students are invited to turn to the person next to them and respond to a question or prompt. Then, after a certain amount of time, each pair is invited to share with the larger group what came	If one person is dominating the conversation, the full group is getting tense, or several

	up in their pair conversation. Example: “Turn and talk to the person next to you about how you’re feeling about this conversation right now.”	students are staying silent.
Small Groups	Break the full group into smaller groups (3-5 people per group) to discuss a topic, question, or prompt. Bring them back together to share what came up during small group conversations.	Some students aren’t sharing or one student is dominating the conversation.
Think Then Speak	An approach to inviting student responses that is inclusive of different learning and sharing styles. Instructors should share a prompt and invite students to think for a defined amount of time (1-2 minutes) before sharing. Some students might choose to write their ideas down during this time.	Students are being quiet, slow to respond, or a few students are dominating the conversation.
Fishbowl	The group divides based on an identity, belief, or perspective they hold. Ideally, there are no more than 2 groups. One group sits in a circle, facing each other, in the middle of the room. The rest of the group sits in a larger circle, encircling the smaller circle of chairs. The inner group discusses their experience or ideas while the outer circle listens, takes notes, and writes down questions. After time is up, the outer circle can ask questions of the inner circle, and the inner circle members can answer. Then it is time to switch.	There are two divergent beliefs, perspectives, or identities represented in the group that want to understand each other better.
Values Spectrum	Place a “Strongly Agree” sign on one side of the room, and a “Strongly Disagree” sign on the opposing wall. The space between is an invisible spectrum between the two. Read out a series of statements related to any topic you choose to	A group is new and wants to figure out what topics to dialogue about, or a group seems to

	<p>dialogue about, and ask participants to move, silently, along the spectrum based on their stance. Sample statements: “America is a safe country to live in.” “I feel that my government represents my views.” “I feel that I belong at this school.” Debrief the exercise once all the prompts have been read.</p>	<p>agree on everything that comes up or is avoiding surfacing difference of opinion.</p>
<p>Fist-to-Five</p>	<p>Ask the group to respond to a prompt, like “On a scale of 0 to 5, how are you feeling about this conversation, 0 being not good at all, and 5 being amazing?” “On a scale of 0 to 5, what is your energy level, 0 being no energy and 5 being ready to go?” Instructors can choose to have students close their eyes as they share, or share their responses openly.</p>	<p>Instructors aren’t sure how the group is feeling and wants a quick temperature check. Helpful when you want to hear from all members of the group all at once.</p>