SPEAKING TO LEARN: THE ART OF HAVING MEANINGFUL DISCUSSIONS

Unlock your potential and participate in engaging dialogues that support collaboration and creativity among your peers.



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About the authors



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Disclaimer: The materials are currently being evaluated and are therefore a work in progress.

WHY IS EDUCATIONAL DIALOGUE IMPORTANT?

It’s not enough to know the answer

You must be able to **express and defend your ideas clearly**, ensuring that others can understand your viewpoint. This skill is essential not only in university but also in your professional environment.

A discussion is not a fight

You need to be able to discuss ideas respectfully — to **disagree without arguing**, listen without judging, and explore different views without turning it into a fight.

Develops confidence

If you’ve ever felt unsure about speaking up in class or felt like you don’t belong in academic spaces, this training gives you **tools to speak with confidence**, collaborate effectively, and build your academic voice

Marketable skill

Employers frequently express the need for **graduates who can effectively communicate** their ideas and **collaborate within teams**.

WHAT IS EDUCATIONAL DIALOGUE?

LEARNING THROUGH TALKING

Engaging in dialogue helps deepen understanding. It's not enough to give one-word answers; real learning happens when you explain, discuss, and question ideas out loud.

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

Thoughtful questions drive meaningful discussions. They clarify ideas, challenge assumptions, and open up new ways of thinking.

EXPLAIN YOUR THINKING

Sharing your reasoning makes your ideas clearer to others and helps you organise your thoughts. It enourages reflection and improves your ability to learn

BUILDING ON EACH OTHER'S IDEAS

Expanding on what others say leads to richer conversations. It shows active listening and helps develop collaborative problem-solving skills.

CHALLENGING

Respectfully questioning others tests arguments, reveals new perspectives, and shows disagreement can be constructive when approached respectfully.

CONNECTING WITH PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Backing up your opinions with examples makes arguments stronger and discussions more persuasive. It also teaches critical thinking.

WHAT ARE DIALOGIC MOVES?

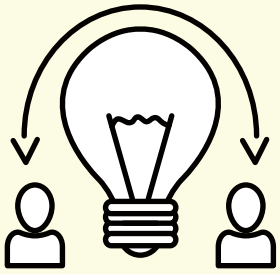




Express or invite ideas

Share what you think and invite others to respond or add their thoughts.

E.g. “Here is what I think”. “What do you think?”



Connect

Link what you’re discussing to things you already know or to other topics you’ve learned about

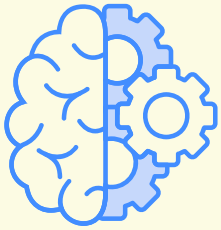
E.g. “I remember from the lecture...”, “That reminds me I heard of....”.



Build

Add to your own or someone else’s ideas to keep the ideas moving forward.

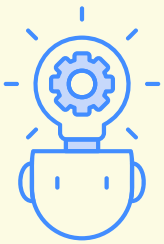
E.g. “I agree, and also....”. “yes, so....”,



Invite reasoning

Ask others to explain their ideas or reasons. This helps everyone think more deeply.

E.g. “Why do you think that?”, “Can you explain that?”, “How did you get that answer?”



Make reasoning explicit

Share why you think something, and explain your ideas so others understand your reasoning.

E.g. “I think it’s B because....”, “This is how you get this answer”.



(Dis)Agreeing

Take a position, compare and challenge ideas, bring different perspectives together to build a stronger understanding.

E.g. “Are you sure? I think it is...”, “I’m not sure I agree...”, “yes, I agree because...”.

How to use this toolkit

1. Familiarise yourself with the ground rules, tips and talk stems for effective discussion.

2. Check the extra materials. Have them with you during discussion and refer to them when you need to.

3. Try to consciously use the talk stems. Make them yours, use your own words.

4. Reflect regularly. After each discussion, talk about what went well, what felt ackward, and what you'll try next time.

5. Keep practising! The more you use educational dialogue, the more comfortable you'll get at expressing ideas clearly and respectfully.

Activity 1: Setting the stage with Ground Rules

Objective: Build a shared understanding of respectful and effective collaboration.

Instructions: Watch a short video of a group discussion



(2:22 onwards)

Reflect: What worked? What didn't?

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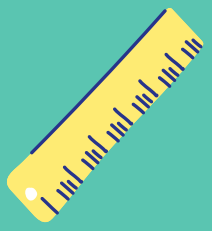
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GROUND RULES



Encourage everyone to contribute

- Both partners should speak.
- Take turns sharing ideas.
- Listen when your partner talks.
- Make sure no one is left out.

Treat all contributions with respect

- Don't interrupt or talk over others.
- Use polite language.
- Show interest in each idea.
- Value different perspectives.

Ask for reasons behind our thinking

- Explain why you believe something.
- Give examples or reasons.
- Ask your partner to explain their thinking.
- Be curious about each other's ideas.

Be prepared to accept challenges

- Stay open-minded if someone disagrees.
- Listen to challenges without getting defensive.
- Think about new points of view.
- Respond respectfully to questions.

Discuss alternatives before a decision is taken

- Talk through different options.
- Compare the pros and cons of each.
- Make sure both partners agree.
- Don't rush to a decision.
- Look for common ground
- Make a decision you both support

Activity 2: Analyzing Sample Conversation

Objective: Identify examples of educational dialogue

Instructions: Read sample transcripts of student conversations and highlight places where:

- Ideas were challenged
- Evidence was used
- Reasoning was explained

Extract A

Craig:	Hello, shall we go through the answers?
Gilly:	Yeah I think it'll be a good idea to get started
Craig:	Yeah, so what do we think for question one, let me get the answers up- er the questions up even
Gilly:	Yep, let me find it. the first one I got C, that's what I got, but I don't know really
Craig:	I did B or A
Gilly:	It's cause I didn't recognise any of the words like
Craig:	Yeah, the calyx words are the ones that are completely different
Gilly:	Yeah so I just wasn't sure where to put them
Craig:	Where it says major and minor calyx, do you think it's the- no it's can't be the, it's not the vein is it, the renal vein and the renal artery
Gilly:	Yeah I don't think it is but I don't know
Craig:	Well I just thought it would be A, B or C cause ureter would be at the end
Gilly:	Yeah that's basically what I did as well, I put, I just thought maybe minor first and then maybe
Craig:	[interrupting] actually yeah I think maybe you're right because ureter would be last, the pelvis would be second last probably, and then the duct and then the other two
Craig:	Ok so we'll go for C, shall I put it in?

Extract B

Frances:	Ok I'm ready to go whenever
Nadia:	Alright cool so am I
Frances:	Question one I put D
George:	Yeah same
Nadia:	Yeah I didn't put D but that sounds right so go ahead
Frances:	I've put B because
Nadia:	[interrupting] Oh B, sorry I thought you said D. Yeah I put B too
Frances:	No, B
Mohammad:	Same
Frances:	Yeah it's B good job
Mohammad:	Good job guys
Nadia:	Good job team
Frances:	Um question two I've put C
Nadia:	Me too
Frances:	Yeah, agree?
Nadia:	Yeah if everyone's happy with it
George:	Yeah I put C as well
Frances:	It's not C
Mohammad:	Unlucky, try D

Compare them. Which one do you think is better? Discuss how they could be improved.

Activity 3: Using the talk stems

Objective: Practice speaking using structured academic phrases

Instructions:

- Read the list of talk stems.
- Choose at least 3 and use them in the discussion

Talk Stem	Example
Invite to build	"What do you think? Can you add to that?"
Build on ideas	"I agree, and also..." "I like that. And what if..."
Challenge	"Are you sure? Could it be something else?"
Invite reasoning	"Why do you think that?" "How did you do that?"
Make reasoning explicit	"I think it's B because..."
Connect	"I saw something similar on another study."
Express or invite ideas	"Here's what I think... What about you?"

Reflect: How did they help? What felt awkward?

Activity 4: Dialogue Observation and Tally

Objective: Notice how often different dialogic moves are used

Instructions: Work in groups of 3. Two people talk, one observes. Use the tally to record the different dialogic moves you hear. Try to write examples to remember.

Talk stems	Examples	Tally
Build on ideas		
(Dis)agree		
Invite reasoning		
Make reasoning explicit		
Connect		
Express or invite ideas		

Activity 5: Self-Assessment

Objective: Reflect on how you worked together

Instructions: After each discussion, rate these items:
((1 = Not true / 2 = Partly true / 3 = Very true)

Adapted from Camtree https://camtree.org/resources

Criteria	Rating (1 - 3)
We worked as a team.	
We stayed on task.	
We built on each other's ideas.	
We listened to each other.	
We gave reasons for our answers.	
We used examples or evidence.	
We challenged ideas respecfully	
We tried to find an agreement.	
We learned from our discussion.	
We enjoyed the conversation.	

Things I liked about our discussion:

Something I could improve next time

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Appendix

Ground Rules

1. Everyone contributes
2. All ideas are respected
3. Ask for and give reasons
4. Accept respectful challenges
5. Discuss alternatives before deciding
6. Aim to reach an agreement





talk stems

Don't forget to use RELIABLE sources!

Connect

- We saw the other day in the lecture...
- I read this study about...
- I heard on the news...

Build

- So, that means...
- yes, and...
- expanding on what you said..
- I also heard that...

Reason

- I think X because....
- If X, then Y

Express and Invite

- I think...
- How about....
- What do you think?
- Any ideas?

(dis)agree

- that could be, but how about...
- Yes, you're right.
- I don't think so because...
- I agree with that because...

Invite reason

- Why?
- How?
- Can you explain that?