

Small Group Work Protocols

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Today in the workshop, the large group will be divided into small groups of 5-6 participants. The group participants will number themselves from 1 to 5 (or 6) sequentially, and then read the discussion protocol with their number. The Talking Stick protocol will be first, and will be the model used for the rest of the small group conversation. After everyone has finished reading, the group will take turns (in numerical order) teaching the rest of the group the protocol they have just read. They will also name one possible use of the protocol in one of their own courses. After everyone has finished, the group as a whole can use the remaining time to discuss and compare the protocols and how they might be used.

The Breakout Rooms

You will be automatically assigned to a breakout room. We will assign 5 people to each room by creating a number of breakout rooms equal to the # of participants divided by 5.

The person whose birthday is closest to Mar. 20 will be the room's Facilitator. Congratulations!

If you have been selected as the Facilitator for your Breakout Room, your task is threefold:

1. Have your colleagues count off (see "How divide the large group" below) from 1 to 5 (or 1 to however many you have in your room) and then have them read the discussion protocol with the same number (detailed in this packet). You should count off with them and read a protocol as well.
2. Wait until everyone has read their protocol. That might take 5-10 minutes.
3. Then encourage them to take turns sharing the protocol that they have been assigned and explaining how it might be used in one of their classes. Each person should talk for about 2 minutes.
4. Afterwards, encourage everyone to record how one or more of these protocols might be used in their classes in the Google Doc, which is located at:

<http://tinyurl.com/y4h5xywm>

5. Once everyone is done, we will close the breakout rooms and everyone should return to the main room for the rest of the workshop.

How to divide the large group

# of Participants	# of Groups
5	1 group of 5
6	1 group of 6
7	1 group of 4, 1 group of 3
8	1 group of 5, 1 group of 3
9	1 group of 5, 1 group of 4
10	2 groups of 5
11	1 group of 5, 1 group of 6
12	2 groups of 6
13	2 groups of 5, 1 group of 3
And so on...	

1. **Talking Stick:** Drawn from the practices of the indigenous Americans, the purpose of this protocol is to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak. It can also be helpful if you have participants who over contribute or constantly have their hands up, in that it offers a structure that allows everyone to participate in an equitable manner. I have use this method for a bipolar participant with Tourette Syndrome, and it allowed him to control his behavior and helped other participants recognize his abilities. After groups are formed, give the participants a token such as a pen as “the talking stick.” Participants then take turns speaking for one minute on the subject. Only the person holding the talking stick can speak, and the stick is passed around a circle, or perhaps handed to the next person who wishes to speak. In the latter case, care must be taken to ensure that all participants have a chance to speak. Allow each participant to speak for one minute *without interruptions* and then pass the “talking stick” to the next participant. After all have spoken, allow a few minutes for them to discuss as a group. When combined with the *Illustrative Quotation* CAT, this variation is called *Save the Last Word for Me* by some developers.

Time required: 1-2 minutes per person in group.

Online equivalent: Asynchronous conversations do not need the talking stick. Synchronous conversations can use a virtual talking stick to keep order in the conversation. You may wish to order responses by having participants respond in alphabetic or reverse alphabetic order by first name. Do not organize by age or experience, as this invalidates the purpose of the talking stick, which is to level the playing field.

2. **Expense Account:** Each person in the group gets 3 tokens (pennies are easy to use). Each time someone speaks, they put a token in the center of the table. If you do not have any tokens left, you can't speak. When everyone is out of tokens, everyone can retrieve their tokens and start the process over. This method gives everyone a chance to speak, but maintains some freedom in when they speak.

Time required: 3 minutes per participant.

Online equivalent: Asynchronous conversations can use this, though it can take a very long time to spend that last token, and the results towards the end of the process can be less than rewarding. Expense account works best with synchronous exercises. A web conference with a shared whiteboard would be ideal, since participants could draw the pennies they are turning in. Virtual classroom environments often have this sort of virtual whiteboard (such as the Conferences tool in Canvas). If conducted in Zoom, one participant might be designated as a banker to keep track of who had used their tokens.

3. **Send-a-Problem (aka. The Envelope Game, Directed Brainstorming):** Each group member writes a question on a card. They then take turns asking the group to solve the question. Once there is a consensus on the answer, it is written on the back of the card, along with a minority report (a statement of the beliefs of outliers from the consensus) if needed. After all questions are answered, the card stack is sent to the next group, who repeats the process *without looking at the first group's answer until they have reached a consensus*. Directed Brainstorming is a variant of this in which individuals write responses or solutions on cards and then randomly swap them with other participants. In this version, the participants are asked to improve upon the idea they received and this process is repeated 2-3 times. A variation of this is Gallery Walk, where large Post-It pads are used. Instead of passing cards, participants move from one pad to the next

Time required: 2-3 minutes per person for each group that works through the card stack. 4-6 minutes for Directed Brainstorming.

Online equivalent: Shared wikis (like Google Docs) can be used either asynchronously or synchronously for this exercise. Alternatively, groups could email or text their ideas to the next group and so on. If groups are numbered, the groups could pass the responses to the group with the next number. Directed Brainstorming would require an app that replicates its original form. Please email me at teaching@cortland.edu if you know of one.

4. **Debate (aka. Structured Controversy):** In this discussion method, the large group is divided into two groups of participants, who then debate a topic in a reasoned and organized fashion. This could be a formal parliamentary debate or a more simplistic model. A debate usually involves these parts:

- a. Decide upon the motion to be debated. The motion may be expressed in this format: “Resolved, that President Truman believed that dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was necessary and proper.”
- b. Divide the large group into teams and decide which will argue for (*pro*) and against (*con*) the motion.
- c. Pro and con teams take turns adding a statement that either supports their argument or refutes that of the opposing team.
- d. The instructor should debrief the debate at the end, explaining which arguments he found most and least compelling as an expert commentator.
- e. As a group, the participants now reflect upon whether their beliefs have changed as a result of the debate.

Option: One group of participants can be designated to be the jury. After the two teams have made their arguments, the jury will summarize the debate, discuss strengths and weaknesses of the arguments, and make a decision. This can take the place of the debriefing or precede the debriefing by the facilitator.

Time required: 1-2 minutes per person in each group, plus 10-15 minutes of debate and 10-15 minutes of debriefing.

Online equivalent: Asynchronous debates (discussion forums, etc.) will often have the most fully articulated arguments. Twitter will be faster, but less nuanced. Synchronous debates (web conferences) will be the quickest. Wikis like GoogleDocs do not typically work well for debates because participants can change or even remove the opponents’ arguments, but if you have an extraordinarily well behaved group of participants, it might work.

5. **Role-playing (aka. We Wear the Masks, Séance):** The purpose of this method is to allow participants to speak with a voice other than their own and to understand the voices of others. This method can help the shy participants to speak more openly, since they can hide behind the mask of their role. When done f2f, this exercise requires a good deal of trust of everyone in the group. As the instructor, you must ensure that everyone feels safe and relaxed as possible, which may mean using after several sessions have built that trust. Assign a role to each participant and have them discuss the topic in character. When the emphasis is placed on the individual responses, this exercise can force participants to consider alternative viewpoints or test them on their understanding of a character or stance. When the emphasis is placed on the dynamic interplay of characters, it evolves into theatrical improvisation. If you desire this, be sure to share these following rules of improvisational theater with your participants:

1. *Don't Deny:* Accept what your fellow participants offer and try to make it work collaboratively. Do not deny or block their offering by saying, "No, this isn't a classroom, it's a library."
2. *Help Each Other:* Either everyone looks good, or no one will. If you stick slavishly to one idea, everyone else has to give up their ideas and try to figure out yours. Build a scene or story collaboratively.
3. *Provide Details:* Try to inject details into the scene that make it come to life. This makes the job of the other participants easier, since they will have more with which to work. If participants have prepared for the conversation through their homework, this rule can be ignored, especially if the goal is to test participant understanding of the particular characters or stances they are playing.
4. *Stay in the Moment:* Keep your focus on your character and on the scene.
5. *Use More than Words:* Get into it. Use your body and gestures to help bring the scene to life.

And if the preparation for this activity was minimal...

6. *Don't Ask Questions That Require a Thoughtful Response:* Asking these sorts of questions increases cognitive load and slows down the action as the other person tries to think of a response.

Time Required: 1-2 minutes per participant with minimal preparation. 3-5 minutes per participant with extensive preparation.

Online equivalent: This is actually easier online, where participants typically feel more anonymous anyways. Participants have probably already played various roles informally on the web, either through games, texting, or chatting. Asynchronous discussions allow more detailed and nuanced responses, as might be appropriate when simulating an academic discourse. Synchronous discussions are more energetic and fun. Form participants into small groups with their own space where they can talk. If the conversation is synchronous, have one member of the group record or archive the talk and then send that file to you. You can then review all of the files for appropriateness and then share them with the rest of the large group. A synchronous conversation might be followed with an asynchronous large group discussion about the exercise or its results.

6. **Concept Test:** This method is especially useful in a lecture hall, because it requires only very small groups and has as its aim the testing of the transfer of declarative knowledge. The instructor gives participants a minute to write down an individual answer to a question. Then each participant turns to the person next to them. Participants without a partner should either raise their hand and look for a partner near them, or (less desirably) join another pair near them. For the next two minutes, the partners try to convince each other that their answer is the most correct. After the two minutes, the instructor assesses their answers, either by clickers, PollEverywhere, or by a show of hands, depending on the need to record the answer and the need for anonymity. If most of the participants have the correct answer, the instructor can move on. If there is division among the answers, he might direct the conversation to continue among the pairs. If most of the participants come up with the wrong answer, the instructor should try to identify the error they are making and address that issue again before retesting.

Time required: usually 5 minutes.

Online equivalent: This is less useful online, where there is no need to limit the number of participants. Occasional surveys of participants as to their understanding of the question are useful, and the active learning element could be preserved by following the lecture with a group discussion.