

CROSSROADS

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER

Question-Crafting Guide

1. What type of exchange are you trying to generate with your question? Dialogue or debate or analysis?
2. Does the question promote understanding and support for building relationships that can sustain deeper, more challenging conversations?
3. What are the follow-up questions?
4. Does the question allow for people with differing viewpoints and opinions to provide input?
5. Which experiences aren't in the room? Do those views need to be stated if no one else articulates them?

To foster dialogue, asking questions that invite personal experiences or associations rather than objective judgment or immediate critical problem solving is more likely to promote the understanding of different perspectives necessary to build a community of trust or even ultimately move to action steps when necessary. Sample questions that tend to encourage dialogue rather than debate or analytical discussion are suggested below. These questions are not intended to be used sequentially, but are simply listed as variations of the basic types of questions represented in Dialogue A.C.T.S.

Questions to Promote Dialogue

- What are your particular associations with _____?
- How would you describe the ways you learned to think about _____?
- How have you experienced _____ in your family?
- How have you experienced _____ in your home community?
- How have you experienced _____ in your professional community?
- Have there been other situations where you have experienced or observed bias around _____?
- In your experience, what are some other ways social biases manifest themselves regarding _____?
- Can anyone share a story or experience of being internally conflicted by your beliefs about _____ and the roles you tend to play according to social norms?
- What are some other perspectives that have not been represented by our comments thus far?
- What might someone who holds that perspective say if they were here?

For more information, go to our website: www.crossroads.ua.edu

Dialogue A.C.T.S.

The Crossroads Civic Engagement Center at The University of Alabama created Dialogue A.C.T.S. to encourage the practice of asking questions to deepen understanding of diverse perspectives. As part of its *CIVshop* curriculum, Crossroads uses an activity called *Take A Stand*, derived from a version used by the Sustained Dialogue Institute,¹ to introduce Dialogue A.C.T.S. as four effective ways to engage others about their views and how they have come to hold them:

Arrange space (physical/intellectual/social) to invite different perspectives

- Whose perspective is missing, and what might they say?
- What perspectives haven't we considered yet?
- How might others view that differently?

Clarify terms or concepts being used

- Could you **Clarify** for me what you mean by “_____”?
- When you say “_____,” how do you understand or use that term?

Tell me more...

- Would you **Tell me more** about why you feel that way?
- Would you **Tell me more** about what you mean when you say “_____”?
- Would you **Tell me more** about that experience?

Share a Story – to get at personal experiences, *not points for debate or analysis*.

- Would you share a **Story** or personal experience you have had or one of someone close to you that influences why you feel that way?
- What experiences have you had that strongly influence why you say that?

*Recognizing how the characteristics of debate, discussion, and dialogue differ is key to knowing what types of questions are best used to achieve the corresponding goals of the 3 Ds. The use of A.C.T.S. is recommended to achieve positive **Dialogue** experiences more effectively.*

The 3 Ds

DEBATE	DISCUSSION	DIALOGUE
Listen to others in order to form counterarguments	Listen to others to find places of disagreement or to gather rational pieces of an argument	Listen to others without judgment and with a view to understand
Competitive - a focus on who is RIGHT. Someone wins, someone loses.	Conceptual – develop academic analysis, such as in classroom discussions.	Collaborative – seek a sense of community understanding, not consensus
Disregard the importance of the relationship	Retain relationships, but do not build trust.	Build relationships for working together better in the future.

This 3 Ds table is a simplified version of the Sustained Dialogue Moderator Manual's Dialogue vs. Discussion table, which was adapted from: Differentiating Dialogue From Discussion: A Working Model (Kardin and Sevig, 1997) and Exploring the Differences Between Dialogue, Discussion, and Debate (Tanya Kachwaha, 2002, adapted from Huang Nissan, 1999).

¹ sustaineddialogue.org