# Orchestrating Productive Classroom Discussions

When orchestrating productive, respectful, and safe classroom discussions, it is essential to have ground rules, language frames, and discussion protocols to support students. This document shares some sample ground rules along with discussion language frames and protocols to assist teachers in facilitating discussions.

## Sample Ground Rules for Class Discussion

1. Be prepared to share your idea when instructed to do so, first with your partner and next with the class.
2. No blurting (ever) or hand raising (until volunteers are asked for).
3. Use the language frames to assist you as you share your ideas.
4. Use your public discussion voice to share your idea: two times slower and three times louder than conversation.
5. Listen attentively and respectfully without interruption while classmates are sharing;, jot down new ideas.
6. If your idea is similar to someone else's, acknowledge your classmate's contribution before sharing your idea.
7. Give space and time to those who have not yet shared their perspective(s) or ideas.

## Language Frames for Class Discussions

| Expressing an Opinion | Contributing Ideas | Affirming |
|---|---|---|
| • I think/believe that…<br>• In my opinion…<br>• Based on my experience, I think…<br>• From my point of view… | • One possible example is…<br>• Another interesting example is…<br>• I would also add… | • That's an interesting idea.<br>• I hadn't thought of that. Great point!<br>• I see what you mean.<br>• |
| **Acknowledging Ideas** | **Reporting a Group's Ideas** | **Disagreeing** |
| • My idea is similar to/related to…<br>• I agree with (name of person) that…<br>• My idea builds upon _____'s idea.<br>• In other words, you think…<br>• I have a question about that. | • We decided/agreed that…<br>• We concluded that…<br>• Our group sees it differently.<br>• We had a different approach. | • I don't quite agree with your point about_____ because…<br>• I have another way of looking at this…<br>• My idea is different from _____.<br>• That's not how I see it. I think… |
| **Offering a Suggestion** | **Reporting a Partner's Idea** | **Holding the Floor** |
| • Maybe we could…<br>• What if we…?<br>• Here's something we might think about…<br>• I think we should add… | • _____ indicated that…<br>• _____ pointed out to me…<br>• _____ emphasized that…<br>• _____ concluded that… | • As I was saying…<br>• If I could finish my thought…<br>• What I was trying to say was… |

## Discussion Protocol Structures

| Discussion Intent | Protocol Ideas | Teacher Prep Load |
|---|---|---|
| Focus on or gain consensus on a few ideas | **Focusing Four**<br>Students generate, record, and advocate for various ideas before prioritizing and voting. Unlike the Nominal Group Technique (below), the Focusing Four contains a round where students can only advocate for (not against) ideas. | Low |
| | **Nominal Group Technique**<br>Students generate, record, and discuss various ideas before prioritizing and voting. | Low |
| Distribute participation or encourage turn-taking | **Inside/Outside Circle**<br>One group of students forms an "inside" circle, facing the second group of students in an "outside" circle. Students pair off to discuss a prompt or question, then the outside circle rotates so that students have a new pair for the next round. | Low |
| | **Fishbowl**<br>A smaller group of students discusses a topic while the rest of the class observes the process or takes turns entering the "fishbowl" to participate. | Low |
| | **Think-Pair-Share**<br>Students have time to individually reflect on their response before sharing it with one other student. Pairs report on their conversations to the larger group. | Low |
| Highlight different perspectives on one issue | **Four Corners**<br>Students must stand in a corner of the room to indicate their position about a statement (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly agree), then they engage in a discussion about their opinions. | Medium |
| | **Jigsaw**<br>Students are assigned to review different material or readings in advance. They first meet in an "expert" group to become familiar with their specific resource and then meet in a "teaching" group to share their resource with the other students. | Medium |
| Discuss a text or reading | **Four A's**<br>Students discuss assumptions, what they agree with, what they argue with, and what they aspire to, based on a specific text. | Medium |
| | **Final Word**<br>Also known as Save the Last Word. One student selects a quotation from the text and reads it aloud. Other students take turns responding to the text, and the original student closes the discussion with a reflection. | Medium |
| | **Socratic Seminar**<br>Students discuss what the author was trying to convey by using evidence from a specific text. Students build on one another's ideas without intervention from the instructor. | High |