



Group Discussions



General Format

1) Welcome

You should begin your discussion by welcoming the participants and thanking them for attending. The way you begin your discussion will set the tone for your discussion -- remember if you are nervous and uncomfortable they will be too!

Useful Phrases:

I'd like to begin by thanking all of you for coming...

I appreciate each of you taking the time to attend this discussion...

Hello and welcome to our discussion about _____.

2) Introduction

Begin your discussion by introducing yourself and stating the expectations for your discussion. You should make sure that your participants understand how the discussion will be organized. For example, clarify any rules that you may have for your discussion; do the participants need to raise their hand to speak, or do they need to hold a 'talking stick', or can they speak at anytime?

Useful Phrases:

Throughout this discussion we would appreciate it if you raised your hand before speaking.

Only one person may speak at a time, and that person must be holding the 'talking stick'.

We'd like you to feel free to speak at anytime.

After the expectations for the discussion are understood, introduce the topic that you will be discussing. At this time you may want to refer to key points in the news article that you have chosen, and then move on to starting the discussion using your 10 questions.

Useful Phrases:

Today we will be discussing...

The topic of our discussion today is...

We will be talking about issues related to _____ today.

3) Guiding the Conversation

The key to guiding a successful discussion is to get your participants engaged and talking about your topic. This is not always an easy thing to do! Remember that you are not there to lecture to your participants, but rather you are there to guide and facilitate (control/manage) the discussion. Generally, at the beginning of a discussion people are shy, so it is a good idea to start with some easier questions and then build up to more complex questions. You should also have some short follow-up questions prepared just in case your participants are not able to answer your main questions right

away. You will need to guide the flow of the discussion; this means knowing when to comment and when to stay quiet and let the participants discuss. Don't fear silence! Giving your participants a moment to think about their answer is fine, but if the discussion is not progressing, you will need to help the discussion continue. Ask your participants questions to obtain more detail about their opinions about a topic to keep the conversation going. You can also paraphrase (repeat something in your own words) what a participant said to ensure that everyone understands and to obtain more information about that participant's opinion. You can also propose hypothetical situations (what if...) to your participants to help continue the conversation.

Useful Phrases (for group leaders):

What do you think about that?

Do you agree/disagree?

Does anyone want to add anything to that?

Would anyone like to respond to that comment?

So what you're saying is...

What if...

Useful Phrases (for agreeing):

I also think _____...

I completely agree, and I think...

I agree, but I also want to add...

Useful Phrases (for disagreeing):

I see your point, but...

I completely disagree with that because...

I am not sure that is correct, rather I think...

Useful Phrases (for interruptions):

Sorry to interrupt but can I add something...

Can I interrupt here?

Sorry I wasn't finished, as I was saying...

Excuse me, I don't think (name) is finished yet.

Useful Phrases (for keeping on track):

Those are some interesting points but I think we should get back to our main question...

I think we are a little off track here...

How do you think _____ relates back to (the main topic)?

Useful Phrases (for changing the topic):

Alright, I think we should move on to...

Let's look at our next question...

OK, let's go on to our next topic...

4) Conclusion

At this point of the discussion you should guide the group to finish current discussions, and summarize key points brought up in the discussion. At this time you should ask the participants if they have any brief final remarks or comments about what has been discussed. Before concluding, you should once again thank the participants for attending your discussion group.

Useful Phrases:

We had some really interesting points discussed here today ranging from...

We have to finish up now, but thank you for that interesting discussion.

Does anyone have any final comments that they would like to add?

Thank you to each of you for attending this discussion.

I hope enjoyed the discussion today and I'd like to thank you once again for coming.

Some Additional Considerations

- Organization of the room - do you want the participants sitting in a circle, or facing each other? Make sure you prepare the room before your participants arrive.
- Equal speaking time – you need to ensure that each participant has an equal chance to speak. Think about how you can encourage shy participants to speak, and also how you might deal with a participant who won't stop talking.
- Debates – discussions can sometimes become very passionate, and you must be prepared to mediate debates so that a professional atmosphere is maintained (not having everyone angry and shouting at one another).
- Follow-up questions – Have some follow-up questions prepared to help keep the conversation going. It is best to avoid questions with *yes/no answers* and better to focus on follow-up questions using *how/why*.
- Keeping people interested – Participants are more likely to speak if they are interested and involved. Think of some ways to make your discussion interesting and unique.
- Changing the topic – Not every discussion question will result in a good conversation; know how to change the topic if your participants are not interested or if they don't understand.
- Keeping people 'on track' – It is good to allow the conversation to progress beyond your discussion questions, but it is also important to keep people focused on your discussion topic.