

Facilitated Dialogue Techniques

Based on work by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and the National Park Service

Technique	Description	Strengths/Key Uses	Challenges (if any)
Verbal			
Serial testimony	Each group member shares a story for a short time (perhaps 1-2 minutes)	Allows all voices to be heard; gives facilitator control of situation, so can address domination by one voice	In large group, can take much time
Mutual invitation	Each speaker invites the next to share their perspective; the invitee may share or pass (knowing that they'll have another chance later)	Gives participants power and the sense that they (rather than the facilitator) own the dialogue and their contributions	
Listening pairs & triads	Participants speak to one or two others in response to a question, quote, or statement	May be helpful early, before people are comfortable sharing in a large group; takes less time than serial testimony	Not everyone's voice heard by whole group; however, pairs can be followed by a report-out to address this
Clarifying questions	Facilitator or participants invite deeper responses to comments already made (e.g. "Could you say more about that?")	Can make dialogue deeper or more personal	
Your "two cents"	Participants are given two pennies, indicating they have two opportunities to share during a discussion; after their pennies are gone, they simply listen	Encourages reflection and thoughtful choices about sharing; effective in "sharing the air"	
Popcorn	Facilitator (or assistant) captures participants' responses and writes them down for all to see	Gives the group a sense of the scope and variety of responses (especially useful for visual learners); in some cases, only new thoughts are written down, not duplicates	
Wagon Wheel or Concentric Circles (or Speed Dating)	Participants form two circles (one inside the other); the inside circle faces out, and outside faces in; they respond to a question, statement or quote; After responding, each person shifts to their right, so new pairs are formed each time	Allows group members to get to know each other and hear a variety of responses	Set up must be explained clearly, or it is confusing; may work better with teens than adults

Passing the Buck

Participants stand in a circle and respond to a question, statement, or quote with one word that they write on a small notecard or piece of paper; then they pass the card to the person standing next to them

Offers a way to make connections among group members and ideas; allows participants to explore directly, though briefly, another person's perspective

The facilitator asks for volunteers to share their original word and the word they received; participants can then answer: What connections can be made between the words? Does the new word resonate? How does the connection between the words tie us together as individuals?

Caucuses

Typically used in multi-session dialogues: People share within an "identity group," which can be divided along different lines (ethnicity, gender, position, etc.)

May provide safety for more open sharing than within the larger group; this safety can then translate beyond the identity group

Must be used carefully and purposefully, so it does not undermine overall group cohesion

Fishbowl

Facilitator and subgroup talk in an inner circle, while those in an outer circle observe silently

Gives observers a deeper understanding of how different perspectives relate to each other and how dialogue functions;

Can be combined with caucuses to allow different identity groups to see how dialogue functions in a group not their own

Hands-off facilitation

Facilitator steps back and allows dialogue to continue (while staying responsible for keeping safety)

Gives group ownership of dialogue

Using self as a model

Facilitator shares a personal story or experience

May inspire people to look at their own lives honestly—a core of the dialogue process; may also help them effect change

Must be used thoughtfully, so it doesn't dominate dialogue; paring stories to their essential elements will keep the dialogue process intact

<p>Non-verbal Photolanguage</p>	<p>Participants respond to images, choosing one to answer a specific question</p>	<p>Allows visual (and other) learners a way into the dialogue process; allows participants to express their perspectives through metaphor, a powerful communication tool</p>
<p>Silence</p>	<p>Facilitator invites time for reflection or internal processing (or group does this without invitation)</p>	<p>Silence often allows the deepest and best thinking to arise; can be used when the group is looking for a way forward</p> <p>Can be forecast with a comment (e.g. "This can be a difficult topic, so let's take a moment to think about it before responding to the question")</p> <p>Can be used to honor a specific response (without feedback, which can be minimizing) that may have deep emotions attached</p>
<p>Gallery walk</p>	<p>Participants walk around the room and read quotes that the facilitator has selected and posted; they stand by the one that most strikes them</p> <p>Within their group (e.g. at a given quote), participants respond to a question asked by the facilitator</p>	
<p>Graffiti wall</p>	<p>Participants draw or write their responses on a whiteboard or large paper posted on a wall (or they use post-its, which they stick to a wall);</p> <p>Participants then walk by and view the drawings/writings</p>	<p>Allows for freer expression than words alone; provides time for reflection and gives a sense of the range of responses; since it's anonymous, can allow for the expression of difficult thoughts or feelings</p>
<p>Anonymous testimony</p>	<p>Participants respond to a question, statement, or quote by writing their response on a large index card or sticky note; these are posted, and dialogue</p>	<p>Since it's anonymous, can allow for the expression of difficult thoughts or feelings</p>

	continues around the responses (not the responders)	
Carpet of ideas	<p>Participants respond to a question, statement, or quote by writing a few words on an index card</p> <p>Once responses are finished, the cards are laid out on the floor, followed by dialogue about the responses</p>	<p>Can be used when a difficult statement/topic/feeling has arisen; allows the facilitator to understand and address through dialogue what's happening in the group</p>
Footprints	Participants are invited to walk in the footprints of a specific group based on a shared experience or series of questions	
Ballot Box, Polling	Participants vote anonymously on a controversial topic, and then talk about the results	Allows participants to see where they stand in relationship to the group's opinions, without having to verbalize this; provides safety for minority views
Attribute Stones	<p>Facilitator makes a series of laminated circles with single-word attributes written on them (including one that says "other")</p> <p>Participants are given several small stones and asked to respond to a question by placing their stones on the circles to indicate the strength of their response to that attribute; then they are invited to share their responses and why they chose that word (or describe what "other" is for them)</p>	
Vote with your feet, Spectrum	<p>Participants respond to a question, statement, or quote by arranging themselves along a spectrum (e.g. strongly agree, strongly disagree)</p> <p>Facilitator invites spokesperson from each area of the spectrum to respond</p>	<p>Gives participants a sense of where they stand in relation to others in the group; allows for them to change their mind (visibly) in response to dialogue</p>