



FACILITATION WORKBOOK

STUDENT EDITION

2019/2020

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THE INTERACTIVITY FOUNDATION



CHECKLIST

Before Your Discussion— preparing:

- ☐ Activity 1. Discussion Road Map & Identifying Your Discussion Topic
- ☐ Activity 2. Facilitation & Discussion Goals
- ☐ Activity 3. Crafting Conceptual and Supplementary Questions

During Your Discussion— facilitating & recording:

- ☐ Activity 4. Facilitation Tips
- ☐ Activity 5. Recording the Discussion

After Your Discussion— evaluating & reflecting:

- ☐ Activity 6. Evaluation
- ☐ Activity 7. Writing-Up Your Reflection/Analysis
- ☐ Activity 8. Level-Up: Cohort Facilitation



Activity 1. DISCUSSION ROAD MAP & IDENTIFYING YOUR DISCUSSION TOPIC

Background & Instructions:

Where have we been? Where do we want to go? How do we get there?

In this exercise, think about where we have been, conceptually, in this class so far. What topics have we discussed? What issues or themes have we explored? Have we taken any detours? Where did they go? What else should we explore? Where else might the conversation go? What should be the primary topic for your facilitation? Take a few moments and write down your thoughts.

If you are completing this activity at the beginning of the semester (before we've had many or any classes), you may need to modify this activity. Review the syllabus and imagine potential landmarks or topics. You may need to use your imagination.

The important lesson here is that each of these classroom discussions are connected. As a facilitator, your goal is to build upon the ideas that have already been shared in prior discussions. And after your facilitation, you will pass the so-called "discussion baton" to the next facilitator to continue the discussion. This should offer some relief. You do not need to cover everything in your single facilitation. Rather, think of this course as an experiment in sustained discussion. We are building knowledge together. We are going on a "discussion road trip" together. Some ideas may lead to dead ends while others may be worthy of revisiting. Think about how you might contribute to this larger project and not just a single, one-off discussion. After you map out the flow of discussions so far, identify your area of concern or the topic that you would like to focus on for your discussion facilitation.

Your Work:

Fill in the following map or create your own map. Again, if it is early in the semester, you may need to review the syllabus to help identify key discussion topics or talk with your instructor.



Where have we been so far (conceptually)?

Where else might we go in our discussions? What topics would you like to explore in your facilitation?

Setting parameters. What is beyond the scope of your discussion? What topics or dimensions are out of bounds? What issues are central to your discussion?

Review what you have written above. Use your work to help you identify your discussion topic.

My Topic:

Activity 2. Facilitation & Discussion Goals

Background & Instructions:

Think about the discussions that have taken place so far in this class. What have they been like? Have they been lively? Thoughtful? Reserved? Tense? What has been the general mood of the class? What do you think the class does well? What can the class improve upon? Take a moment to write down a few words that describe the experience so far.

Your Work:

What do you want your facilitation to accomplish? Pick 2-4 of the following goals and/or add your own:

Goal

- ☐ Everyone in the class contributes
- ☐ Practice active listening
- ☐ Practice deeper hearing
- ☐ Build trust and Community
- ☐ Have more fun
- ☐ Embrace divergent thinking
- ☐ Engage taboo/difficult topics
- ☐ Practice generous interpretation
- ☐ Make connections between ideas
- ☐ Build on the ideas of others; avoid negating
- ☐ Deeper understanding of a topic/concept
- ☐ Develop new or bold ideas
- ☐ Draw connections to lived experiences
- ☐ Others:

Activity*

Pair Share, Round Robin, Perspective Swap
Note Taking or Collaborative Artist
Mirroring or Sharing Ideas of Others
Storytelling, Values, Backronym, Mobile Sharing
Icebreakers like Musical Chairs
Role Playing or Avatars
Snowball or Anonymous Notecard
Clarifying Qs or Question Round
History of the Future,
Yes, and..., Picture Phrasing, Word Assoc.
Hat Trick, Claymation, Charades
Mapping the Future, Metaphors, Doodle, Imagery
Scenario, Storytelling

*See Appendix A. Discussion Activities

Activity 3: Crafting Exploratory & Supplementary Questions

Background & Instructions:

Once you have chosen your topic, you should create lists of questions that you may use during your facilitation. You will want to prepare two sets of questions: (1) a few big-picture, open ended exploratory questions that help to introduce the topic and frame the discussion; and (2) a more detailed and complementary set of follow-up or supplementary questions so that you will be able to take the discussion in new directions.

I. **Exploratory Questions.** What are the big-picture, conceptual, exploratory questions for this topic? How are they different from other sorts of questions? A conceptual or exploratory question tends to be broad and often invites deep, divergent responses. Sometimes they can be framed in a provocative way to catch the attention of the discussion participants. Exploratory questions invite participants to look for greater meaning and interrogate shared understanding. They often result in a willingness to disrupt what we tend to think of as “obvious” or “common sense.”

Let's look at an example. Let's say your topic is “autism and the American educational system.” You are assigned to facilitate a classroom discussion on this topic. Let's take a look at some examples of more exploratory or conceptual questions.

Sample Exploratory Discussion Questions

Q: What do we think we know about autism? Where does our collective knowledge come from?

Strength: Allows us to reflect on epistemology, information flow, biases/assumptions.

Q: What might our language, policies, and popular representations of autism tell us about our society? How do they reflect our values as a society?

Strength: Allows us to shift the conversation from “those people” in need of fixing to reflections on popular society. Allows for alternative descriptions of the problem. Allows us to reflect on our own observations and analyses.

Q: How might society embrace neuro-diversity? How might schools support neurological difference? What would be gained by doing so? At what cost?

Strength: Allows us to explore multiple pathways for change and imagine the strengths of each approach that has consequences beyond the specific area of concern. Allows for a discussion on trade-offs and unintended consequences.

II. **Technical Questions.** By comparison, narrower technical questions tend to encourage technical solutions. Technical solutions and problem-solving techniques, in general, are not bad processes to implement. It is important, however, to know when to ask more technical questions (looking for a specific answer or course of action) and when to ask more exploratory questions (looking for exploration of ideas that may even force the group to reexamine the framing of the so-called problem).

Here are some examples of more technical questions for this topic that would not foster a very good exploratory discussion.

Sample Technical Discussion Questions

Q: What is autism?

Limitation: Most discussants are not experts in cognitive development. This question asks for a level of expertise that may not engage the group; it may lead to debates over technicalities or definitions. However, definitional questions are fine if the goal is to make sure the class has completed a reading and everyone is on the same page about formal definitions before moving on.

Q: Why do you think autism is on the rise?

Limitation: Leading question; is it on the rise? Encourages speculation or requires discussants to refer to explanations in text. This is fine for reviewing a text, but it does not encourage exploratory discussion. It encourages review of text.

Q: Do you think autism is linked to vaccines?

Limitation: Invites speculation. Invites debate over questionable science. Will lead discussion off track.

Q: How should schools accommodate autistic children?

Limitation: Invites conversation about institutional support but not a good initial question. Assumes directionality of action.

You must research your topic so that you have some idea how to frame your discussion. This is not an “anything goes” type of discussion atmosphere. You will want to pull from class readings, lectures, and previous discussions. Incorporate the resources of the class but do not limit the discussion to dissecting readings. You want to explore the practice or application of those ideas that you have been reading about.

In sum, part of your job is to craft exploratory questions that encourage participants to think deeper and to even question foundational assumptions. The goal of the exploratory discussion is not to solve a pre-determined and identified problem. It is not to interrogate specific texts. Rather, the exploratory discussion should create a more complex view of the topic, pulling on the knowledge and experiences of people in the class, and it should leave the class with more questions than answers.

Your Work:

Now it is your turn, craft a few discussion prompts. Use simple language. You should be able to introduce the question, say it one time, write it on the board, and then pause for the class to respond. Your question shouldn't be so complicated that discussants ask you to repeat it multiple times and ask for additional clarity. Keep it simple.

Your topic: _____(see Activity 1)

I. Exploratory Questions

Exploratory Question or Discussion Prompt

Rationale. What will this question do or make possible?

1.

2.

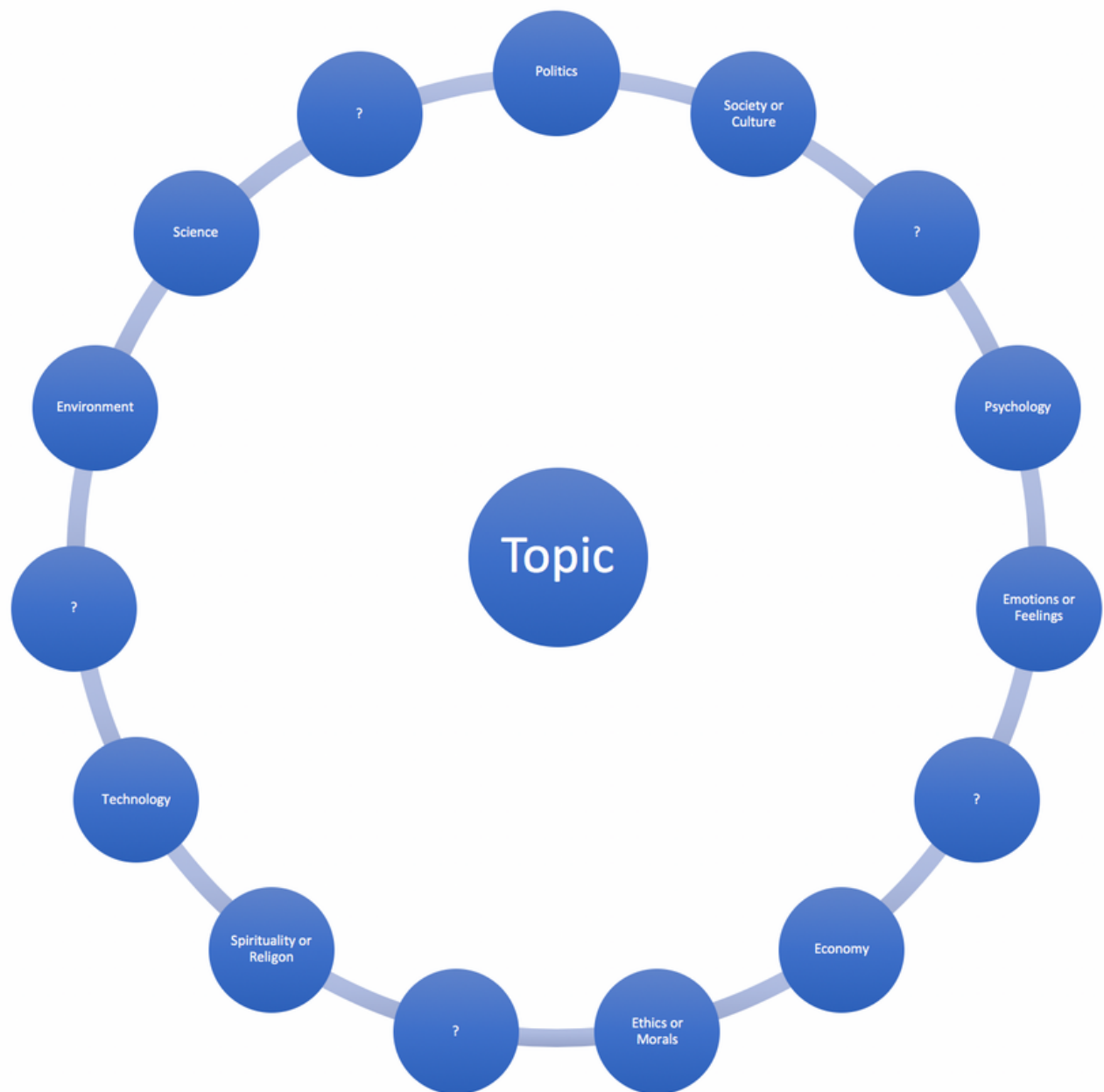
3.

4.

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II. Follow-Up, Supplementary Questions & Surrounding the Topic

As a general rule, it is better to be overprepared than underprepared for your facilitation. You should think about how participants might respond to your exploratory questions. What do you think they will say? You should be able to anticipate some of the responses and then prepare to follow-up to take the discussion deeper or move the discussion in another direction. To do this, you will want to practice “surrounding the topic.” Think about all of the possible dimensions or ways of thinking about your topic. It might look something like this:



As the facilitator you will want to be mindful of the various dimensions that surround the topic of discussion. You should craft opening questions for each dimension to encourage discussion participants to think differently—broadly and from multiple dimensions— about the topic. You may only have time for one or two follow-up questions, but since you won't know how the discussion will unfold it is better to be prepared to discuss a variety of dimensions.

II. Follow-Up, Supplementary Questions (surround the topic)

Dimensions	Follow-up Question	Rationale. What do you anticipate?
Political		
Social/Cultural		
Educational		
Economical		
Psychological		
Emotional		
Spiritual or Religious		
Technological		
Scientific		
Environmental		
Moral or Ethical		
Governmental		
Other:		

Remember: Keep it simple. Use accessible language. Avoid yes/no questions. You will not use all of these questions (don't try). It is good to practice to overprepare and mentally think through the various directions a discussion might go.

Activity 4. Facilitation

Background & Instructions:

On the day of your facilitation, you will need to set the tone of the discussion, offer guidelines or ground rules, lead the discussion as a strong, but impartial facilitator, manage the discussion flow, help to elevate the thought of others, and offer some sort of conclusion to the discussion. An experienced facilitator makes this process seem easy. Here are some easy steps to follow:

Step 1. Set the Tone

It is your job to set the tone for an imaginative, serious, and fun exploratory discussion. To do this, you will want to begin the discussion by 1) Standing up (resist the temptation to blend into the group), 2) Thank everyone in advance for their participation, and 3) Set some ground rules or guidelines for your discussion. You will want your guidelines to reflect and support your discussion goals (see Activity 2). You may offer a handout or write your discussion guidelines on the board.

Sample Discussion Guidelines

- Discussion basics: be respectful, take turns talking, do not dominate, help other enter the discussion, ask questions.
- Practice saying, "Yes, and..." Try to build on each other's ideas as they come up rather than evaluating or criticizing them right away.
- Be yourself—and be someone else. Share what you think—then use your imagination to think beyond yourself. Imagine someone from another walk of life or with other perspectives than your own. What would they add? What is the group overlooking?
- Be generous of spirit. Help each other to think through ideas. Try to find the grains of truth in the ideas of others, even if you don't agree with them. Focus on exploring the content of ideas rather than the persons who introduce them. Help each other explore and flesh out ideas even if you disagree with them.
- Be bold and go deep. Bring up ideas regardless of whether you think they might meet approval or regardless of whether you think they might work out. Sometimes innovative ideas seem crazy at first because they go beyond current conventions.

Step 2. Understand Your Role as Facilitator

1. Facilitator ≠ Discussion Leader. Your role is to help the group help each other to chart uncharted territory—not to lead them to a pre-determined destination. A good conversation typically unfolds organically in a non-linear fashion. Avoid being overly directive and avoid steering the discussion. Be adaptable. Don't rigidly follow your discussion plan.
2. Facilitator ≠ Bystander. Your role is to encourage the group to expand the perspectives they explore. Challenge the group if they get in a rut and exclude alternative points of view. Avoid being overly passive. Use questions or examples to expand the discussion, such as:
 - o "What do you mean by that?"
 - o "How can we build on that idea?"
 - o "What are some other perspectives?"

Step 3. Manage the Discussion Flow

It's your job to keep the discussion on track and to encourage participation. You can do this by:

1. Using flip charts to help keep everyone on track. For example, if someone presents an interesting idea, but it is off topic or detracts from the current discussion thread, then put it in the "parking lot" or the corner of the flip chart. This will help you keep the discussion on track and remember to come back to this idea later.
2. You can also use the flip charts to make connections between ideas. You can even encourage discussants to review the charts and make these connections by asking, "How does this relate to what _____ said earlier about _____?"
3. Ride the waves and make room for silence. Discussions ebb and flow. Silence often means that people are thinking. Don't panic when things get quiet. Be comfortable with silence.
4. Dissolve tensions and conflicts by reminding the group that this is an expansive exploratory discussion. You want to include divergent ideas, not pick winners. You may have to find friendly ways of reminding participants if the discussion starts to devolve into a debate or contest.

Step 4. Conclude the Discussion

Don't let the clock run out on you. Facilitators sometimes forget to conclude the discussion. They realize, "Oh, it looks like we are out of time. Good-bye." Don't do this. Be mindful of the time. Spend the last 5 – 10 minutes of the discussion asking for final comments or thoughts. Try to summarize key themes. Leave participants with some sort of review of the discussion. If possible, try to conclude the discussion by noting that many of these themes will be further discussed in future classes. Finally, don't forget to thank everyone for their participation. You may even want to offer a special acknowledgement for great comments, keen participants, or successful activities.

Activity 5. Recording the Discussion

Background & Instructions:

Each of our classroom discussions will have both a student facilitator and a note-taker (using a flip chart or the white board) to help record the discussion. In addition to facilitating a session, you will be asked to be a note-taker for another facilitator. This activity is intended to help you better understand the goals and some of the practical tips for taking flip chart notes. If you are co-facilitating with someone, you will want to figure out how to divide this labor equally.

Taking good notes is an additional and important discussion skill. Certainly, it helps to record the key ideas from the discussion for later reference and reflection. In addition, however, good note-taking can also be a big help during the discussion to summarize participant comments and identify key ideas for everyone to see (See Activity 4).

Functions of note-taking during the discussion include:

Note-Taking Functions

Summarizing participant comments for everyone to see.

A note-taker is not trying to create a word-for-word transcript. You can't write quickly enough (and shouldn't try) to capture every word. You have to select and write just a few key words to summarize the point.

Highlighting when the discussion has shifted to a new sub topic, or when it has shifted back to a previous point.

When the discussion shifts, you might insert a new outline number; or change marker colors; or start a whole new flip-chart page; or draw an arrow back to a prior point.

Validating participant comments.

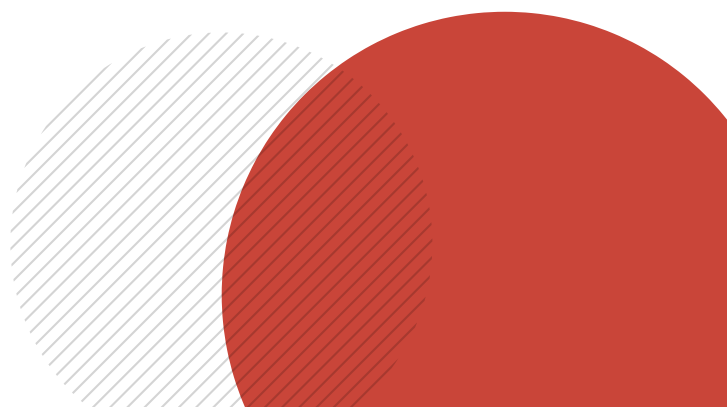
When participants see their comments recorded, even in summary form, it helps reinforce that their ideas and participation matter. They are creating something. It also offers them the opportunity to hear how others understand their point and clarify, if need be.

Similar to facilitating, there are also a number very practical tips or guidelines for note-taking. These include, for example:

Practical Tips for Note-Taking

1. Use charts with sticky-tape on the top of the back side (like post-it notes) so you can post each page to the wall as you work and so the participants can see the growing record of their prior comments.
2. Have at least two colors of marker so you can alternate colors to highlight different contributions or contrasting ideas.
3. Record the key words and ideas, not the name or initials of the contributor and not every word.
4. Don't hesitate to ask for clarification if you don't understand what someone is saying. And don't hesitate to re-state the idea and ask for confirmation. For example, you ask, "How do I best capture that idea?" Or, "Does this describe your point?"
5. You can and should help the facilitator by, for example, watching to see if someone has been missed or has been waiting to contribute. But the note-taker should intervene only occasionally, when necessary, and always briefly. In general, stay in the background, "on the side," and let the facilitator manage the flow of the discussion.
6. Number the flip chart pages as you go so you can put them back in order afterwards. Don't hesitate to "organize" as you go (e.g., draw arrows to connect related ideas, insert outline points, circle or underline repeated or big-picture ideas).
7. Try to write large and somewhat legibly.
8. Use a separate "parking lot" or "bicycle parking lot" page to record interesting but unrelated ideas/contributions. This helps to simultaneously validate the contribution and gently remind everyone to try and stay on point.

What other practical practice tips can you think of for note-taking? For example, are there times in the discussion or types of comments that you should you not record? Are there alternative ways to record a discussion that might play to the skills of the notetaker? Take a few moments to write down your thoughts.



Activity 6. Evaluation

Background & Instructions:

You will be evaluated on your preparation, facilitation, and post-facilitation write-up. Below are some sample grading rubrics that will be used.

Your Work:

Please review and circle any parts of these rubrics that you do not understand so that we can talk about them in advance of your facilitation.

Instructor Evaluation. The instructor will use this rubric to evaluate your facilitation. It will be returned during the post-facilitation debriefing.

Evaluation Component	Evaluation Notes	Evaluation Scores
1. Discussion Strategy		<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Outstanding <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Average <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Below Average <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Unacceptable
2. Facilitation Mechanics		<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Outstanding <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Average <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Below Average <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Unacceptable
3. Discussion Leadership		<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Outstanding <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Average <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Below Average <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Unacceptable
4. Use of Course Content		<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Outstanding <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Average <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Below Average <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Unacceptable
5. Quality of Discussion		<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Outstanding <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Very Good <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Average <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Below Average <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Unacceptable
6. Other Observations		
7. Overall Evaluation		Total
*Improvement strategy		
*Continue with		
*Progress made from previous discussions		

Peer Evaluation. Randomly selected classmates may be given this form to complete during your facilitation. They will remain anonymous. This information will be returned to you during the post-facilitation debriefing.

1. How well did you think the facilitator prepared you to participate in the discussion? (minimum 50 words)

2. Were there aspects of the facilitator's preparation that could have been done better? (minimum 50 words)

3. How useful was the initial discussion question in getting the discussion started? (minimum 50 words)

4. How would you describe the facilitator's neutrality in the discussion (i.e., was any bias evident?)? (minimum 50 words)

5. How well did the facilitator maintain the proper flow of the discussion? (minimum 50 words)

6. How well did the facilitator maintain a discussion environment where everyone felt comfortable in sharing his or her views? (minimum 50 words)

7. How well did the facilitator ask supplemental questions when the discussion seemed to stall? (minimum 50 words)

8. How well did the facilitator communicate with the participants during the discussion? (minimum 50 words)

9. How well did the facilitator give feedback to the participants to enrich the discussion? (minimum 50 words)

Co-Facilitator Evaluation. You may be asked to evaluate the work of your co-facilitator. If so, this form will be due at your post-discussion de-briefing

1. How well did you think your co-facilitators prepared for the discussion? (minimum 50 words)

2. Were there aspects of your co-facilitator's preparation that could have been done better? (minimum 50 words)

3. How would you describe your co-facilitator's style of facilitation? (minimum 50 words)

4. Were there aspects of your co-facilitator's work in the discussion that could have been done better? (minimum 50 words)

5. How well did your co-facilitators analyze and write up the discussion summary? (minimum 50 words)

6. Were there aspects of the discussion summary that could have been done better? (minimum 50 words)

7. How well did your co-facilitator meet deadlines? (minimum 50 words)

8. How well did the co-facilitator communicate with you during the entire discussion process? (minimum 50 words)

9. Would you like to work with this co-facilitator again? Explain your answer. (minimum 50 words)

Activity 7. Writing up Your Summary Reflection & Analysis

Writing up the discussion. Create a thematic (not a narrative) summary of the discussion for the group. You can sort out the key headings or categories that emerged in the discussion in the form of bullet points. Then sort the different perspectives as items under those headings. You can highlight connections and areas for future development. Don't record who said what. Instead, focus on key themes, areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as any surprises or challenges you faced during the facilitation. Some practical tips include:

- Immediately following the discussion, you should write up your rough facilitation notes and reflections for your own use (these notes will not be turned in). You will remember more detail if you write these notes and reflections immediately after the discussion.
- Let these notes sit for a few days so that you can give yourself time to further process the discussion.
- After you've had time to reflect, write up your Summary Reflection & Analysis. Please use the following evaluation rubric to help structure your document, which should be no more than 2-pages, double spaced.

Task	Did this Task?	Comments on the Effectiveness
1. Identified key themes of the discussion		
2. Identified areas of general agreement		
3. Identified areas of general disagreement		
4. Identified areas of concern		
5. Produced a well written/coherent summary		
6. Produced the summary in a timely manner		

Activity 8. Level-Up: Cohort Facilitation (optional)

Background and Instructions:

These discussions take place outside of the classroom. By “cohort” it means that you can organize a discussion with familiar, friendly participants. You can organize a discussion amongst your friends or in-groups.

Guidelines: Invite 5-8 people to participate in an exploratory discussion that takes place in-person or online and lasts approximately 1 – 2 hours. This can be organized and (co)facilitated by 1-3 people.

Your Work:

Pre-Discussion Preparation:

Identify topic _____(See Activity 1)

Identify discussion goals and strategy_____(See Activity 2)

Craft exploratory and supplementary discussion questions_____(See Activity 3)

Discussion Facilitation:

Create discussion guidelines_____(See Activity 4)

Record the discussion_____(See Activity 5)

Post-Discussion Reflection & Write-up:

Reflect on your facilitation performance_____(See Activity 6)

Write-up thematic summary of discussion_____(See Activity 7)

What to submit:

Submit a 1 to 2-page summary of the discussion event (See Activity 7). Include additional information, such as location, types of attendees, time, general mood of discussion, etc. Also submit your pre-discussion prep work and be prepared to share raw discussion notes, if requested. Finally, include 1 photo of the discussion event.

Appendix A. Discussion Activities

1. Anonymous Notecards

Each discussion participant writes a few lines or words about any concerns or issues that they are having with the class or a specific topic. Cards will be collected and the facilitator will read through them and organize key concepts on a flip chart or white board. The purpose of this activity is to help clear the air or address difficult issues.

Goal: Engage taboo or difficult topics.

2. Avatars

Each participant should be informed prior to the discussion that they will participate in the discussion as an avatar—or the embodiment of a character or an idea. They will participate in the discussion as this avatar (and not themselves).

Goal: Embrace alternative or divergent thinking. Think beyond personal beliefs and values.

3. Backronym

Create small discussion groups (3-4 participants). Take a word and use each letter to begin a descriptive word about the thing, idea, person, or place. For example, "SARALYN" - Smart Amazing Rigorous Altruistic Linguist Youthful Nagging. You may also use the name of institutions, cities, or other words that are commonly shared between the participants.

Goal: Connect with fellow participants. Encourage participants to talk with one another and contribute ideas.

4. Charades

Toward the end of the class discussion, the class may want to review the discussion notes on the white board or on the flip charts. The facilitator can choose one word or concept from these notes and ask a participant to act it out in a game of charades. The participant who guesses correctly can have the next turn acting out the next word determined by the facilitator.

Goal: Help to review key concepts from the discussion.

5. Clarifying Question Round

When confronted with an idea that the majority of the class does not like or finds disagreeable, implement a 5-minute round of clarifying questions. Participants offer questions that are aimed at genuinely helping them understand the disagreeable position. No one is permitted to answer these questions. The facilitator collects as many questions as possible and records them. As a group, try to make sense of these questions: what are the common themes or threads? How might someone who supports the "offensive" idea answer these questions?

Goal: Encourage perspective taking, generosity of interpretation, and/or the humanization of "the other side."

6. Claymation

Pass out to each participant a one-ounce container of Play-Doh (ideally in different colors). Ask each person to construct a clay object relating to a word or idea given by the facilitator. Allow several minutes for this part of the activity. Then ask each participant to share her creation and tell why it relates to the prompt. The facilitator will capture their ideas and discussion about their creations on the board. Hopefully, one of the objects modeled in this activity could lead to the next discussion prompt. You can alter this activity by using Legos.

Goal: Develop deeper understanding of a concept and/or develop new ideas.

7. Doodle If You Want

The facilitator will distribute sheets of paper. Each participant will be asked to take 30 seconds to think about what they want to draw/doodle/write on the sheet of paper. It should relate to the topic of discussion. In small groups (3-4 ppl), the participants take turn showing their creations. Others in the group will respond to each piece by sharing the first word or few words/phrases that come to mind when they see the picture. The facilitator will reconvene the large group and record the words that were shared.

Goal: Encourage creativity and thinking about the topic from new perspectives.

8. Collaborative Artist

In small groups (4-5 ppl), appoint 1 person to be the designated artist. This person stands in front of the flip chart or white board. The rest of the group stands behind the artist with their backs to the artist. The artist and the group cannot see one another. The group has an object in front of them. They describe to the artist how to draw (or paint) this object. The artist listens and can ask questions. The artist executes the instructions of the group. The group cannot turn around until the artwork is complete.

Goal: Improve listening skills and communicating effectively.

9. Hat Trick

The facilitator brings in a hat that is filled with either characters from a novel or ideas from whatever text is being read that week. Each participant in the group picks a character or idea from the hat. Once the characters or ideas are chosen, one of two things can be done: 1) with characters, the group could act out the character or they could even act out the idea and the rest of the group guesses or 2) each group member can explain the character or the idea's significance.

Goal: Improve understanding of key concepts or content.

10. Imagery

Ask participants to relate their individual ideas with an image that would best describe it. For example, when exploring the topic of changing the education paradigm participants might respond with “intellectual eagle”—adorning the eagle with a graduation cap, glasses, etc. to make the eagle an intellectual aura. Imagery may help to draw the participants’ attention and keep them engaged while making their ideas on the topic much more vivid.

Goal: Improve understanding of key concepts/content and encourage the development of new or bold ideas.

11. Metaphors

The facilitator will ask everyone in the group to write down a metaphor for a specific topic. For example “Education at my high school was like...” or “Wisdom is like...” Remind group members that there is no right answer and ask them to think creatively. Remind them that a metaphor does not define a word; instead it helps us understand it by evoking images and feelings. Give the group 3-4 minutes to come up with an answer and then the facilitator will record the list of metaphors. Ask the group how they think any or all of the metaphors help us see the topic in a new light. Take some time to explore. For example, try to think of as many things as possible it would mean to say “Wisdom is like a light in darkness.” Think about how the metaphors relate to each other: are there themes among them? or striking differences?

Goal: Develop new or bold ideas

12. Mirroring

Encourage participants to repeat back what they hear other participants saying. They do not need to repeat back, or reflect, these words verbatim. For example, “I hear you saying...” or “If I may summarize your point, I believe you are saying..., is that correct?”

Goal: Encourage deeper hearing and validation of other participants.

13. Mobile Sharing

For 5 minutes, ask participants to take out their phones or devices. Ask for a volunteer to play a clip from the song they listen to most often when they are happy. Sharing in small groups or with the person sitting closest, ask participants to share a photo that reflects them as a person. As a large group, discuss descriptions that were shared.

Goal: Build community or trust in the classroom.

14. Musical Chairs

Count the number of participants in the room. Put that many chairs minus one in the middle of the room. The facilitator will play music from their phone. Stop the music. Everyone sits down. The person without the chair is out of the game. Remove one chair and continue until there is only one person remaining. Discuss the results. Why did this person win? Was it just luck? If it was the professor, what role might power dynamics play in the class?

Goal: Build community or trust in the classroom. Have fun.

15. Note Taking

Encourage participants to take personal notes during the discussion. These should be hand-written and not typed. This will help everyone to listen more carefully and stay focused on the discussion. At various intervals in the discussion, ask different participants to share what they recorded. How did you capture that exchange or that idea? How did you make sense of that comment?

Goal: Practice active listening.

16. Pair Share

Divide the class into partners or groups of 2. Pose exploratory or supplementary questions. Give these small groups time to discuss how they would answer this question. Share back answers in the large group. Repeat.

Goal: Encourage everyone in the class to contribute.

17. Perspective Swap

Similar to pair share, but instead of verbally communicating, have each person write down their thoughts and then share it with their partner. The partner can ask or write clarifying questions. Share back results to the large group.

Goal: Encourage everyone in the class to contribute.

18. Personal Storytelling

Encourage participants in small groups (3-4 ppl) to share a personal story that relates to the topic. Emphasize that it must relate to the topic and place a strict time limit (less than 2 minutes) on each story. The group may discuss how the story relates or ask clarifying questions. The small groups can pick one story to share with the large group. The facilitator will try to connect key themes.

Goal: Draw connections to lived experiences and build trust in the classroom.

19. Picture Phrasing

Instead of using words, participants in small groups (3-4 ppl) can work together to craft a response to the facilitator's question by drawing a collective picture. The groups share their pictures with the class and the facilitator connects common themes and concepts.

Goal: Build on the ideas of others and develop new ideas.

20. Role Play

In order to get more outlooks on the subject, the facilitator may want to assign each participant a different role in society. For example, if the topic is "What does education mean to you?" then the facilitator could assign one person to be a kindergartener, a high school teacher, a parent who has children in school, an administrator, etc. By giving each person a different identity, the facilitator will receive different perspectives in return. This will help the group see how others might react to the topic. If the topic or accompanying roles are difficult, the facilitator may want to assign these roles prior to the discussion so that participants can come prepared to represent their assigned perspective. Try to encourage participants to avoid caricature or overly simplistic representations.

Goal: Embrace divergent thinking

21. Scenarios

Introduce descriptive scenarios that help to illustrate a real life situation. The scenario will be multifaceted and nuanced. Discussants will need to talk through the complexity of the situation. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. Rather, this exercise is designed to help connect conceptual ideas with real life application. It helps participants to realize, "Oh, it's complicated." To review pre-written scenarios, see the Resources page of The Interactivity Foundation website.

Goal: Draw connections to real life experiences and develop an appreciation for the complexity of many ideas.

22. Sharing the Ideas of Others

In partners or small groups, have participants share their thoughts about a particular discussion prompt. Allow for several minutes of small group discussion. Then ask the small groups to share back with the entire class, however, participants cannot share their own thoughts. Each participant must share a thought expressed by someone else in the group. Have this participant present this idea as convincingly as possible without identifying the originator of the idea.

Goal: Develop deeper hearing skills.

23. Snowball

Organize everyone in the room into one large circle. Everyone should be standing. Ask everyone to write down one issue, question, concern, problem, controversial idea, etc. on a piece of paper. The facilitator can use this exercise to explore concerns or taboo topics. Once everyone has written down an idea, they crumble the paper into a ball. When the facilitator says, "go" everyone throws their "snowballs." Like a snowball fight, participants are throwing these balls at one another. After a minute the facilitator stops the fight and asks everyone to pick up the paper closest to them. One person shares what is written anonymously on the paper. Others who have similar comments then share. Try to keep the discussion organized thematically. Use flip charts to track the responses on the snowballs.

Goal: Identify and engage a taboo or difficult topic to discuss.

24. Speed Round Robin

The class should be sitting in one large circle. The facilitator opens the discussion with a question or prompt. Go around the circle and give everyone the opportunity to contribute. The facilitator can make rules about no repetition, one sentence limit, or flow reversal when certain expressions are used, like "I feel..." or "I believe..." or "I don't know."

Goal: Everyone in the class contributes to the discussion.

25. Values

Ask everyone to write down 3 statements that reflect their values, such as "I value curiosity and open-mindedness" or "I believe people should take responsibility for their actions." Ask a volunteer to share a statement. Explore who else in the group has a similar statement. Continue examining and discussing the values of the people in the group.

Goal: Help to build trust and understanding the group.

26. Word Association

Start out with one word, and whatever word you think of immediately after writing the previous word, you write down. As an example: Tree - bark - dog - fur - coat - winter - cold - tissue - nose You end up with something that is far from the original word, but you create new pathways for thinking. Try doing this with a small group. Each person builds on the previous word. After everyone contributes, review the progression of the words. Debrief as a class and examine how individuals jumped from one idea or word to another. This alternative way of thinking might lead to innovation and creation.

Goal: Building on the ideas of others and embracing alternative and divergent thinking.

27. Writing the History of the Future

Begin by asking the group to imagine their ideal future on particular topic. For example, you might ask: In the future, what do colleges look like? Who attends? What do they learn? How much do they cost. Have the group design a future image. Then, ask them to tell the history of this future. What events had to happen for this ideal to come to fruition? You can ask for specific examples. Draw a timeline on the board or on a piece of paper.

Goal: Encourage bold, constructive, and imaginative thinking.

28. Yes, and...

Encourage discussants to practice "yes, and..." instead of "yes, but..." responses in the discussion. This approach helps discussants to build on the ideas of others (being constructive) rather than dismissing the ideas of others (being restrictive).

Goal: Avoid negating. Build on the ideas of others.