

# Collaboration Activities and Techniques

## Group Norms

Category

Technique or Getting Started

Time

10-15 minutes

Group or Individual

Group

Why do it?

Establishing group norms is a 10–15-minute investment in the creation of clear, agreed-upon behavior for how a group will engage with one another, resulting in a more engaged and effective group.

Overview

Everyone comes into group spaces with their own set of experiences, values, expectations, and perspectives that impact how they think, react, and behave. A deliberate discussion about what the group expects from themselves and one another can help to build trust, work together toward the goal of the session, and hold one another accountable. Norms should be flexible touchstones that guide and remind participants of agreed upon behavior for the group. There should not be too many, and they should not be too rigid.

Directions

1. On a large surface create a board with three columns, Worst, Best, and Group Norms.

*Note: you may also consider using the **Think-Pair-Share strategy** with this activity.*

2. Begin with the “Worst” column
3. Ask the group to recall the worst groups or discussions (modify this to fit the learning experience) they have ever been a part of and to spend a moment listing what made that experience terrible either on paper or on sticky notes.
4. Ask for participants to share and/or place their sticky notes in the “Worst” column.
5. Identify commonalities.
6. Move to the “Best” column.
7. Ask the group to recall the best groups or discussions (modify this to fit the learning experience) they have ever been a part of and to spend a moment listing what made that experience great either on paper or on sticky notes.
8. Ask for participants to share and/or place their sticky notes in the “Best” column.
9. Identify commonalities.
10. Move to the “Group Norms” column.
11. Ask the group to consider the previous conversations and to offer suggestions for group norms.
12. Make a list without saying no or discussing any of them as they are shared.

13. Once suggestions have slowed, discuss each suggestion briefly to ensure there is a shared understanding of meaning, clarify language and modify as needed so the norms listed read as intended.
14. Explain throughout the session that it is ok to pause to ask questions and add or alter norms.

*Tip: These should feel like group expectations that participants can use to self-manage. The onus should not be on the instructor or facilitator.*

15. At the end, revisit the list in totality by asking:
  - “Do we still agree on everything listed here?”
  - “Would we like to make any revisions?”

*Note: In subsequent meetings of the group, revisit a couple of the norms, calling out something that relates to the upcoming conversation and model how you might remind someone of a norm. Example: Remember to know when to step up and to step back to allow for other voices in the conversation.*

### Examples

- Listen intently to what is said, to understand instead of to respond.
- There is no such thing as a stupid question.
- Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements for more effective communication.
  - Sample “I” statement: “I feel frustrated when my feelings aren’t acknowledged.”
  - Avoid statements like: “You don’t care about my feelings.”

*Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas.*

### References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/pages/session-principles>

Coming to the Table Touchstones (2019). <https://comingtothetable.org/project/touchstones/>

# Round Robin

Category

Ideas or Collaboration

Time

30 minutes

Group or Individual

Group

Why do it?

Evolve to more fully formed ideas quickly, integrating multiple perspectives.

Overview

You have an idea, but it needs further development and could benefit from the perspectives of others. Using this activity, the group collaborates to offer feedback, make suggestions, and further the thinking of their peers in a fun and efficient way.

Directions

1. Give each participant a large sheet of paper. Ask them to fold the paper so that it is divided into four equal sections.
2. With the paper in a vertical position, ask the group to write the name of their idea at the top of the paper.
3. Give them 5 minutes to outline, draw, and/or explain their idea in the top left box with enough detail that someone can understand it without further explanation.
4. Once time has passed, ask everyone to pass their paper to the person on their left.
5. Give participants approximately 8 minutes to look at the idea and, in the next section on the paper, develop it further, ask questions, and offer suggestions and alternatives.
6. Repeat steps four and five until all sections of the paper are full.

*Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas.*

References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/roundrobin>

# Start, Stop, Continue

## Category

Collaboration and Group Work

## Time

30 minutes

## Group or Individual

Group

## Why do it?

Determine how the group is going with three simple questions.

## Overview

This activity is often used in business and on functional teams to gather feedback, improve a situation, or work through a process. In the classroom, it can be used for those and several other purposes as well. This activity can be especially useful with groups throughout a group project to determine how things are going, bring all the unspoken issues and successes to the forefront for purposeful discussion, and determine clear actions for moving forward.

## Directions

1. One a large piece of paper, create three columns with the headings “Start”, “Stop”, and “Continue”
  - a. Note: This activity may be done in small groups or as a whole class, depending on the topic of discussion and the goal.
2. Ask participants to spend five minutes creating sticky notes – one idea per sticky – responding to the question: “*What should we start doing?*”
3. After time has passed, each person shares what they wrote and posts them in the “Start” column.

*Note: you may consider using the **Theme Sort strategy** as participants post their stickies.*

4. Ask participants to spend five minutes creating sticky notes – one idea per sticky – responding to the question: “*What should we stop doing?*”
5. After time has passed, each person shares what they wrote and posts them in the “Start” column.
6. Ask participants to spend five minutes creating sticky notes – one idea per sticky – responding to the question: “*What should we continue doing?*”
7. After time has passed, each person shares what they wrote and posts them in the “Start” column.
8. Spend about five minutes talking through what was brought up and reflecting on the collective input of all the members.

*Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas.*

## References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/startstop>

# Mad, Sad, Glad

Category

Collaboration

Time

30 minutes

Group or Individual

Group

Why do it?

Get a sense for how the group is feeling about a topic, activity, the course, or anything really.

Overview

Understanding how our students feel about different activities, course materials, the course, or their groups is a quick and easy way to gain valuable feedback and add to the community, voice, and choice we offer in our courses.

Directions

1. One a large piece of paper, create three columns with the headings “Mad”, “Sad”, and “Glad”
  - a. Note: This activity may be done in small groups or as a whole class, depending on the topic of discussion and the goal.
2. Ask participants to spend five minutes creating sticky notes – one idea per sticky – responding to the question: “*What are you mad about?*”
  - a. Note: You may also want to add examples to help clarify and define “mad”.
3. After time has passed, each person shares what they wrote and posts them in the “Mad” column.

*Note: you may consider using the **Theme Sort strategy** as participants post their stickies.*

4. Ask participants to spend five minutes creating sticky notes – one idea per sticky – responding to the question: “*What are you sad about?*”
  - a. Note: Once again, you may also want to add examples to help clarify and define “sad”.
5. After time has passed, each person shares what they wrote and posts them in the “Sad” column.
6. Ask participants to spend five minutes creating sticky notes – one idea per sticky – responding to the question: “*What are you glad about?*”
  - a. Note: As with the others before, you may want to add examples to help clarify and define “glad”.
7. After time has passed, each person shares what they wrote and posts them in the “Glad” column.
8. Spend about five minutes talking through what was brought up and reflecting on the collective input of all the members.

*Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas.*

## References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/madsad>