

# 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>

# Fishbowl

Category

Discussion

Time

30 minutes to 1 hour

Groups or Individual

Group

Why do it?

During in-person sessions, encouraging students to participate, to listen carefully, and to be active leads to better comprehension of material.

Overview

The fishbowl strategy creates an incentive for multiple students to join in discussions by making the discussion space itself part of the focus. Additionally, the fishbowl reduces the likelihood that one or two students will dominate the discussion.

Directions

1. Place three chairs in the front of the room, with easy access for all class participants. You can put any space between the chairs.
2. Assign a topic for students to discuss or allow them to generate topics (see the Democratic Discussion card for a helpful way to generate discussion topics).
3. Select students to sit on two of the chairs and explain that they will start the discussion rolling. Then, tell the class that any one of them can fill the empty chair, but when they do, one of the original speakers will need to exit voluntarily, leaving their chair empty for someone else to fill.
4. Set a time limit for the discussion and begin.

References

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

# Democratic Discussion

Category

Discussion

Time

1 hour

Groups or Individual

Group

Why do it?

If all students have a say in the topics the class discusses, they are more likely to be invested in participation.

Overview

In addition to deciding upon what to discuss, participants are given the authority to decide the duration of various topics that they have agreed to cover.

Directions

1. At the beginning of class, place three columns on the whiteboard: To Discuss, Discussing, Discussed.
2. Ask all students to write down on stick notes topics that they would like to discuss during class and to place their notes in the "To Discuss" column.
3. Explain that every student has three votes to use any way they like. They can give one vote to three topics, all three votes to one topic, and so on. Ask them to write down their votes on a sticky note.
4. Collect the votes and arrange the topics in the order from most to least votes. Move the highest vote getter into the "Discussing" column.
5. Set a time for 10 minutes (or whatever time frame works for the subject) and tell students to begin their discussion.
6. When the time is up, have the students decide as a group whether to continue on with the topic or to place in the "Discussed" column.
7. Pair this strategy with Fishbowl to spark wide participation.

References

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