

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In the best circumstances, conversations allow people to share their ideas in order to create new understanding for everyone in the group. Have you ever been in a conversation where all the group members were listening to each other, interested, and enthusiastic? These are the situations that lead us to those aha moments when we understand something in a new way. The big puzzle is, what are those circumstances that allow people to feel comfortable to share their personal opinions and ideas with others? And that allow isolated and individual thoughts and opinions to synthesize into new and fresh ideas. How could we have conversations that energize the members and make them feel important, included, and engaged? It is a group discussion.

Elements of a good discussion

First, it's important that you come to the conversation prepared. Often the topic or issue of the conversation is given beforehand. Familiarize yourself with as much background information that you can so that you'll have some reliable facts and information to contribute to the conversation. Secondly, when the group meets make sure that where and how you're sitting makes everyone feel comfortable and part of the group. Everyone should be on the same level, should have eye contact with each other, and the desk should be cleared of any distractions. Thirdly, know the purpose of the conversation and help the group achieve it. It's important that the group has a common goal so they can move toward it together. Stay focused on the topic, make comments that are relevant, encourage your group members to do the same. Fourth, listen to understand. Be honestly interested in what others have to say. Believe that you have something to learn from them. Give yourself quiet time to think about the information that's been said and ask follow up questions if you don't understand. Next, communicate clearly, try to have your ideas organized in your mind before you share them with the group. Give relevant and specific examples that illustrate the point you want to make. Use language cues to help the listeners follow along. Look for the listeners' gestures that communicate things like agreement or disagreement, confusion, or even boredom, and adjust what you're saying accordingly. Sixth, think deeply.

Research has shown that by applying, analyzing, and evaluating concepts, people will learn it better and will remember it longer. Challenge your group members and yourself by asking interesting questions. Seventh, be dynamic with your voice and gestures to bring positive energy to the group. Use your voice to emphasize important ideas by saying them louder and longer. Keep everyone's attention by saying some things fast and some things slowly, or in a high pitch, or in a low pitch. Use your eyes, hands, arms, and your smile to make gestures that keep the group members engaged with what you have to say. And lastly, be humble, positive, and respectful. Truly believe that everyone you will ever meet knows something that you don't, and act accordingly. Avoid being the person who has all the answers and tells others where they're wrong, instead be someone who's open-minded and admits there's a lot that can be learned. Respect others by not interrupting and by responding positively and relevantly to their ideas.

Problems in Group Discussions

In this lesson, we are going to have a look at how to have a smooth discussion. You already know that a discussion should involve teamwork. Everyone should put in the same effort and work together to construct a good discussion. Of course, many things can go wrong when you're working in a team or a group, that is just the nature of interacting with people. In this lesson, we are going to look at some of the common problems that can arise in a discussion, and how to prevent them. Three common problems that may occur are:

Getting off track, uneven participation, and a bad attitude. First is getting off track. This is very simple. When you are playing a game, you need to keep the ball on the field. Getting off track in a discussion is like a ball going out of bounds. It's really very easy to get off track in a discussion. Here's a discussion about Doping in Professional Sports. Sometimes, people just aren't interested in the topic, so they talk about something else. This student isn't even close to being on topic when he says, hey, I heard a new restaurant opened across the street. Have you tried it? Sometimes people aren't exactly sure what they should be talking about. So they never get on the right track to begin with like when this student says, I don't get it. Are we supposed to be finding solutions or just looking at causes? And sometimes the discussion takes an interesting turn, and everyone is very involved but they've gone off track. Like when this student references a movie he saw. It relates to the topic, and the others are interested in hearing about it. They start asking him questions, but they don't get back to the main thread of the discussion. The main solution to getting off track is just to be aware of where the discussion is going. You can remind the group to stay on track with phrases like, I think we're getting a little off topic or we are running short on time, so let's get back on topic. Which is a little more direct or, please keep to the point everyone which is firm and direct.

Another common problem in a discussion is uneven participation. In a good balance discussion everyone contributes about the same. There are two main problems that can occur. One is talking too much; one person shouldn't dominate the entire conversation. The other is not participating enough, everyone should contribute. The person who doesn't say anything is hindering a good discussion just as much as the person who talks too much. There's nothing to respond to. There needs to be talking, listening, and turn-taking, from everyone. First, be aware of your own participation. Be sure you add your ideas, but be sure to listen too. You may feel like you can't find a good moment to jump into the conversation. And sometimes there won't be a space. You're going to have to interrupt. Use eye contact and body language to signal that you want to jump in. And/or you can say something like, I would like to add an idea, or, can I say something here? Or before we go on I want to say. These are all good ways to interrupt and jump in with your ideas. You should be aware of how much you are participating, but if you noticed that someone else is dominating the discussion, or someone's not saying anything at all, don't be afraid to speak up. A lot of the time people don't realize how much they are talking. Say something like, that's interesting but we haven't heard from John yet, or let's make sure we hear from everyone. And feel free to invite others to speak. You can say things like, hey John, what do you want to say about this? Or simply, John, what do you think? To try to get everyone involved.

The third problem we are looking at is a bad attitude. A bad attitude can mean many things, it can be a general lack of motivation or a disinterest in the discussion. It can mean not taking the topic seriously, joking around too much, or distracting others from the task at hand. And, most problematic, a bad attitude can mean frustration and anger when there's disagreement. This can really ruin a discussion. You can be aware of your own body language during a discussion. But what do you do if other members of your group are looking bored and not participating. Well you can invite them to share their ideas by saying things like, what do you want to say about this, or maybe even, come on work with us. But keep a friendly tone. You aren't going to get anyone to talk if you scold them. Sometimes all it takes is a direct invitation to speak. You can have a friendly attitude but take the discussion seriously. Be a good listener, make eye contact and show respect for each member of the group. If someone is joking around too much, don't be afraid to tell them to stop. But usually, you can just set the tone and others will follow. Finally, it is normal and completely okay if there is not agreement in a discussion. The goal is to explore a topic. Agreeing isn't necessary, and not agreeing actually improves some discussions because different viewpoints make people think. Don't let yourself get frustrated or angry during a discussion just because other people don't think the same way you do. Don't get personal and don't take things personally. There are many polite ways to disagree. The important thing is to show respect and allow others to express their ideas. In the United States we say, we'll just have to agree to disagree. How you interact with other members of the group is a vital part of a successful discussion. Your behavior sets the tone, and there are many things you can do and say to steer your conversation in a positive direction. Stay on track, aim for balanced participation, and maintain a good attitude, even when there is disagreement. Hopefully, following these ideas will ensure smooth sailing for your discussion.

Preparing the Discussion

Before we talk about academic discussions, let's take a moment to talk about building houses. Which house will be better? The house that sits on a strong foundation or a house with no foundation at all? Obviously, it's the house with the strong foundation. Building a strong foundation for something is called Laying the Groundwork. Group discussions are similar to houses. You have to lay the groundwork too, but what's the groundwork in a Group Discussion? It's your pre-discussion preparation. If you don't prepare, your discussion could be a disaster. Participants don't have much to say and this makes for very short, and unsatisfying conversations. Preparation can prevent this problem. Let's look at some ways to prepare for a group discussion.

Reading is the key to helping you prepare to talk. When you do this reading, you must read actively. This means reading with an engaged mind. Here are four strategies that will help you to get the most out of your pre-discussion reading. Mark the text. Take double-entry notes. Note key vocabulary and make lists. First, don't just read the text, you need to react to it. An academic text is an argument. And when you read it, you need to think about and react to this argument. It's like having a conversation with the author, but in your head. One great way to do this is to mark the margins of the text with some symbols. If you read something you agree with, put a checkmark

next to it. If you don't agree with an idea, put a x. An exclamation mark can be used for new, surprising or memorable ideas and important points to discuss can be marked with an asterisk. Also, you can write a question mark for questions or unclear ideas and a pound sign for ideas that contradict, or challenge your expectations. If you mark your text. Then during the discussion, you can easily find ideas that you can comment on or ask questions about. Another way to prepare is to take double-entry notes. First, draw a line down your paper. On the left side, you'll take notes on the author's argument. On the right side, you'll write your personal reactions. What is the authors view point? Record it on the left. How does the author organize the text? What are the parts of argument? For each of those parts, what support does the author give? It's important to indent your notes to show the hierarchy or importance of ideas. And again, it's important for you to react to this argument.

On the right side, write some of your own personal reaction to the ideas in your notes. You can use this comments when you need ideas or point to discuss. A third way to prepare is to know key vocabulary from the text, especially if the discussion is not in your native language. If a word is a keyword related to the topic, write it down and listen to the pronunciation online, so that you can confidently use the word in the discussion. Note the part of speech of the word and lookup the word's meaning. If you really want to remember the word, write it in your own original example syntax. These things will help you remember key vocabulary when you're talking and you'll feel more confident expressing your ideas in English. Finally, a fourth option for preparing is to make a short list of things you'd like to say or ask about the topic. First, list points that you'd like to make during the conversation. However, be flexible and open to change. Someone might change your mind during the conversation and these points may become irrelevant. That's what a discussion is all about. More importantly, make a list of questions you'd like to ask about things you don't know or would like to hear other people discuss. Questions show that you're trying to learn from others and that you're open to new possibilities. If you use one or more of these strategies to prepare, you're so much more confident going into the discussion. You'll understand more and you'll be much more likely to participate.

Exercise

A. Following are two examples of two students' discussion preparation reading. Which is better and why? The both read material on "Water Crisis" for group discussion.

Would these double-entry notes be useful during an academic discussion?

Notes	My Reaction
Water security = 1 of biggest prob of 20th cent!	
• 2050: high pop. countries in Asia will be without $\frac{1}{4}$ of needed grain	> Interesting.
• 2013: Year of H ₂ O cooperation (UN)	> Cool!
© Elsevier	

Notes	My Reaction
Water security = 1 of biggest probs of 20th cent.	
① Effects	
• 2050 - high pop. countries in Asia w/out $\frac{1}{4}$ of needed grain	> This is a scary prospect. How would we handle this?
• Drought = #1 threat to food supply -> deeper than any other nat. disaster	> Why does this not receive more media atten.?
② Drawing Atten. to the Prob.	
• 2013: Yr of H ₂ O coop. (UN) • \$75K for clean H ₂ O projects	> Good. Corporations need more involvement

B. Comment on the usefulness of the following for the group discussion.

Points to Make	Questions to Ask
1. This is a social justice issue → there is fresh H ₂ O, but the people who need it most are the least likely to have access to it	1. Why doesn't this issue receive more media attention?
2. Corporations & gov'ts need to take a great role in clean H ₂ O initiatives	2. Should there be repercussions for gov'ts that won't cooperate?

Points to Make

1. Enough fresh water for the planet, but the problem is that it is mismanaged.
2. One of the reasons this is that water is an international issue, but the solutions on a local level do not take into account the global issue.

Questions to Ask

1. What are potential ways to consider the problem on a larger scale?

Critically read the following article and use the discussion preparation method to prepare for your group discussion. The topic of your group discussion is "The Multi-layered Education System of Pakistan".

A government school and an O-level school are two extremes of the stratified education system that exists in the country. Which one of them will children end up in depends on how much money their parents have.

A rough estimate of the various layers that make up urban education brings forward eight categories of parallel systems that have been functioning for years - Madrassahs, government schools, English-medium schools, cadet schools and colleges, O- and A- level schools, the Aga Khan University board, government colleges and public and private universities.

In the absence of any formal tab, each of these schooling systems devises a different curriculum and fee structure. As a result, each institute attracts a certain social class, and year after year, churns out batches of students, who share life experiences completely alien to each other.

According to a survey titled 'Education in Pakistan' conducted by the Strengthening Participatory Organisation, "Madrassahs, Urdu- and Sindhi-medium schools and English-medium schools cater for different socio-economic classes and further increase the alienation that exists between them.

The system is unjust as it distributes the most lucrative and powerful jobs advantageously to the elite, which is educated in English-medium institutions. Meanwhile, the Madrassah-educated people and those who fail in Urdu-medium schools join the increasing army of the unemployed, who use the idiom of religion to express their defused sense of being cheated of their rights. Hence, the unjust system of schooling might increase Islamic militancy in Pakistan that will be as much an expression of resentment against the present policies of the ruling elite as the commitment to Islamising the society."

Professor Jaffer Ahmed, the director of the Area Study Centre for Pakistan Studies, has a similar perspective. "The stratification in education is creating two nations within the country with no communication bridge."

Officials in the education department say there are 2,800 government schools in Karachi. Private schools are even greater in number. "There are about 6,000 registered private schools, and a conservative estimate will reveal that there are 4,000 unregistered private schools in the city," said Syed Khalid Shah of the All Private School Management Association.

Education at government schools comes free of charge, but the standards are such that even a poor man prefers to send his children to a small-scale private school.

In survey carried out by the Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi titled "Urban Trends in Education", it was discovered that only 34.8 percent fifth grade students at government schools in Karachi could

read English sentences and solve three-digit division sums. Only 47.8 percent of them could read an Urdu storybook.

The figures for fifth grade students at private schools were relatively higher, but not satisfactory as 51.4 percent could read an Urdu storybook, 91.4 percent could read English sentences and 62.9 percent could solve three-digit division sums.

The same survey also pointed out that the disparity among private and public sector schools was the highest in Karachi in comparison with Lahore and Peshawar. Of the total percentage of students enrolled in schools, 26.5 percent attended government schools and 70.8 percent private schools.

A brief history

According to the state policy, taxes should be spent on educating students in Urdu and Sindhi languages only. This had been the practice in schools which operated in the 60s and 70s. Teaching continued in the mother tongue till fifth grade, after which it was carried on in both English and Urdu.

It was stated in the Strengthening Participatory Organisation survey that it was during Ayub Khan's time that cadet colleges were first constructed. The medium of instruction there was English, and the reason given for the armed forces to step into the field of education was the "need to produce officials, who could step into the military bureaucracy".

These institutes provided education at a subsidised rate, and were situated in state-of-the-art buildings. After nationalisation in 1972, the standards of government schools suffered a serious blow. It was then that O-and A-level schools began to spread. The market gap for quality education was captured by a number of private schools of all sizes that mushroomed in the city.

On the other hand, the Madrassah is an educational institution that exists with every other mosque, even in remote villages with no schools.

More often than not, parents send their children to these 'boarding schools' to ease the burden of extreme poverty.

The Aga Khan Board was introduced in 2003, and offers both matriculation and intermediate education. It follows the national curriculum and claims that its fee is "less than one-third of O-and A-level schools" but the standard is the same.

Pakistan might be the only country with an education system as layered as this and produces children completely alienated to each other. Here, one child has no bench to sit in a classroom and the other has access to lush green football stadiums. In a situation like this, one is forced to ask that if the constitution guarantees that all citizens are equal, why are some more equal than others? By Sidrah Roghay (The news)

How to Start the Discussion Conversation?

Let's look at actually getting the talking started. First, remember, a conversation is not a competitive sport. The goal is not to plow over everyone to get your point across or to dominate the conversation. If anything, an academic conversation should be a team endeavor, with equal effort and even participation from all. So go in with a collaborative attitude. So the first step is to get settled into a position where all participants are able to see each other. You may have to move chairs and desks to reposition yourselves. A circle formation is ideal, that way everyone can see each other. Avoid negative body language such as crossed arms. Try to be aware of your body language. You should clear everything you don't need off of the desktops. There shouldn't be sweatshirts, backpacks, or even large drinks creating a wall between group members. If you don't need your computer or phone for notes, it's a good idea to put those away too. They're just distractions. This is much better. So now you're set up to talk. The next step is to introduce yourself.

In the United States, handshaking is common when you meet someone. But if this seems too formal to you or you've been sitting next to the person in class for weeks already, a handshake is not necessary. A friendly smile works great in any introduction. It's time to get down to business and start talking about the topic. Look at your materials. What are the discussion questions? Make sure everyone in the group agrees on what needs to be discussed. It's very important to address the question. A really common problem in discussions is going off topic or not hitting the target. It's really important that all group members agree on what should be discussed. Let's say the question is, discuss the causes of the water crisis, and your group talks about how to conserve water. Well, this isn't a cause of the crisis; you have missed the target. Or say the topic is, discuss possible solutions to the high cost of university tuition. And then your group ends up talking about how hard it is to pay for college, well, it may be true but your goal was to discuss solutions. Again, you've missed your target. If the question is, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of social media, a good idea is to start by writing two columns in your notes to list advantages and disadvantages. This way, you know that your discussion will hit your goal. To sum up, make sure you have a good arrangement so everyone can see each other and participate equally. Then introduce yourself to establish a friendly environment, and so you can use each other's name during discussion. And finally, make sure everyone understands the discussion topic so that your conversation achieves its goal. Now you're ready to start your conversation.

Constructing Conversation in Discussions

There have been some pretty fantastic buildings constructed in the world. Each one of these buildings had someone who followed a set of steps to get the job done. One essential step is to build a firm foundation. The foundation supports the building by lifting it above the ground, by keeping moisture out, and by resisting the Earth's movement around it. A building can crumble if the foundation is not firm. Another step is to have a blueprint of the building. The builders need to have an idea of what the building is supposed to look like. The blue print guides the construction and gives focus to the people involved in the process. Lastly, in the construction of any stable

building, each brick or piece of wood needs to be placed intentionally upon the last. That's how progress is made, by building on what already exists. In this short lesson, we will develop the idea of how the construction of a discussion is much like the construction of a building. And then we'll emphasize how important it is to build on the ideas of others. Just as a solid building needs a firm foundation, so does a solid conversation.

The foundation of a house includes steel rods and concrete, the foundation of a conversation includes background knowledge of the discussion topic and an understanding of the value of the discussion. Background knowledge can be developed by doing the assigned task related to the topic as well as taking the initiative and doing some independent research on your own. Knowledge of the topic will allow you to contribute information and ideas that will elevate the conversation. Having knowledge of the topic will also allow you to understand the scope of the discussion, and will help you detect irrelevant information that could sneak into the conversation. An understanding of the value of the discussion can be developed by asking yourself, why am I in this discussion group? What are some of the benefits of being in this discussion? Some responses may be that the discussion will deepen your understanding of the content, that it will be a chance for you to build community as you get to know the viewpoints of your group members. Understanding the value and purpose for what you're doing provides the foundation to resist obstacles that can collapse the conversation, such as apathy, disagreement, etc. Just as a solid building requires a blueprint to guide construction, a discussion requires a clear task. The task is what specifically needs to be done, such as responding to a set of questions and reporting it back to the group or sharing ideas on a particular topic or making a decision or judgement on something.

The task guides the development of the topic and it provides focus for all the group members. Just as a brick needs to be placed intentionally upon the last to make progress on a building, comments in a discussion need to build on and refer to comments made by group members for good ideas to develop. There are a couple of reasons why this is important. First, by acknowledging comments made by your group members, you strengthen the spirit of the group as you show that their comments count and that they're being heard. Secondly, building on the comments of others usually requires critical thinking, which as we've discussed previously, adds depth to any discussion. As you build on another comment you can analyze it and break it into parts and comment on those parts. You can synthesize it with your own ideas or evaluate it and discuss its strengths or weaknesses. Lastly, building on the comments of others simply moves an idea further. Let's build fantastic discussions by following these three simple steps. Build a firm foundation. Be clear about the task your group needs to accomplish. And build on the comments and ideas of others.

Elaboration in Discussion

Elaborate means to add more. When you elaborate in a discussion, you add more details to your answer. In a discussion, you bring your ideas and opinions to the table. You want your contributions to be generous. The way to be generous in a conversation is to elaborate, or add more to your answers. You want to fill in all the details and give your listeners enough information

to understand what you mean and to have plenty to respond to. How can you know if bringing a detailed response or an insufficient response to a conversation? Well, you can be aware of the characteristics of comments that lack elaboration. There are many reasons why a discussion comment may lack elaboration. Here are just a few common ones. Insufficiently elaborated responses can be too short, they can be vague or not specific, or they can just be a repetition of what you've already said.

Let's look at responses that are too short. In a discussion on GMOs, genetically modified organisms, a short comment could be, well, I think we need GMOs. This person does not explain his answer. Why do we need GMOs? What are their reasons? How are they beneficial? The other people in this conversation would not be convinced. Maybe he has a good point in mind, but he hasn't explained or elaborated enough to convince us. Another type of insufficiently elaborated comment is the vague comment. Well, I think GMOs are an important aspect of modern life that can be found anywhere at any time. This guy is using a lot of words, but the words don't really mean anything, they're not specific. The other conversation partners would have nothing of substance to respond to. It's like giving your friend only the whipped cream that goes in the middle of the cake without actually giving them any cake at all. Other insufficient comments are repetitive. The speaker may repeat what he or she has already said. GMOs will be an important food source when our population grows. The world's population grows every year, and GMOs will provide us with enough food. This comment repeats the same point twice, just in different words. This is called paraphrasing. And paraphrasing is not elaborating. You'll bore the other people you're talking to. It's kind of like taking a bunch of identical cakes to a party. What's the point of that?

In a conversation you have two jobs when it comes to elaboration. The first job is to elaborate on your own responses. You need to support and explain your ideas. You could do this with facts, like statistics or examples from a text. Anecdotes, those are stories. Analogies, which are comparisons between two things. And hypotheticals are imagined examples. You want to explain your ideas well so that people will clearly understand what it is you're trying to communicate. Your second job in a conversation is to ask your partners to elaborate on their answers, especially if they've offered a response that is short, vague or repetitive. You can do this through asking the right kinds of questions. You could try asking, what do you mean by? Or, can you be more specific? Or, I'd love to hear more about. One last thing you should remember about elaboration, don't elaborate too much. If you start to elaborate too much, you run the risk of taking over the conversation. Or of making your response disorganized. Know how to use just the right amount of elaboration and you'll satisfy your conversation partners.

Critical Thinking in Discussions

Have you ever studied ocean life? There's another world underneath the ocean, the deeper you go the more interesting and unusual the fish become. Ordinary common looking fish such as mackerel, cobia, catshark and krill, live on the surface toward the top. As you go deeper, the fish get more interesting and out of the ordinary. Fish like the rat tail fish, the grouper eel, the black swallower and the angler fish live deep down in the ocean. The various types of fish in the deep

sea look like they're from another planet. It's also true that the deeper that you go in conversation, the more interesting your conversation becomes. What I mean by going deeper is to have discussions that require critical thinking.

To have discussions where the participants are thinking independently, and coming up with new ideas. In this lesson, we will talk about how thinking can be divided into six different levels, which of those levels are considered critical thinking, and how you can incorporate these levels of critical thinking into your discussions. A psychologist named Benjamin Bloom categorized thinking into six levels. Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. The lower level skills, knowledge, comprehension and application, involve repeating facts, summarizing information that's been received, and carrying out a procedure that's been taught in a familiar situation. Basically, with lower levels of thinking, information is presented and the learner needs to repeat it. Lower level thinking skills do not require that the learner develop new thoughts.

Higher level thinking analysis, synthesis and evaluation on the other hand trains people to think independently. These three levels are considered to be critical thinking. These skills help learners to see patterns and connections, to identify problems and find solutions. To think of alternative possibilities, to see different perspectives. To apply skills to new situations and to support an opinion with relevant evidence. Research consistently finds that when learners practice a concept using higher level thinking skills, they remember it longer and apply it more easily to new situations. In academic conversation, it's important to know and understand the facts, however, thinking deeply and critically make the conversations more memorable and more meaningful. Read the following questions, which of them do you think will be interesting and engaging to discuss in the discussion group? Each of these questions represents one of the six levels of thinking. Let's learn a little more about each specific level of thinking now.

The first and the most basic level of thinking is knowledge. At the knowledge level of thinking, the learner recalls information. An example of a knowledge level question is, what is genetically modified food? Some questions you can ask to your group members could begin with one of the following questions starters. The second level of thinking is comprehension. At the comprehension thinking level, learners show their understanding of ideas. An example of a comprehension level question is; how would you summarize the reasons that GMOs have been created? Some questions you can ask your group members could begin with one of the following question starters. The third level of thinking is application. At the application level of thinking learners used their knowledge state learned in a familiar situation. An example of an application level question is, what would be the best approach to convincing the government in the United States to require the labeling of genetically modified food. Now onto the higher level thinking skills. At the analysis level of thinking, learners break down information into small parts to find the relationship between them. An example of an analysis question is, what do you think are the main reasons that the United States do not require GM food to be labeled? The fifth level of thinking is synthesis, at the synthesis level of thinking, learners put parts together to form a whole. An example of a synthesis level question is what evidence is there that concludes that GMOs are dangerous? The highest level of thinking is evaluation. At the evaluation level of speaking, learners make a judgement and support the judgement with relevant evidence. An example of an evaluation level question is, do you

support the development of new, genetically modified foods? Please explain. Some questions that you can ask your group members could begin with one of the following question starters. Going deeper in your discussions make the concepts that are discussed more memorable and meaningful. The six levels of Bloom's taxonomy helps clarify what it means to go deeper and to think critically.

Language for Group Discussions

The more words you know, the bigger your world is. For example, if you only had one word in your vocabulary for the color blue you'd probably only have one concept connected to that word. You wouldn't have the possibility to communicate the great variety of all the hues of blue. Knowing the terms for these various hues of blue gives you the ability to communicate different moods to describe scenery in more detail and to differentiate small discrepancies between similar objects. The more words you know, the more complex your ideas can be. In addition, knowing more words allows you to speak more fluently and makes it easier for others to understand what you want to say. This specific situation of the group discussion has specific academic vocabulary that's commonly used. In this lesson, I would like to introduce you to three general categories of Academic Vocabulary and how they can help you communicate more fluently and clearly in your group discussions.

One type of academic vocabulary that's risk studying is the New Academic Word List. This updated list was revised in 2013. The new academic word list is a list of the most frequently used words from a corpus of academic journals, non-fiction, student essays, and conversation in academic settings. There are 936 words in this list. By becoming familiar with the words on this list, you will greatly increase your chances of understanding academic texts, lectures, and conversations, and you'll have greater flexibility in how you express your ideas as you respond in academic discussions.

A second important type of academic vocabulary is the multi-word expression. A multi-word expression is two or more words that are strung together to have a single meaning, or single function. Take for example, the expression, high expectations. This expression means to believe that an individual or a group can and will achieve some sort of high standard. To convey this meaning, it will be strange to say, tall expectations, or big expectations, or large expectations. Although tall, big, and large are synonyms, they are very often use interchangeably. In other words, many times multi-word expressions cannot be logically figured out. They need to be memorized and learned. Some say that multi-word expressions are one of the most important components of language. Studies have concluded that multi-word expressions account for at least 20% of all spoken language and up to 66%. These word chunks are used all the time. By learning these expressions, you can improve your comprehension, increase your fluency, and become more native-like in how you communicate in English. Some various types and different terms for the multi-word expressions include idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, lexical bundles, lexical phrases, phrasal expressions, multi-word units, multi-word chunks, fixed expressions, sentence frames, frozen phrases, routine formulas, chunks and formulaic language. I would like to introduce two specific types of multi-word expressions, academic collocations and sentence frames.

Academic collocations are words that go together to convey one meaning. Like the example we discussed, high expectations. A second type of multi-word expression is the sentence frame. Sentence frames are groups of words that have a single function such as agreeing or disagreeing with someone or paraphrasing what a group member has said or requesting evidence. Sentence frames give structure to the conversation and allow you to have more clarity in a conversation. Can you think of some sentence frames that are commonly used to ask someone to clarify what he or she has just said because it wasn't clear to you? Did you think of some of these? >> So, are you saying that GM foods should be banned? >> What do you mean when you say that GM foods are dangerous? >> You lost me. Could you explain that again? >> I don't know what you mean when you're saying that there isn't enough research. How much research do you need in order to be convinced? >> Can you explain that last part again? >> I'm sorry, I don't quite understand what you're saying. >>

A third type of academic vocabulary is the vocabulary that's specific to your field of study. You should make yourself familiar with vocabulary that is central to the themes and concepts in your studies. These are the key terms in your text book and in your lectures. Make your world bigger by extending your knowledge of academic vocabulary.

Agreeing and Disagreeing

When you're having an academic discussion it's like you're building a house together. You're all working together to create a communal space in which you can discuss ideas and achieve common goals. In academics we call this space a discourse community. In a discourse community you collaborate to create a space that's warm and welcoming for everyone. However, there's bound to be disagreement in this process. When you're building a house, you might not agree on the color of the paint. But in a discourse community, disagreements will be over ideas. Disagreement is an essential and healthy part of the discussion process, because hearing a diversity of opinions is good for helping us develop and clarify our own ideas. This is what collaboration is all about. However, when people disagree, they may sound or look confrontational, which brings negative emotion to the community. Collaboration builds up, but confrontation tears down. But, how can we disagree without getting confrontational? Of course, the answer to this question may vary a little from culture to culture, but we'll examine the issue more from an American cultural perspective.

First, present your viewpoint in a logical response backed by evidence or support, instead of a subjective response based purely on emotion. The wrong emotions threaten that warm space of your discourse community. Also remember, if someone disagrees with you, they're disagreeing with an idea, not with you as a person. If you feel yourself getting confrontational, take a step back, breathe deeply, and try to switch to a more neutral frame of mind. When disagreement occurs, check yourself. Think about both the content of what you want to say, the words you choose, and the way you communicate with your body and voice. Think body, voice, content.

When you're disagreeing, don't enter into the personal space of other people. This is interpreted as aggressive. Also avoid aggressive hand gestures and check the micro-expressions in your face. Those are controlled by the small muscles near your mouth and eyes. Next when disagreement occurs we also need to be aware of our voice. When you're disagreeing with someone check your

intonation. Intonation is the melody or music of your voice. Finally, during a disagreement, choose your words wisely. How can we replace their confrontational tone with one of collaboration? One way to disagree is to use one of these firm yet polite statements. Like, I'm sorry but I don't agree, I don't agree that, I disagree with you there, or well, actually. Then you need to back up the statement with concrete evidence. Giving evidence is the best way to show that your disagreement is based on facts and logic rather than purely on opinion or emotion.

Let's listen to the example. >> Everyone loves a good romantic comedy. >> Well actually, for at least a decade now, action movies have earned almost three times more money at the box office than romantic comedies. >> Another way to disagree is to build on your partner's comment before you voice your disagreement. You can do this in two ways, to concede the point, and to acknowledge your partner's viewpoint. Conceding a point means that you find something your partner said to agree with before voicing your disagreement. This helps your partner save face in a conversation. You can concede by saying, though it's true that, I agree that, however, or, I see your point, but I can't agree. >> Everyone loves a good romantic comedy. >> Well, it's true that romantic comedies are popular, but they still don't do as well in the box office as action films. You know for at least a decade now, action movies have earned almost three times more money at the box office than romantic comedies. >>

Or maybe you don't agree with anything your partner said. You just want to acknowledge that his or her viewpoint is valid. You could say, that's one way of looking at it, but, or I understand what you're saying, but. By saying these things, you're creating goodwill and opportunities for future consensus. So let's revisit our main points. When you're in a discussion and you want to disagree, be sure to check your body, voice, and the content of what you say, your words. Ensure that they have a collaborative tone, not a confrontational one. And lastly, I'd like to make one more point. When you're disagreeing in a discussion you sometimes reach an impasse. That's a point at which you know no further agreement can be reached. It's like conversational dead end. When this happens you and your conversation partners just have to agree to disagree and get on with the discussion. Just keep the tone of the conversation collaborative, not confrontational. Remember, we can agree to disagree, but we don't have to be disagreeable.

Synthesis in Group Discussions

This lesson is going to look at synthesis. What it is, and how to do it in your discussion. You may know the word synthesizer. This is an electronic instrument that has many different instrument sounds in it. When you use a synthesizer, you are pulling together the different sounds that you want to create a piece of music. If we take a closer look at the word we see syn, which means same or together, and thesis, which means put forward or propose. So a synthesis is a pulling together of elements to create something new. You may think of a research paper when you think of synthesis, because there's a lot of information about how to write a synthesis. In a research paper you gather together information from various sources, decide what supports your main idea and combine your ideas with supporting facts and data from experts to write your paper. The same kind of process happens in a good discussion. You gather together information beforehand, from various sources, such as class lecture, reading or online data, and form your own ideas about the

topic. Then you bring that whole mix of information to your conversation. As you share your data and your own ideas, you synthesize.

Synthesis should happen during your discussion, and at the end. In a typical discussion, many ideas are put forward. There are exchanges in the conversation. Some people will adjust their comments, and some people will change their minds according to how the discussion progresses. A lot is said, and through it all, there is a natural process of synthesis. Part of this process is editing, both during and at the end of the discussion. Some ideas will be rejected as the discussion unfolds. You don't want to have happen is a conversation that is just summary. Summarizing and synthesizing are both skills that you use a lot in an academic environment, but what's the difference? A summary is a brief version of a longer text, it includes main ideas that are restated. A synthesis is more involved. It involves pulling together information from different sources to support one's own ideas, and in the end create something new. Summary and synthesis naturally happen in an academic discussion, but you want to make sure that your conversation isn't all summary.

Let's take a look. Here is a discussion where people are only summarizing. Each person gives an idea, but there's no building on the other ideas. We just have a string of ideas like a line of bricks, it's shallow. The end result of this conversation will not be a cohesive new idea. It will only be a brief review of main points. In a good discussion, there is back and forth sharing, questioning, agreeing, and disagreeing. You hear a lot of transitions like, I think, I agree and I also want to point out. Let's remember that, I don't see how that's relevant if, what about, I want to add. And I see what you're saying. It looks messier than the previous conversation, but this discussion is more dynamic. There is building on each other's ideas. The group members add information, accept and reject ideas, and work together to create a cohesive response to the discussion questions. Now let's take a look at synthesis at the end of a discussion. Remember, a lot was said during the conversation. The last step is to come to a consensus and develop a coherent and concise response. Try to leave some time at the end of the discussion to reflect. Here, everyone has taken a moment to go back over their notes, and also look back at the discussion questions to make sure they touched on everything. It's time to come to a consensus. Consensus means that everyone agrees on the responses to the questions, but remember, everyone doesn't have to agree with each other. You can agree to disagree. This may sound strange, but the important point here is that everyone is satisfied with the conclusions, and those conclusions may be mixed. Your responses should be coherent and concise. Coherent means relevant, logical, organized, they make sense. And concise means brief but complete. Make sure that your answers are not too long, but thoroughly address the questions. To sum up the main points of this lesson, in a good academic discussion you should pull together information from resources, such as class lectures and your own research. Then you should share your ideas with the group, using this data as support. As you share and listen, you should edit. Decide which ideas are most important. And finally, you should pull those ideas together into a coherent and concise response to the discussion questions. This whole process is called synthesis.

Final thoughts

Have you ever been in a discussion and then you weren't? You're having a good time sharing idea, connecting. And then it was just over. It was like all the ideas were floating out there in the

conversation. And then no one took the time to really neatly organize them in memorable packets so that the information could be easily recalled in a meaningful way later on. Perhaps the conversation ended like this. >> You know what? I'm so done with this. Let's call it a day. >> Such an abrupt ending can be unfulfilling. Frustrating and can take the focus away from what was accomplished in the discussion. What things should be done at the end of a group discussion to get the most out of the discussion? This lesson will present important steps to remember to do when wrapping up an academic discussion. First, it's essential that the content of the discussion is synthesized as you already know. The group needs to identify the key points made and then figure out what brings them all together. By synthesizing the discussion, the ideas are packaged so they are easy to remember. The synthesis of a discussion is often called the take away. It's what can be taken away and easily shared with others. So questions we can ask ourselves when synthesizing ideas from a discussion may be what key idea can we take away? How can we bring all this together? Secondly, reflect on the goal or task your group is supposed to achieve. Was it accomplished? Lastly, if the discussion is part of a process or a project, it's important to discuss what the next steps are and who needs to do what. These are called action points. Action points are the tasks that individual members will need to do as a result of the discussion. For example if the group project was to argue that globalization is not beneficial to humanity in a debate. And the group had just decided on the main points they would use in the debate. The group may agree that the next steps should be to research each of the main points and then define credible evidence. Each main point that needs to be researched would be an action point assigned to an individual. These three steps help the group organize the floating ideas into neat packets. They help wrap up the conversation so the discussion can be meaningful.

13 Proven Ways to Get Your Message Across

***The Essential Reference for
Teachers, Trainers,
Presenters, and Speakers***

Ernest W. Brewer



CORWIN PRESS, INC.
A Sage Publications Company
Thousand Oaks, California

2

Small-Group Discussion

Definition

Small-group discussion allows presenters to announce a topic or idea for group discussion among participants. A small-group discussion follows democratic guidelines and allows everyone to contribute many ideas for others to discuss and reflect upon. Discussion allows for an interchange of ideas within the context of a group under the direction of a presenter.

Introduction

Whenever groups of people congregate in the same place, they will talk with one another. It is human nature to be curious about our surroundings and other people, and the best way to find out answers to our questions is to talk with one another. A discussion may be information based, concentrating on facts, or it may focus on personal opinion and feelings. People enjoy discussions and the arenas of thought they uncover. Talking with friends reveals attitudes and values and offers insight into ways of solving personal problems.

New ideas can be evaluated and tested using the discussion method. Small-group discussions, under the guidance of a presenter, discuss issues to achieve understanding and consensus after much consideration of the viewpoints and ideas of others. Its goals are to spark new thought and concept exploration, encourage analysis of factual information, and develop open-mindedness toward new attitudes and beliefs, so as to accept the opinions of others.

Small-group discussions serve intellectual, emotional, and social purposes. Intellectually, discussion helps participants become aware of the diversity of opinions on an issue. It also allows participants to realize the complexity of issues when they walk away from a discussion with more questions than when they went into the discussion. This is good because it helps them to think about all the possibilities. The participants must discern the difference between fact and opinion and thus they must practice the skill of listening.

Emotionally, the participants may have some sort of personal involvement in the issue they are discussing, making it important to them. Others should be sensitive to this. Participants want others to realize that their opinions matter, and once the group responds to this, each participant retains a feeling of self-worth. This is an important affective quality that is key to the building of self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

Socially, group discussion builds a sense of cohesion and trust with one another. Discussion groups are an arena in which differences in opinion, race, gender, and participation should be accepted and celebrated. Differences allow for the diffusion of new ideas and attitudes. Group work of any sort helps participants build their interpersonal skills and confidence about offering individual opinions in a group atmosphere.

A well-conducted group discussion will end in acceptance of different opinions, respect for well-supported beliefs, and improved problem-solving skills. Overall, it will promote the sharing of information and all members will gain insight concerning the thoughts of others before reaching consensus on a topic. Bellon, Bellon, and Blank (1992) believe participants in small groups concentrate better on the topic at hand due to the support of their peers and individual motivation.

Main Procedural Steps in Using Small-Group Discussion

The purpose of the small-group discussion is to contribute and circulate information on a particular topic and analyze and evaluate the information for supported evidence in order to reach an agreement on general conclusions. To do this, several steps must be taken when conducting small-group discussions.

Step 1: Introduction

The presenter must prepare before the discussion for it to be successful. The presenter should try to introduce a topic on which all

of the participants have some background knowledge so they have a basis for discussion. If the participants are introduced to a topic that is familiar to them, each will have something to contribute that another participant may not have thought of, thus moving the discussion on its way with many new avenues of thought to explore. The introduction should have four parts.

1. *Instructional Objective.* An instructional objective should be given to the participants at the beginning of the discussion.
2. *Purpose.* The presenter should explain why the groups will be discussing the chosen topic.
3. *Relationship.* The presenter must explain how this information fits in with what has already been learned or what will be learned in the future.
4. *Advanced Organizer.* An advanced organizer is some sort of attention-grabber that attracts participants' interest. Many discussion topics fail because participants aren't drawn into the discussion at the beginning.

The presenter may have to help the participants understand how small-group discussion works to help them make the most of their time. Participants must understand the difference between a discussion and an unguided expression of opinion without pertinent information or facts. Participants might have to do a little research beforehand to get acquainted with the presenter's selected topic. Brookfield (1990) suggests choosing topics that are not too fact oriented or lacking in controversy to spark creative thought and diverse responses.

Step 2: Directing the Discussion

The presenter is in charge of directing the discussion to get it started. The presenter should ask the participants if they have questions about the topic at hand. These questions can start the discussion, or the presenter may want to ask a few questions from a prepared list to stimulate thought toward the topic. Another way to begin the discussion is to ask the participants to recall and share personal events that have happened in their lives that relate to the topic. This is a good way to get everyone involved. Questions are excellent motivators for discussion.

Sometimes the participants will take different thought paths and deviate from the instructional objective, so the presenter might have to reroute the thinking. Leading questions from the presenter can direct the participants back to the topic. These questions should

not be answered with a yes-or-no answer. They should contain key words and relate to the objective of the discussion. These presenter-guided questions will be a model for participants to ask of the peers in their group. King and Rosenshine (1993) found that participants who ask thought-provoking questions in small-group discussions encourage creative answers that increase the learning potential for all.

Once the discussion begins, questions are essential in keeping the discussion moving. They can bring the discussion back on track or emphasize an important concept. They can draw in shy or non-participating individuals and can be key in checking for understanding.

As the presenter directs the discussion, he or she should decide whether or not the participants are spending too much time on insignificant points. The presenter should try to keep control of the discussion, yet not dominate it. To avoid having the discussion centered around the presenter, he or she should try to enter in only when necessary.

Step 3: Summarizing the Discussion

Sometimes the participants may be confused or retain a wrong idea as right. The presenter should summarize to make sure the participants understand what has been discussed. For small-group discussions seeking consensus, it is important to summarize to make sure all the participants are thinking along the same lines. A final summary is essential at the end of the discussion. Conclusions should be recorded on the chalkboard so all can see them. The presenter should ask the participants how they would use the information. At times, a discussion will result in the participants' having incorrect ideas. Basically, summarization is helpful for clearing up confusion, covering main points, ending a discussion, and conveying consensus.

Variations of Small-Group Discussion

Cooperative Learning Groups

In cooperative learning, a small group of participants works together to achieve a common goal. Cooperative learning operates on the premise that participants achieve more when they work together. The goals of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction among participants, individual accountability within the group, and interpersonal and small-group skills. This teaching method fosters cognitive development in the areas of retention

and achievement and affective development through socialization and self-esteem. Henson (1993) notes that small-group discussions allow the participants to get to know each other on a personal level and give them a sense of belonging to a team.

Problem-Solving Groups

These groups exist in order to cooperate, discover, inquire, and think critically. For example, several participants might work together to solve mathematical problems through exploration. The purpose of the problem-solving groups is to approach real-life problems with an appropriate strategy. The participants find many approaches to the problem and test them for the best possible solution. Cooper (1990) states that problem-solving groups help participants come to logical solutions and make responsible decisions.

Group Investigation

The presenter breaks participants up into small groups based on particular interests. Each group has a certain category, and they gather information and analyze it for meaning. The participants then prepare and deliver a presentation to the class about what they discovered. The process teaches participants to work together, listen to one another, and support each others' work and opinions. This is a group-skill-building teaching method that strengthens peer interaction.

Appropriate Uses, Suggestions, and Cautions

The group discussion requires great skill on the part of the presenter. The presenter must encourage participants to participate freely and still keep the discussion on the topic. During the discussion, the presenter must help the participants to understand how all the opinions and facts relate to the topic. For the presenter to conduct the discussion successfully, he or she must carefully plan it in advance.

The presenter must identify the objectives of the discussion. These objectives should be relevant to the needs of the participant, and the participants should have some prior knowledge of the topic. An introduction should be used to explain to the participants why they need to accomplish this objective. The presenter should conduct the small-group discussion with leading questions. Summaries should be used by the presenter to check for agreement and understanding. Charts, models, or actual objects might help the participants understand what is being discussed.

A few cautions are in order. Some participants may want to talk all at once. The group will have to generate some sort of courtesy system to allow everyone to express his or her opinion at different times so all may hear. Some participants may not want to talk at all. The presenter may have to ask a few leading questions and encourage one of the more aggressive participants in the group to speak. One or two participants might monopolize the conversation. The presenter should explain the importance of letting everyone contribute. Some participants may strongly disagree on points and fight with one another. In this case, the presenter must carefully draw the topic to a neutral point so both may see the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments.

Advantages, Disadvantages, and Limitations of Small-Group Discussion

When using the small-group discussion, the presenter should be aware of the following advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of this instructional strategy.

Advantages of Small-Group Discussion

1. All participants in the group can participate.
2. It is a good way to get participants interested in a topic.
3. Participants may more easily understand another participant's explanation than a presenter's explanation.
4. The presenter can identify participants who need assistance.
5. The presenter can identify individual opinions about the topic.
6. It helps the participant see relationships among ideas or concepts related to the topic at hand (U. S. Professional Teacher Training, 1983).

Disadvantages of Small-Group Discussion

1. It is time-consuming.
2. Some participants in the group may do all the talking.
3. It involves less presenter involvement than other methods.
4. The discussion can easily get off track.

Limitations of Small-Group Discussion

1. It is not a method that transmits information or facts.
2. It involves more talk and less action.
3. The discussion must be carefully planned, not impulsive, to be effective.

Examples or Applications

The small-group discussion may have as its aim to come to some sort of definite goal or decision based on consensus; for example, "What is the best way for participants to study Shakespeare?" But small-group discussion can also be used for stimulating new ideas and insights without really aiming for a particular decision; for example, "What are some ethical guidelines politicians should follow?"

Each topic should begin with leading questions to direct participants in the desired pattern of thought toward a topic; for example, "What is the whole impact of recycling on a global basis, and what actions can we take to continue this renewing process?" or "How serious is the damage we have done to our earth?" or "What can we do individually or collectively to make a difference?"

Summary

Small-group discussion develops the cognitive and affective abilities of participants. It is a process of freely sharing information and insights among peers in a welcoming environment under the guidance of a presenter. Individual effort is encouraged to make a strong team with creative ideas. Meloth and Deering (1994) note that groups are more likely to devote a collective effort toward their prescribed task and become more focused on their goal when in cooperative groups.

References

- Bellon, J., Bellon, E., & Blank, M. (1992). *Teaching from a research knowledge base*. New York: Merrill.
- Brookfield, S. (1990). *The skillful teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cooper, J. (1990). *Classroom teaching skills*. Toronto: D. C. Heath.
- Henson, K. (1993). *Methods and strategies for teaching in secondary and middle schools*. New York: Longman.
- King, A., & Rosenshine, B. (1993). Effects of guided cooperative questioning on children's knowledge construction. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 6(2), 127-147.
- Meloth, M., & Deering, P. (1994). Task talk and task awareness under different cooperative learning conditions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31(1), 138-165.
- U.S. Professional Teacher Training. (1983). *Unit 2: Facilitate learning; PAK 5: Conduct a small group discussion*. (General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training). Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Author.

The Small-Group Discussion Planning Sheet

Date: _____ Time: _____ Site: _____

Purpose Statement:

Specific Topic/Question to Be Discussed:

Relationship to Former/Future Learning:

Advanced Organizer:

Directions for Organizing Groups:

Directions for Discussion:

Plan for Sharing With Entire Assembly:

Handouts (if any):

Equipment (if any):

Summary Notes:

Ernest W. Brewer, *13 Proven Ways to Get Your Message Across*. Copyright © 1997, Corwin Press, Inc.

The Small-Group Discussion Evaluation Sheet

(♦ You may wish to have someone else consider these items,
as well as evaluating yourself.)

- ♦ Was the purpose stated clearly? Yes No (Explain)
- ♦ Was there a clear relationship to former/future learning?
Yes No (Explain)
- ♦ How well did the advanced organizer engage participants?
Was the specific topic/question a natural outgrowth of the advanced organizer?
- ♦ Was the topic appropriate for these participants?
Yes No (Explain)
- ♦ Were directions clear and logical? Yes No (Explain)
- ♦ How well did the facilitator manage any tendency to stray from the topic? Yes No (Explain)
Was there a sharing of information with the entire assembly?
Yes No (Explain)
- ♦ Did this contribute to general understanding?
Yes No (Explain)
- ♦ Did the summary clarify and bring effective closure to the activity? Yes No (Explain)
- ♦ What was the most effective aspect of this learning session?
- ♦ Suggestions for improvement:

Business Meetings

What is a Business Meeting?

A business meeting is a gathering of two or more people for the purpose of making decisions or discussing company objectives and operations. Business meetings are generally conducted in person in an office, however with the rise of video conferencing technologies, participants can join a business meeting from anywhere.

Before we talk about the kinds of meetings, let's start with some general vocabulary for meetings. Usually a meeting has an agenda. This is the plan for the order of things to talk about at that meeting. Each part of the agenda is called an item. If someone needs to do something after the meeting it's often called an action item. The person who is in charge of a meeting is called the Leader, the Lead or sometimes the Chair. The Leader runs or leads the meeting. We can also use chair like this, as a verb, and say someone chairs a meeting. In most meetings someone will write down a summary of what was discussed and what was decided. These notes are called minutes. We use the verb phrase take minutes to describe writing these notes. After the meeting this person will distribute the minutes to the other participants or attendees. In more formal situations the participants will approve the minutes at their next meeting. That means they say that the summary was correct. So now we know some basic meeting vocabulary, let's think about different types of meetings.

Types of Meetings

In business there are many kinds of meetings, for example, social get-togethers networking meetings, and negotiations with people from different companies. In this course however, will be mainly talking about internal meetings, meetings with people you work with. Even so there are still several types of internal meetings. So let's talk briefly about what they are. Basically the type of meeting often depends on what the purpose of the meeting is. Look at this list of different meetings that might happen in a company. How many have you participated in? Lets talk about each of these different meetings.

The purpose of an information meeting is to explain something. In an information meeting there might be just one or two speakers and an audience. Participants usually listen and may sometimes ask questions. A team meeting is when members of a particular team meet, for example a management team or a finance team. Usually these meetings are scheduled regularly, weekly, or monthly. At these meetings people usually share information and give updates. They may also make announcements and make decisions. If people from different departments are working on a specific project, there will usually be a kick off meeting. When the project begins and then regular progress report meetings take place afterwards where people working on the project give updates. At the end there may be a debrief meeting where participants can discuss what was successful or not so successful about the project. At decision-making meetings, the purpose is to reach agreement on one or more issues. Attendees are expected to participate fully, giving their opinions

and coming to agreement. Often the leader will ask for a vote. At brainstorming meetings, the purpose is to think of and share new ideas about a topic or try to solve a problem. These meetings are often informal and participants are expected to be creative.

Usually we think meetings are where people are together discussing things. But we can also describe a training and a team-building as types of meetings. The goal in these kinds of meetings is to improve the work situation. For example, by helping employees use the new software program or by encouraging employees to work together as a team. We also usually think of meetings as a group of people sitting around a table in a meeting room. However, these days there are also meetings where some or all of the participants are in different locations. These kinds of meetings, teleconferences or video conferences can have the same purposes that we've just talked about but they also have their own special guidelines and you'll learn about these guidelines later in the course. To review the general kinds of meeting there are let's look at a few examples and decide what kind of meeting would be appropriate.

You work for a small coffee shop company with a few coffee shops in town. You would like to add some food. You want to get some ideas from your team. That's right, you would want to hold a brainstorming meeting. You've just reorganized the management team in your organization and you want to explain it to your department. That's right. You would want to hold an information meeting. How about this situation? You want to select a new software program for your design team. Because you need to make a decision, this would be a decision-making meeting. Finally, your international sales team needs to have its monthly meeting. Many of the team members are out of the office. Because they are in different places, a teleconference would be the best way to hold the meeting. Now that we know about the different kinds of meetings we can think about what makes a successful meeting. If participants understand what the purpose of a meeting is and what is expected of them then it's more likely to be successful, right?

Essentials of a Successful Meeting

These are the answers of some professionals about one of the meetings they attended:

>> We didn't start for 20 minutes because people were just chatting and then the meeting went on for an extra hour. One of the participants wouldn't shut up. No-one else was able to speak. I didn't really know what we were supposed to be talking about, and at the end I didn't know what we had decided. I felt it was a complete waste of time. I came prepared because I had read the documents that we were supposed to discuss, but it was really clear that a lot of other people at the meeting hadn't read them. Some of them didn't even bring the documents at the meeting. I felt so frustrated. >>I wanted to contribute because I thought I had a few good ideas, but I didn't feel comfortable giving my opinion, so I just kept quiet. The meeting room was small so we were all sitting really close together. There was also construction work going on outside so it was hard to hear.>>

Were any of those comments familiar? They probably were because those are very typical complaints about meetings. However, if we think about it we can solve most of those problems fairly easily. By following a few basic guidelines, we can make sure most of the meetings we attend are successful. Perhaps the most important guideline is to be prepared. Make sure that there

is an agenda and that everyone receives the agenda at least 24 hours before the meeting. If you are a participant in the meeting, make sure that you read the agenda and prepare any documents that are necessary. It's a good idea to print out the agenda or at least have an electronic copy available. If you are running the meeting you could also print out an agenda for people in case, they don't have one. If you want to save paper, project it on a screen if one is available. To help participants be prepared for a meeting, it should be clear what each item on the agenda means. For example, an item with just the phrase Next Year's Budget, doesn't give you a lot of information about what you'll be required to do. For example, Vote on Approval of Next Year's Budget tells you that you will decide what will be in the budget. This means you should know what is in the budget before coming to the meeting, that you should be prepared to ask questions and give your opinion. And that you will be asked to vote.

The second most important guideline is that the meeting should be well run, and often that is the responsibility of the chair, or leader, or team leader. The meeting should start on time. It's okay to have a little small talk before starting. But the chair should make sure that it doesn't go on for more than just a few minutes. The meeting should also finish on time or better several minutes before. The chair might postpone the discussion of any remaining items to the next meeting if you run out of time. In fact, when planning a meeting, it is better to ask ourselves the question, how much time will we need to reach the objective, instead of, how many things can we discuss in the time that we have?

Another important role of the chair or leader is to make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak. That one person doesn't talk all the time and that the discussion stays on topic, meaning people don't start talking about things not related to the topic of the meeting. This can be a little difficult and you'll find out more about this when we focus on leading meetings in week two.

Another important guideline is to think about when and where a meeting will be held. For example, scheduling a meeting late on a Friday afternoon is maybe not the best idea in the US. A cold or noisy meeting room would make it uncomfortable or difficult for people to participate successfully. Deciding to have a brain storming meeting at a local restaurant wouldn't be a good idea either because ordering food and eating could be distracting.

Meetings are so common and frankly, many people find them so boring that some organizations are trying to be more creative about the location of meetings. A recent interesting idea is to hold meetings outside while walking. Even in Seattle it might catch on despite the rain.

When the meeting is over, a summary or the minutes of the discussion, including any decisions that were made and any action items, should be sent to all participants as soon as possible. This reminds people what the meeting achieved. Finally, when we are meetings with people who are from different cultures and who speak different languages, we should always be considerate of those differences and do our best to make the other participants feel comfortable participating in and speaking in English. So here's what we've done so far.

Organizing Meetings and Writing the Agenda

Have you ever had to set up a meeting? How was it? Did you like having to do it? Actually, I think a lot of people don't really look forward to organizing meetings. Probably the main reason is that we have to try and find a time when everybody is available to meet and that is often the most difficult part. But, once we've agreed on a time, we can just follow some guidelines to make sure that people come to the meeting prepared and ready to participate. So, let's talk about what we need to do. First, let's take an example from a company. Karen is the Chief Marketing Officer at Ranier Chocolates. She calls Eric, a member of her team and leaves a voicemail. Karen wants Eric to arrange a meeting. What does Eric need to do? Listen to the message for details about when, what and who. Write notes.

>> Hey Erik. Karin here. I just wanted to let you know that I'm going to be out of the office for about ten days and wanted to ask if you could organize a team meeting for the first week of next month. As well as our regular updates I'd like us to discuss the remodel of the Northlake store. We need to give input on which design we prefer. I'd also like us to decide if we need more money in our budget, so it would be good if you could invite Lauren to join us too. Thanks and let me know if you have any questions. You can call me on my cell. See you in two weeks. >>

So Eric has to organize a team meeting for next month. They will have short updates and then discussions about the remodel of the Northlake store and the budget. Lauren will also be invited. Now let's talk about what he needs to do to set up the meeting. First, we need to know what kind of meeting it is, and what the purpose is. Then we should decide who the attendees, or participants, are. In addition to the members of the team, Karen also told Eric to invite Lauren. So, the next step is to find a date and time for the meeting. In some organizations, meetings are often set up through scheduling software such as Google Calendar or Microsoft Outlook. Employees are required to post their schedules on a calendar so that the organizer of a meeting can easily see when people are available. But sometimes this might not be possible. Some people might not be good keeping the schedule up to date. And if you're inviting someone from outside the organisation or team, they might not use the same software.

A good meeting email must have a clear subject line such as scheduling next month's team meeting. The subject line should be a noun phrase, that tells the reader what the email will be about. Next, there should be an appropriate greeting for an email to a group of people. The purpose of the email is then in the first line. Here are some examples of how we can do this. >> I need to schedule next month's team meeting. I'd like to set up a meeting for next week. I'm trying to arrange a meeting for sometime next week. I want to find a time for us to meet. >> Notice the verbs we can use with the word meeting. Schedule, set up, and arrange. Then we need to try to organize the time. You can choose a date and time, and asked if this would be okay. Here are some phrases you could use to suggest a time and then check. >> I'd like to propose Monday, May 2nd at 10 a.m. How about Thursday afternoon at 2:00? Would Wednesday at 9:00 work for everyone? >> Sometimes you might want to give some choices and ask which one people prefer. >> Here are some options, let me know what you think. Which of these days and times work for you? Let me know which of these dates you prefer. >> Also you could ask people to give you suggestions of the best time. >>

Please let me know when you are available. When is a good time for you? Can you give me sometimes when you are free? >>

Of course, asking for suggestions is more complicated, because all of you need to agree on the best time. It's also a good idea to give people a deadline for letting you know about the date. >> Could you let me know by tomorrow if that doesn't work for you? >> We use, by a time, to say that we want something done before that time. Once the time has been arranged, we need to decide on the location. You'll need to think about how many people will be there and also what equipment will be needed. You should also decide what handouts are necessary.

So now we know the kind of meeting, the time, the location, the attendees, and what equipment is needed. The next step is to prepare the agenda. As we learned in our previous lesson, having an agenda can help a meeting be successful. So let's see how to create one. First, an agenda should include the title of the meeting at the top. This lets people know what kind of meeting it will be. Sometimes, in more formal meetings, you would also include the name of the company. Then, you should write the details of the meeting, the date, time, and location. The people who have been invited to attend the meeting will be listed next as attendees. Below this, in more formal meetings, there might be a space to list anyone who will not be attending the meeting. They will have told the meeting organizer before that they will not be able to attend. This can be listed as excused or apologies.

Next, we list the items to be covered in the meeting. In a more formal decision making meeting, for example a board meeting, the minutes of the previous meeting will often need to be approved and that usually happens at the start of a meeting. However, this is not common in normal business meetings. In regularly scheduled meetings there is often time for people to give updates or make announcements. This is usually listed as reports, or simply, updates. Next, we continue with the main items. Remember, as we learned in the previous lesson, each item should be clear so that the participants will know what they're going to be talking about. Usually the headings for items on the agenda start with nouns like discussion, update or vote. Having a single noun like discussion won't give you much information. You need to add details like, discussion on something, or, vote on something. You can add how much time you think will be needed for each item to help the organizer run the meeting efficiently.

If a particular person will be responsible for talking about an item, you can list his or her name, too. This means the person won't be surprised when he or she is asked to lead the discussion at the actual meeting. Sometimes you can include a question to help focus people's attention on what outcome of the discussion will be. For example, which design do we prefer? Instead of a question, you could use a statement of the outcome of the discussion. For example, decide whether to request an increase in our marketing budget. However, you should be consistent. Either use all questions or all statements if you decide to do this. At the end of a meeting there is often some time for participants to talk about anything that wasn't listed on the agenda at the start. This is often listed as new business. Sometimes instead we can list it as announcements. At the end of the agenda, you can leave space for action items. Remember, these will be things that people will do after the meeting based on what was decided. If you have several items on the agenda to

discuss, you could also include space for the action item after each one. So let's review what is necessary for planning a meeting. We decide what kind of meeting it will be and the goal of the meeting. We identify the people to invite, then based on their schedules we decide on a time and location. We might have to find out what time is best by emailing the people involved. We prepare any necessary equipment, and then we write up an agenda.

Writing Announcement

So you've organized the meeting and written the agenda. The next thing you should do before the meeting takes place is send an email to everybody with details and include the agenda. At the end of this part of the lesson, you will be able to identify what to include in this kind of email. As we saw in the first part of this lesson, we should begin an email by writing a subject line. The subject line should tell the reader what the email will be about. \

Then for our greeting we can use one of these for a group email as appropriate. >> Hi Folks, Hi Everyone, Team. >> Next we need to give the details of the meeting including the time and location. This is usually done in the first line. >> Our next team meeting will be held on Monday, May 2nd at 10:00 AM in the 4th floor conference room. This is to remind you that the SoftPoint training will take place on Wednesday afternoon at 2:00 PM in 301A. >> If necessary, say whether it is a required meeting. For example, if it's a required training or an optional information meeting. Software like Microsoft Outlook allows you to show whether it is required for you to attend a meeting or whether it is optional. >> This is a required meeting. Although attendance is optional, I hope to see most of you there. >> You can also give some more details about the meeting, for example the objective. >> You'll need to choose the design team for our remodel at this meeting. >> If the participants need to prepare something for the meeting, also include a sentence about this. >> Please read the proposal before the meeting. In preparation, please look at last year's financial report. Please bring copies of the report. Handouts will be available at the meeting. >> Next, you should refer to the agenda. You can either attach the agenda to the email. >> The agenda is attached. I've attached a copy of the agenda. >> Or if there's not much on the agenda, you can also include it in the body of the email. >> The agenda is as follows. The agenda is below. >>

Sometimes you can also ask if anyone would like to add an item to the agenda. But the organizer can also do this at the start of the actual meeting. >> Please let me know if you want to add anything to the agenda. >> However, if you think you won't have a lot of time, you can say something like this. >> We have a pretty full agenda. >> You can then include a sentence to let everyone know what to do if they cannot attend the meeting. It's a good idea to also include a deadline. >> Please let me know by tomorrow if you can't attend. >> Sometimes people use the word apologies to describe not being able to attend the meeting. Although this is more common outside of the US. >> Please send apologies by the end of the week. >> Finally, finish with a friendly closing sentence. Here are some examples. >> I look forward to seeing you next week. Please let me know if you have any questions. See you all tomorrow. >> And then the closing. >> Best regards, Erik. Best, Erik. Erik. >> So now you know what to include in an email

announcing a meeting. And remember you should send this kind of email with the agenda at least 24 hours before the meeting. [MUSIC]

Exercise: Writing an Agenda

Write the agenda for a meeting you have to conduct as a class group leader. Invent all necessary details.

Review criteria

Review three other people's agendas. Use the following to review:

1. Does the agenda have a title?
2. Is the correct time and date included? (example: Wednesday, June 8th at 9:00.)
3. Was Reports/Updates listed as an item?
4. Was closing the Eastside Store listed as the next item?
5. Was deciding if they are going to hire Creative Build the next item?
6. Was increasing the marketing budget the next item?
7. Was discussing the location of the newest store the next item?
8. Was space for action items included?
9. Optional: Was a sentence or question focusing on the objective included under any of the agenda items?
10. Optional: Was New Business/Announcements listed at the end?
11. Optional: Was a time listed next to each item?
12. Optional: Is Karin listed as attending?
13. What additional feedback do you have? Comment on anything that your peer asked about.

Responding to Meeting Announcements

When you receive an email informing you about a meeting that you should attend, most of the time you don't need to do much. Except, if you're using meeting scheduling software, you would accept the meeting request. However, sometimes you might want to respond by asking a question. Here are some situations when you might need to send an email to the person organizing the meeting. If there was no agenda sent, you might want to ask about that. Imagine you are writing back to a colleague. Which of these would you probably not choose? Where's the

agenda is very direct and could sound rude if you don't know the person very well. The other two are good, let's see how we can use them. You can write something like this. >> Hi, Karin, thanks for the email. Do we have an agenda? >> If the writer forgot to attach the agenda, you could write something like this. >> Hi Karin, I think you forgot to attach the agenda. >> Sometimes the meeting email will ask if anyone wants to add anything to the agenda.

So, if you want to talk about something that is not on the agenda, send a quick email. Here are examples of how to do it. >> Hi Karen, I'd like to add some time to talk about the new store. We probably need about 15 minutes. >> Hi Karin, Can we have some time to talk about next week's training? 10 minutes is enough. >> And this example is a little more formal >> Hi, Karen. I would like to add an item to the agenda. I think we need to discuss next month's advertising campaign. I'm not sure how long we need, but I think it's important. >> Finally, this example is a little more indirect. >> Hi, Karen, would we have enough time to talk about last month's sales report?

Here are some guidelines for writing an email where you can say that you cannot attend. After the greeting, you'll first need to write, that you cannot attend the meeting. Here are certain examples of what to write in the first line. >> Hi Karen, I wanted to let you know that I can't come to next week's meeting. >> Here is an example that is a little more informal. >> Hi Karin, just to let you know that I can't make it to next week's meeting. >> And here's an example that is a little more formal. >> Dear Lauren, I am writing to let you know that I am unable to attend next week's meeting. >> Remember you might want to soften your message to make it sound less direct. In this case, you can use words like, I'm afraid, I'm sorry but or unfortunately. Let's see how we can add these phrases to our first sentence. >> Hi Karin, I wanted to let you know that I'm afraid I can't come to next week's meeting. >> Hi Karin, just to let you know that I'm sorry, but I can't make it to next week's meeting. >> Dear Lauren, I'm writing to inform you that unfortunately, I am unable to attend next week's meeting. >> When you say that you can't do something, you usually have to give a reason.

So, let's look at some different reasons we might have. First, we'll look at some reasons when it is impossible for you to attend. >> I'm going to be out of the office on Monday. I'm on vacation all next week. I have a previously scheduled appointment on that day. >> This is more formal language. Sometimes there are other reasons why you can't attend. Maybe you are just too busy. However, it's not a good idea to just write, I'm busy. You should give more details about what you are doing. >> I have to finish the sales report by Tuesday. >> I have the deadline for the website redesign coming up >> The reorganization of the Northlake store is currently taking up a lot of my time. >>

When you are busy, you should really give details but sometimes we don't have to be clear. It's acceptable to give vague reasons when something unexpected happens or there are personal reasons. >> Something has just come up. >> This means that something unexpected has happened. >> Due to a family commitment. >> This means, that you have to go to something like a wedding, family celebration or attend a meeting at your child's school. >> Due to a personal matter. >> Due to a personal matter is very vague, because it's personal and so, that means it's private. You're not going to say exactly what the reason is and other people are not

going to ask what it is either. However, when you use this phrase, it means that it's probably something important, not that you just don't feel like coming to work. Another expression that is more serious is "due to a family emergency". This could mean someone in your family is very sick. After giving your reason, you might also want to add another sentence apologizing for not being able to attend the meeting. Of course, this depends on your relationship with the reader.

If you're writing to your boss, you probably would want to be clear and give an apology. >> Sorry to let you know on such short notice. >> On short notice means, that you are letting the reader know that you cannot come a short time before the actual meeting. >> My apologies. I'm sorry for any inconvenience. >> This is a little more formal. Next, you'll want to end by adding a closing sentence, so that it doesn't sound too abrupt or sudden. Here are some examples. >> Please let me know what was decided. >> Anyway, I look forward to hearing what was discussed. >> I look forward to reading the minutes. >>

What about if you really want to or need to attend? Well, you could ask that the meeting time be changed. Again, you would probably ask a colleague this question, not usually your boss. As this is a special request, you'll want to make the language indirect. Let's see some examples. Notice how the request is a yes/no question. >> Would it be possible to move it to Tuesday? >> Is there any chance we could push it back to the following week? >> Push back means to postpone something. >> Could we maybe reschedule it for later in the week? So to review, we've covered how to write an email asking a question about the agenda and saying you can't attend. We've seen how to give a reason and how to end with a closing sentence. >>

Exercise

In this assignment, you will write an email announcing a meeting and then respond to another person's email saying that you cannot attend.

1. Read these notes.
-

Company: Eagletop Outdoors

Meeting: Weekly Management Meeting (including decision about the location of the new flagship store)

Preparation: Read/bring reports on the 3 locations.

Time: 1hr 30 minutes.

Write an email to the management team announcing the meeting. Decide on a time and location. Mention the agenda. Ask for any questions or if the team would like to talk about anything else.

Also tell the team to inform you if they won't attend the meeting. Give a deadline. Remember to include a subject line.

3. Review three of your peers' email. Use the following to review.

1. Is the subject line a clear noun phrase?
2. Is the greeting appropriate?
3. Does the writer mention the meeting in the first line?
4. Is the objective or the type of meeting included in the email?
5. Does the writer include the time and the location of the meeting?
6. Is there a reference to the agenda?
7. Does the writer invite the readers to respond if they want to add anything to the agenda and/or cannot attend?
8. Does the writer ask the readers to prepare by reading and/or bringing the reports?
9. Is there a closing sentence?
10. Is there a closing like Best regards, and the name?
11. What additional feedback do you have? Comment on anything that your peer asked about.

Effective Meetings

Objectives

After completing Section 16.3, you should be able to:

- 1 Identify guidelines for effective participation in meetings.
- 2 Organize productive meetings.
- 3 Discuss guidelines for leading a meeting effectively.

If you
before
necessa
day in c
If yo
take yo

Imp
When r
partici
group
"Does a

Some
decisio
tant iss
refocus
somethin
softwar
tant cou
next tim

The
decisio
directl
think i
everyth
tell me
Even i
create
One
non id

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS

TEACHING TIP

Stress that employees should try to make a good impression in meetings. Effective participation can result in added responsibilities and promotions.

TEACHING TIP

Note that active participation implies that the participant is prepared and confident. Choosing not to participate suggests the opposite.

When you attend meetings as an employee, you have the responsibility to be an interested and useful participant. In addition, your conduct in meetings—what you do, what you say, and how you say it—sends a message about who you are, your abilities, and your competence. This section of the chapter discusses the art of effective communication in meetings. Meetings are most likely to yield good results when they have active participants, organization, and effective leadership.

Prepare to Take Part

Active participation means that you take responsibility of partial ownership of the meeting. This type of participation requires involvement—a process that begins before you enter the room. For example, when you receive the agenda for the meeting, review it carefully. Write down any questions you would like to ask. If you think that you need some background on an agenda item, educate yourself. Read any attachments.

If a meeting has been called to make a decision, be ready to support your point of view. Disagreement is OK. Few managers want yes-people; instead, they want participants who voice thoughtful opinions and who bring up points the group should consider. Write down the things you want to say so you will remember them.

Come to a meeting prepared—ready to listen as well as to speak—and remain focused on the objective of the meeting.

Arrive on Time

Strive to be at meetings on time. Timeliness sends a nonverbal message that you are dependable and that you believe the meeting is important. Tardiness sends the opposite message. Make a habit of arriving early. Do not allow work, unexpected conversations, or other factors to delay you.

FOCUS

DIVERSITY

In the North American business culture, arriving on time for a meeting is extremely important.

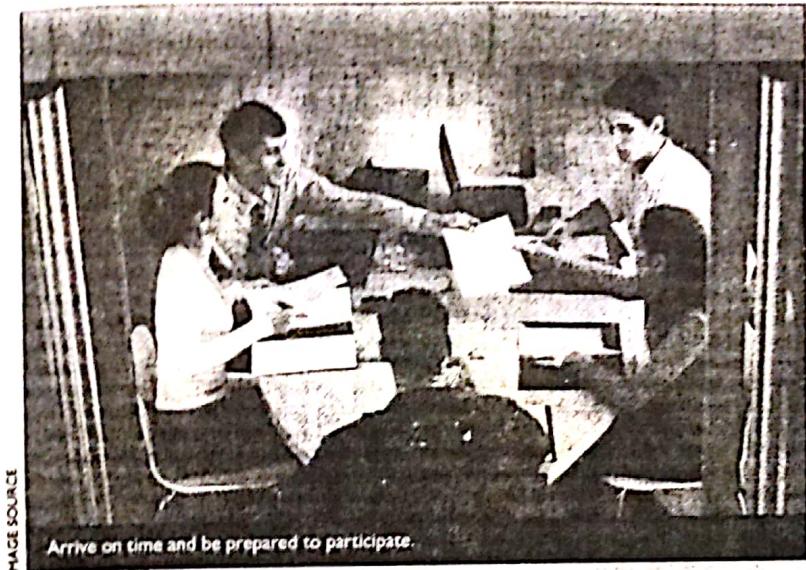


IMAGE SOURCE

Arrive on time and be prepared to participate.

If you are not familiar with the location of a meeting, get directions beforehand. Find a place where you know you can park for as long as necessary at the time of day of the meeting. Allow yourself extra time that day in case traffic is heavier than you anticipated or you make a wrong turn.

If you must arrive late for a meeting, notify the leader. When you enter, take your seat without interrupting.

Improve Decision Making

When members of a group are reluctant to make a decision, an effective participant tries to determine the source of the reluctance and move the group forward. One way to do that is to ask a probing question such as "Does anyone need more information about the software?"

Sometimes a group gets bogged down in the process of making a decision. People ask for more information or get sidetracked on unimportant issues. When such things happen, try to close the discussion and refocus members on the present task. Be tactful but firm. For example, say something like, "Now that we have all of the information we need about the software, we can proceed to costs" or "Ja'far has brought up some important concerns about productivity. I think we should look at them closely the next time we meet. Today, though, we need to make a decision about costs."

The opposite problem occurs when the group is preparing to make a decision before you believe it is ready. In that case, express your concerns directly or ask questions that will yield information or raise matters you think should be considered. You could say, "I've listened carefully to everything the committee has told us, but I still have some questions. Edith, tell me again why you think the software will help us maintain inventory." Even if the group does not agree with you, your hesitation probably will create more discussion.

One pitfall that groups need to guard against is *groupthink*. A phenomenon identified by psychologist Irving L. Janis, *groupthink* occurs when the

FOCUS

EMPLOYABILITY

To ask the right question at the right time is a sign of an alert, capable employee.

TEACHING TIP

Emphasize that knowing when to move a meeting forward and when to hold back on a decision is a valuable skill. Most leaders and participants do not think about how, when, or where to move a meeting.

members of a group tend to suppress their own ideas and to make their opinions and decisions conform to those of other members. As a group member, you have a responsibility to listen to and consider different points of view. You also have a responsibility to state your own point of view, particularly when you think a decision is wrong.

THINK CRITICALLY

How might groupthink develop from the desire to get along and avoid conflict? What negative characteristics might a group in which groupthink operates display?

TEACHING TIP

Tell students that groupthink has been identified as a factor in some well-known disastrous decisions, such as the decision to launch the space shuttle *Challenger* the day it exploded.

MULTIMEDIA SUPPORT

The bulleted list appears in TM 16-8; Figure 16.4 appears in TM 16-9.

TEACHING TIP

Remind students that people believe nonverbal messages more than they believe verbal messages.

Make a Positive Impact

The following suggestions will help you make a positive impact on any group of which you are a part:

- **Be willing to listen.** Groups work best when participants are open to new information and points of view.
- **Speak briefly and directly.** Speak in a clear, organized manner so others will want to hear.
- **Discuss ideas.** To discuss is to exchange ideas; to argue is to become emotional and unreasonable. Arguments often start when participants put their ideas ahead of group objectives and refuse to listen to differing points of view.
- **Avoid personal attacks.** Mutual respect is a key to group functioning.
- **Engage in fair play.** Give everyone the opportunity to speak; do not dominate the discussion.
- **Use body language to your advantage.** Make eye contact when you begin speaking, speak slowly and calmly even when excited, and make sure your posture communicates authority and confidence.
- **Take notes.** Take notes that will help you remember what is said, complete assignments, and prepare for any future meetings. Even if the group has a secretary who records minutes, you still need to take notes on matters of importance to you.

Figure 16.4 summarizes do's and don'ts for meeting participants.

FOCUS

EMPLOYABILITY

Reports indicate that in the 20th century, the average number of meetings at work more than doubled. Further, the amount of time spent in meetings increases constantly.

—University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

ORGANIZE PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS

If you are responsible for holding a meeting, the first thing you should do is ask yourself whether the meeting is really necessary. Determine if the work can be accomplished without a meeting; for example, through e-mail, memos, or telephone calls. If the work can be completed without a meeting, do not call one. If a meeting is needed, you can help make it productive by defining the objective, determining the type of meeting to hold, choosing participants carefully, and taking care of the mechanics.

Define the Objective

An effective leader recognizes what a group can and cannot do. For example, entry-level managers do not develop company policy. Corporate directors develop company policy but do not gather information; that job

DO'S	DON'TS
Prepare.	Show up with no background for the meeting.
Arrive on time.	Arrive late.
Focus on the topic.	Be inattentive or spend excessive time on side issues.
Be concise.	Ramble.
Participate actively.	Remain uninvolved.
Help the group arrive at sound decisions.	Keep to yourself when the group has trouble deciding or prepares to decide prematurely.
State positions clearly.	Speak in an unorganized way or choose not to share your views.
Follow the agenda.	Raise issues whenever you want to talk about them.
Discuss ideas willingly.	Argue or refuse to listen to different points of view.
Engage in fair play.	Dominate the discussion or act unfairly.

FIGURE 16.4 Do's and don'ts for meeting participants

usually is done at a lower organizational level. Look carefully at the purpose of your meeting. Determine what your group should accomplish. Plan to state the objective clearly at the beginning of the meeting.

Trying to do too much makes meetings frustrating, disorganized, and unproductive. Restrict the content of a meeting to its designated purpose. Although, under certain conditions, a meeting can have two or more purposes, you should generally call separate meetings in such instances. The rule is "one objective—one meeting." Do the same when a task is too large to accomplish in a single meeting. Divide the task into workable parts and plan separate meetings.

Determine the Type of Meeting

With the objective identified, you can easily determine what type of meeting to hold. Meetings can be held (1) to inform, (2) to develop new ideas, (3) to make decisions, (4) to delegate work, (5) to collaborate, and (6) to persuade. Determining the type of meeting makes organizing it easier.

To Inform

At meetings to inform, information is provided in the form of oral presentations. Use a meeting to inform when clarifying written information that participants have already received or when presenting new information.

To Develop New Ideas

Meetings may be held to develop or improve procedures, programs, or products. A common technique used in such meetings is brainstorming. Brainstorming is thinking of every possible idea about a topic. The goal is to generate ideas. No one criticizes anyone's ideas; in fact, the ideas are not evaluated until after the brainstorming session. If you decide to use brainstorming, invite a diverse group of people, plan to state ground rules before brainstorming begins, and appoint someone to record ideas.

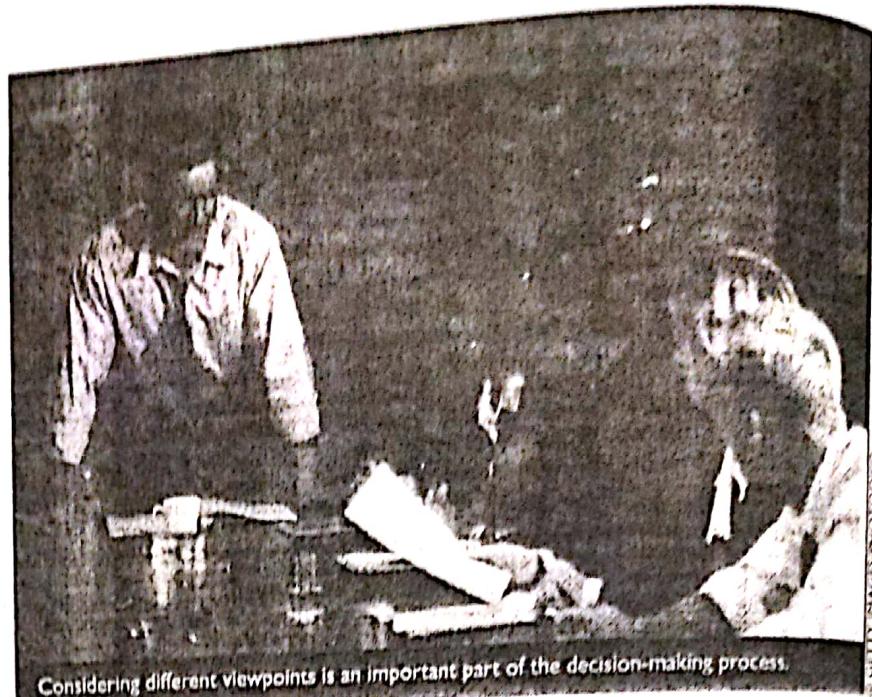
FOCUS

EMPLOYABILITY

The first international scientific study of the effects of meeting time on employee well-being found that although people complain about meetings, most like to have at least one per day. A key factor is whether meetings are run efficiently.

KEY POINT

At brainstorming meetings, a leader should stress that the goal is inventing, not deciding.



Considering different viewpoints is an important part of the decision-making process.

To Make Decisions

Decision-making meetings bring people and companies together to debate an issue, air different views, raise points that should be considered, reconcile conflicting positions, and make a decision. When planning a decision-making meeting, you may find it useful to solicit information about the various perspectives beforehand and to provide the information with the agenda. As the leader, you will be expected to establish ground rules for the debate, monitor its conduct and duration, and bring the group to a decision. Deciding by **consensus**—with all members contributing and ultimately accepting the decision—is the most effective method.

KEY POINT

Effective meeting leaders and participants make sure assignments are clear and accepted.

FOCUS

TECHNOLOGY

Collaborative software enables group members to work together simultaneously on the same document, whether they are in the same location or are meeting virtually.

To Delegate Work

Meetings to delegate are held to assign tasks to people or groups. Although you can assign responsibilities over the telephone or by e-mail or memo, you may need to hold a meeting to clarify details, to get volunteers, or to determine who would be best at handling each task. Meetings to delegate often are followed by informational and decision-making meetings.

To Collaborate

Collaborative meetings are sessions in which participants work together; for example, to organize complex memos, letters, or reports. Collaborative efforts succeed only when people work together as a team. For this type of meeting, make sure that whatever supplies and equipment the team needs to work together are provided.

To Persuade

In persuasive meetings, people make oral presentations designed to achieve a group consensus and to gain support for a course of action. For example, a persuasive meeting may present the merits of new equipment or build enthusiasm for the training needed to use the equipment properly.

Choose Participants Carefully

Communication in a meeting works best when everyone has a reason for attending and can contribute to the discussion. When more than one person has the same expertise or point of view, choose only one to join the group. If you can choose, select people you know will be effective participants.

Corporate culture may affect who can and cannot be invited to a meeting. In formal, highly structured companies, meetings usually are attended by people on the same organizational level. In less structured companies, participants are more likely to span the entire organization, with less emphasis on seniority and position.

KEY POINT

The success of a group is closely related to the ability of its members to work together.

Take Care of the Mechanics

Mechanics are the practical and functional details of a meeting. They include scheduling the meeting, creating an agenda, choosing a site, arranging the furniture, securing equipment and supplies, and providing for the comfort of the participants. Good mechanics create a positive atmosphere. They show attendees that you value their time and appreciate their input. Take care of the details so participants can focus their time and energy on the work at hand.

Schedule for Convenience

Schedule a meeting at a date and time that is convenient for most participants and that is not unduly inconvenient for anyone. One way to do that is to offer a selection of dates and times and to ask people to indicate which two or three would be best for them.

Early morning and right after lunch are popular meeting times. Many businesspeople hold working breakfasts, lunches, or dinners with food served or brought in.

Invitations are usually extended by e-mail or phone and occasionally by memo. Advantages of e-mail are that participants have a written record of the invitation, they can take time in consulting their calendars and replying, and it avoids telephone tag. When you need an immediate reply or are inviting only a few people, phoning may be a better choice. If you write, include a date by which people should let you know if they can attend. When that date arrives, call anyone who hasn't responded.

Create an Agenda

Creating an agenda was discussed earlier in the chapter. When composing the agenda, contact people who will or may have something to present to find out how much time they will need. Send the agenda and any background materials well in advance of the meeting. Plan to bring extra copies to the meeting in case anyone needs them. If you don't have a person who takes minutes regularly, arrange for someone to take minutes and make sure that person understands what information to record.

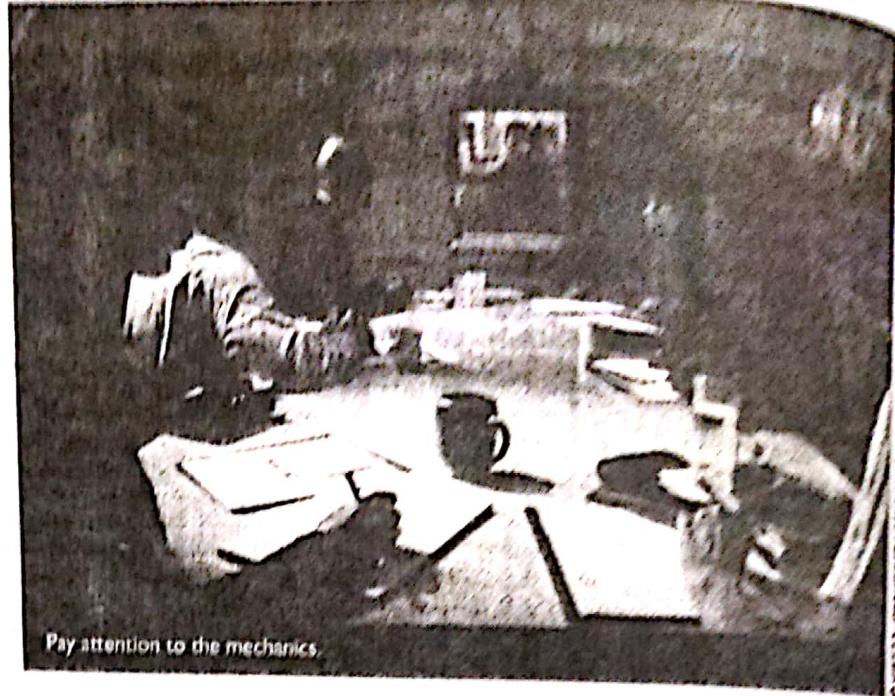
FOCUS

TECHNOLOGY

To help keep a meeting on task, consider creating a computer presentation of key points (Chapter 11).

Select an Appropriate Site

The decision to meet in your office, in a conference room, in someone else's office, or at an outside location depends on the amount of space needed, the convenience of the location, and the environment that is best for the group.



Pay attention to the mechanics.

For example, you may need a table to hold papers or an overhead projector available only in a conference room. If most of the people who will attend the meeting work in one location, it makes sense to schedule the meeting at that location. A room with new furniture or a scenic view provides a pleasant working environment.

Arrange the Furniture

Arrange the furniture sensibly for all concerned. Usually, everyone, including the leader, sits around a table. Check that presenters will be able to see the audience and will have the space they need. Ensure that each participant will be able to see the presenter and everyone else. Can visual aids be seen clearly from any seat? If you plan to offer refreshments, place them so people will not have to cross in front of others.

FOCUS

TECHNOLOGY

Section 16.4 describes technology that you can use to meet virtually.

Secure Equipment and Supplies

Make sure the room is equipped with everything that participants will need and that equipment is working properly. Some examples of equipment and supplies that you might require are a speakerphone, individual computer setups, a whiteboard, a projector, microphones, an audio recorder, notepads, name tags, and pens or pencils.

Provide for Comfort

The last step in meeting mechanics is to provide for the comfort of participants. Make water, coffee, and tea available. If you are meeting early in the morning, consider bringing in doughnuts, bagels, and muffins. For working breakfasts, lunches, or dinners, choose a vendor whose food and service you know is good from personal experience or who is recommended by someone reliable. Try to anticipate the needs and preferences of the various people who will be attending. For example, if the meeting will include lunch or dinner, vegetarian or kosher offerings might be appropriate. Plan for breaks during long meetings.

LEAD MEETINGS EFFECTIVELY

How a leader conducts a meeting has a great deal to do with how successful the meeting will be. State the objective, use the agenda to run the meeting in an orderly way, encourage participation, apply strategies for managing difficult people, be professional, and end with a summary and thank yous.

TEACHING TIP

Use Teaching Suggestion 2 on page IE-39.

Begin Appropriately

Begin with a roll call, approval of minutes from the previous meeting, or any other routine business that needs to be conducted. If some participants do not know each other, introduce them or ask people to introduce themselves to the group. State the objective of the meeting and quickly go over the tasks to be accomplished. Make your statement positive and forward-looking. Convene the meeting on time to show your determination to get the job done.

Use the Agenda

Use the agenda to ensure that topics are discussed in order and within the time allotted. As each agenda item is dispensed with, summarize points of agreement and disagreement and outline any actions that will be taken.

A common problem is for participants to stray from the topic. Their attention drifts to peripheral issues, or they begin telling personal stories. Remain polite and friendly, but keep the group on track. When people ramble, a good approach is to summarize what you think they meant to say and to ask a question that will point them in the right direction.

Another common problem is spending too much time on an agenda item. If it looks as though a presentation or discussion will exceed the time allotted, decide whether extra time is needed. If it isn't, tell the presenter or group how much time remains and request a summing up or conclusion within that time. If more time is needed, you must decide whether to take time from other agenda items or to revisit the topic at another meeting.

Encourage Participation

Encourage people to share their insights. If a discussion is slow getting started, try posing an open-ended question, one that requires more than a simple yes or no answer. For example, you might ask, "What sorts of changes can we make to our basic shop operations to reduce pollution?"

Encourage quiet people to join in by asking direct, specific questions such as, "Gino, you're our computer expert. Will adding this program overload the existing computer system? Will we have to upgrade?" When people talk about an area they know well, their shyness often disappears. Although you cannot force people to participate, you can provide a positive climate and abundant opportunities.

Make sure that ideas are communicated clearly and that everyone understands them. Be alert for puzzled looks and other signs of confusion. When participants do not grasp a concept, restate in your own words what you think the speaker is saying. "I believe Zeshon is telling us that, according to these surveys, there is not enough interest among our customers to justify offering online banking services." If you are not sure what the speaker means, ask a clarifying question. For example, you might say, "Hatsu, I don't understand what a proxy server does. Can you explain it to us?"

KEY POINT

An agenda can be used to direct participants back to the objective of a meeting if they stray.

TEACHING TIP

Point out that meetings without agendas often waste time.

TEACHING TIP

Note that drawing people into the conversation makes a nonverbal statement that everyone's input counts.

MULTIMEDIA SUPPORT
TM 16-10 summarizes do's
and don'ts for meeting
leaders.

RESOURCES

Exercise 7 in the Study Guide
provides practice in handling
difficult people; Exercise 10,
in evaluating meetings,
participants, and leaders.

Handle Difficult People

Handling difficult people is the greatest challenge any meeting leader faces. Sometimes a difficult person is being difficult because he or she is unable to express a concern or thinks the group hasn't understood or considered it adequately. If you think a difficult person has a legitimate concern, ask questions to try to identify the problem. Be respectful, listen actively, and keep an open mind.

If the behavior persists, keep your composure. Don't respond to the person's arguments point for point. As one consultant suggests, "Act rather than react." Keep your remarks brief and focus on the issue or areas of agreement rather than on personalities.² A good strategy is to use the agenda or a technical point to move the discussion to another topic.

Frequently one person wants to dominate the conversation. To discourage an overzealous contributor, you could say something like, "Chris, as you can see by the agenda, we have a lot to cover. I can give you only five more minutes." If Chris continues to talk, interrupt and redirect the discussion to another person. Say, for example, "Your experiences point to the need to communicate with consumers. Kelli, can you fill us in on the advertising plan?"

Be Professional

The leader sets the tone for the meeting through fairness, work ethic, and control. The following steps show your ability as a leader.

Recognize Contributions

Recognize everyone's contributions. Participants who believe that their insights are valued will continue to contribute. Even if a proposal has problems, focus on the positive aspects and lead the group forward.

Maintain High Standards

Do not accept slipshod work or opinions that masquerade as facts. When participants do not have information the group needs, postpone the meeting if possible.

Maintain Order

Make sure the meeting follows the agenda. Allow only one person to speak at a time and discourage private conversations.

End Appropriately

At the end of a meeting, summarize what has been accomplished and move the group ahead to future action. List items that need further consideration. Review assignments and deadlines for future work. If the group must meet again, explain that you will communicate with everyone soon regarding the date and time. Finally, thank participants for their time and efforts.

TEACHING TIP
Emphasize that high standards maintain quality and promote positive attitudes.

²Barton Goldsmith, "Managing Difficult People," *Successful Meetings* 53, no. 2 (February 2004): 32.

Section 16.3 Assessment

KEY TERMS

brainstorming
consensus

groupthink
mechanics

open-ended question

REVIEW

Fill in the blank, using the correct term from the chapter.

- Making sure furniture is arranged appropriately and refreshments are provided is part of a meeting's _____.
- When members of a group tend to make their ideas and opinions conform to those of other members, _____ is operating.
- The best way to reach agreement at a decision-making meeting is by way of _____.
- _____ is a tool for generating new ideas.
- If you are organizing a meeting, the first thing you should ask yourself is whether the meeting is _____.

KEY

- mechanics
- groupthink
- consensus
- Brainstorming
- necessary

APPLY

Write complete answers to the following items.

- Form a group with three or four other students. Hold a brainstorming session to come up with ideas for a fund-raiser that students in your school could do to benefit a local charity. Appoint one person to record ideas. Think of as many ideas as you can in five minutes. Everyone should contribute at least one idea.
- You are planning a follow-up meeting in which you will assign tasks for the fund-raiser from Application 1. Determine the objective and type of meeting and plan the mechanics. Send an e-mail to your instructor with the information.

KEY

- Answers will vary.
Have students submit their lists.
- Answers will vary.
The objective is to assign tasks for the fund-raiser; the type of meeting is a meeting to delegate work.

DISCUSS

Write complete answers to the following items.

- How can you apply the *you* attitude and positive words in your remarks at meetings?
- Difficult people cause other problems in meetings besides those discussed in the text. For example, they play games or make inappropriate or abusive comments. Choose one negative behavior and explain how an effective leader can manage it. You might draw on your experiences with sports teams or other groups.

KEY

See page IE-39.