



Judith Gray (n.d.) developed the 4 As protocol and I adapted it to its present form. You can use this popular protocol with adults and students alike. The various lenses to examine the text create opportunities for participants to critique the text, not completely agree nor disagree with it.

Purpose

Group members aim to explore a text through the lens of personal values and intentions.

Group Size

Generally, groups of five or fewer work well; the number of groups operating at the same time is unlimited.

Sequence

The steps of this protocol are as follows.

1. Give whatever time is needed for participants to silently read the text, marking the spots that correspond to the following words that begin with A.
 - a. What do you *agree* with in the text?
 - b. What *assumptions* does the author of the text hold?
 - c. What do you want to *argue* with in the text (or *ask* the author)?
 - d. What parts of the text do you want to *aspire* to (or *act* upon)?
2. Starting with the first A (*agree*), one person in each group identifies an excerpt of the text with which they agree. Continue until each person in each group has identified a passage. Spend the remaining time in this step discussing what was just revealed. (five minutes total)
3. Moving to the next A (*assumptions*), a different person in each group begins. Continue the process similarly to the way you did in the previous step. (Five minutes)
4. Continue the process with *argue* or *ask*. (Five minutes)
5. Finish the last A with *aspire* or *act*. (Five minutes)
6. (Optional) End with an open dialogue in each group with a relevant question based on the text.
7. Debrief the process.

Notes

- Participants find success with this process when they know what to look for at the onset of the reading time. They might use a simple coding system as they are reading such as, A1, A2, A3, A4, or the actual words that begin with each A. Participants could read the text prior to the meeting if the facilitator has clearly communicated the As.
- This protocol can be successful only if the text is interesting enough for the reader. Asking educators to argue with a text that is too aligned with their values and actions tends not to work very well.
- The original version of this protocol, developed in the 1990s, has two differences from this adaptation (Gray, n.d.). First, in the original version, the only option for the third A is *argue*. However, in some contexts and cultures, participants may see arguing as disrespectful or uncollaborative. If the connection to argumentative writing doesn't help educators engage in the *argue* step, *ask* usually does. Secondly, in the original version, *assumptions* is the first A. However, for some educators, asking to articulate an author's assumptions is tricky—they sometimes feel they are being tested. Starting with how they *agree* with the text seems more inviting.
- This protocol works well in online environments as well. Synchronous sessions with webcams work similarly to face-to-face interactions. Asynchronous environments might ask participants to post all four of their As, then once everyone has done so, engage in a conversation about what they have posted.
- To add physical movement to this protocol, consider placing chairs so that two people are facing each other, then allowing space between them and the next set of partners. At each A, rotate to a new person.

Application Examples

- James is in his first year as a principal at an urban school. The staff have been thoroughly trained in Ruby Payne's (2005) poverty framework. He has some concerns about the philosophy behind the practices, in particular her belief that students from generational poverty lack the language skills necessary for school success and thus, teachers should use more direct instruction with students from poverty. He decides to have the leadership team read an article by a Payne skeptic. He feels the 4 As protocol will give them space to both agree and disagree with some of the author's thoughts.
- LaTanya facilitates district-level professional development frequently, but most of the trainings she has been asked to lead only meet one time. For reading a text in one of her sessions, she chooses the 4 As protocol since many of the teachers do not know each other prior to the session. This protocol seems like a better choice than some others since she does not have time to engender trust among the participants.

References

Gray, J. (n.d.). *4 A's text protocol*. Accessed at www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/four-as-text-protocol/ on August 20, 2020.

Payne, R. (2005). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Baytown, TX: aHa Process, Inc.