

Collecting and Respecting Different Perspectives

Now that you have thought through a range of different perspectives about the controversial issue we are studying in class, it is time to seek out real voices from real people who disagree with you. Engaging in conversations with those who think differently will help you understand the issue you are studying better. Use this handout to collect viewpoints that don't align with your own.

Conversation Planning Steps

Who do you intend to speak to? (This can be any classmate, family member, or friend who you know thinks differently than you do.)

When do you plan to speak to this person? (Do you have time to meet during the school day? Is there a due date that you must be aware of? How will you get in touch with this person?)

How do you expect this person to feel about the controversial issue you are studying? (Is he or she likely to completely disagree with your point of view? Will there be any common ground between your perspectives?)

Is there anything about this person's age or experiences that might shape the way he or she thinks about the topic you are studying? (Is he or she likely to have firsthand experience with the topic you are studying? Will experience—or inexperience—influence his or her point of view? Will age, family background, or hometown influence his or her point of view? How?)

What questions do you most want to ask this person? How will you challenge his or her thinking? What do you most want to understand? (The best conversations are built on questions! If you want to encourage other people to talk, you have to concentrate on asking and listening instead of talking and telling. Brainstorming good questions now will help you sustain conversations later.)

Taking Notes During Your Conversation

What key points does this person make about the issue that you are studying? (Are there ideas that he or she repeats time and again? Does he or she use phrases like, “What I really believe . . .” or “Most importantly . . .?”)

What kinds of attitudes or emotions does this person display during your conversation? (Does he or she seem open to new ideas? Is he or she angry? Excited? Emotional? How does he or she respond to challenges that you pose? Which ideas fire him or her up? Which ideas do he or she seem the least interested in?)

How does this person answer the questions that you ask? (Remember that you came into this conversation hoping to understand new perspectives. Record as many details as you can.)

Reflecting on Your Conversation

What new ideas did you learn about your topic during this conversation? (Careful thinkers can *a/ways* learn something new from people who have different points of view. What caught your attention during this conversation? What points caught you by surprise? What hadn’t you considered before?)

What new ideas did you learn about your opponents during this conversation? (Are there specific points that they feel particularly strongly about? Are there specific points they might be convinced to change their mind about? What kinds of language do they use?)

Are there parts of this person’s point of view that resonate with you? What is impossible for you to agree with? (Persuasion often depends on finding common ground between different points of view. Where is the overlap between your thinking and the positions of this person? What are the flaws in his or her thinking? How can you respectfully convince this person that his or her ideas are flawed?)

Note: While speaking with an actual person will be far more meaningful, it is not required to gather different perspectives. You can also search the Internet to collect multiple viewpoints on the issues you are studying.