

Classroom Talks for Civic Engagement



STUDACT



PEOPLE & PLANET LAB (PPL)

Ready to use in your classroom: a practical Discussion Group Protocol to help you lead discussions on topics such as activism, global issues, climate change, human rights, and body positivity.

Research-based and classroom-tested: The protocol was developed and tested through the STUDACT project with 150 student discussion groups (ages 14–20) across six countries.



Safe and ethically approved: It has received ethical approval from six universities worldwide, giving you confidence to use it with your students.

Clear structure, easy to follow: You'll find suggested themes, guiding questions, and prompts that support inclusive, engaging, and thoughtful discussions.

Flexible and adaptable: Use the full protocol for a longer session or select individual sections to fit your time, subject, and student group.

Supports student agency: Designed to foster critical thinking, dialogue, and meaningful participation in a variety of classroom settings.

How To Create a Successful Discussion Group in your classroom

Dos

- **Let students lead:** Allow the group to shape the discussion and decide what feels relevant and meaningful. Follow the natural flow.
- **Set the tone early:** Emphasize that there are no “right” answers and that disagreement is welcome.
- **Address the group, not individuals:** Direct questions to the whole group to encourage dialogue among students.
- **Ask open, transparent questions:** Invite exploration and avoid leading language (e.g., “*What makes you French?*”).
- **Respond to what students say:** Use their contributions to guide follow-up questions.
- **Accept all contributions:** Treat every response as valid and worthy of discussion.
- **Encourage examples:** Ask students to illustrate their ideas with experiences or concrete evidence.
- **Step back after setting the topic:** Your main role is to introduce themes; let students drive the conversation.
- **Focus on shared meanings:** Support reflection on collective viewpoints and underlying assumptions.

Don'ts

- **Don't impose your own structure or interpretations:** Avoid steering the discussion toward your expectations.
- **Don't single out individuals:** Avoid directing questions at specific students; focus on group dialogue.
- **Don't tightly manage participation:** Avoid enforcing turn-taking or requiring everyone to respond.
- **Don't overuse follow-up questions:** Only intervene minimally, ideally after the discussion naturally pauses.
- **Don't introduce leading terminology:** Let students develop and use their own language and concepts.

Key reminders:

- Think of yourself as a **moderator or facilitator**.
- Prepare a small number of **broad, open questions** to start the discussion, and use additional questions only as gentle prompts if the conversation stalls.

Facilitate Group Discussion

STARTER:

We are going to have an open group discussion. To ensure that everyone has a good time, we must treat each other with respect. What principles should we follow?

Encourage students to establish their own rules, and then guide them and supplement, so that the final version of the rules will include:

- Listen to others. Then others will also listen to you.
- Never shout over other speakers or interrupt them.
- Don't let emotions take over.
- Don't be afraid to express your own opinion.
- Stay on topic.
- Evaluate arguments, not individuals.
- Avoid hurtful stereotypes.
- Respect the views of others.

You can create a list or a mind map on the classroom whiteboard, this way students will see and be reminded of the rules of respect at all times.

I would like to know how you understand these topics. I'm not looking for dictionary definitions or the "right answer" from a book; I want to know your understanding.

Facilitate Discussion on Activism

What is activism?

- Can you give examples?
- From news?
- From social media?
- Is there something like social media activism?
- Which one do you think is more important: online or offline activism?

Who is an activist?

- In what initiatives/projects/campaigns would an activist be involved? What topics should activists address, in your opinion?
- Can you provide examples of influencers, bloggers, or media personalities who seem to fit this definition? For example, climate activist Greta Thunberg. Can you think of someone similar?

Is there such thing as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (positive or negative) activism?

- Can you give examples?

Facilitate Discussion on Global Issues

What do you understand by "global issues"?

Can you give some examples?

What are "human rights" to you?

Can you think of examples of Human Rights activism?

Are such initiatives important? Why or why not?

(Note: *If students struggle with this topic, ask them about their rights in school and whether they are respected, and then try to move to more global human rights issues*)

How do you understand the term "climate crisis"?

Can you think of examples of "climate crisis" activism?

Are such initiatives important? Why or why not?

What is 'body positivity' to you?

How do you understand it?

Can you think of examples of Bodypositivity activism?

Are such initiatives important? Why or why not?

Facilitate Discussion on Global Citizenship

What do you understand by citizenship or being a citizen?

Do you find yourselves to be citizens of the world/global citizens?

Can you think of examples of global activism?

Are such initiatives important? Why or why not?

Have you ever participated in such or similar initiatives?

Would you like to get involved in such initiatives in the future?

Prompt: Yes/No/Why/What initiatives have you participated in/thought about/ how exactly would you like or could get involved?

d. Do you see yourselves as activists?

Conclude your discussion

Thank you very much; it was a very productive discussion. Your opinions on [...] are very interesting, and I'm glad you shared them.

In conclusion, I would like to remind you of the rules we established at the beginning. You did great here. Even though you didn't always agree with each other, it's important that you respected each other. And I would like to ask you to follow these rules when you leave this class.