



# Reflective Structured Dialogue Format for Use with Experts in the Room

Designed as a 90 min experience for times when there is a need for the use of an expert on the topic to be involved

How many issues in our public discourse have become too big and complex for most people to fully understand? How often are people expected to have opinions about topics in class or conversation that feel overwhelming and unapproachable without expertise?

People in the midst of dialogues and deliberation often long for facts and information. At the same time, we know that more facts are not the savior we hope they will be. People with all the same facts still disagree about how to assemble and make sense of them, and about what to do in response.

This resource contains an outline of a Reflective Structured Dialogue process that makes space for participants to hear from a topic expert—and still allows people to bring their life experiences, values, identities, and dilemmas into the conversation, to more deeply understand the topic, themselves, and one another.

5 min	<p><b>Welcome and Purpose</b></p> <p>The purpose of this dialogue is for participants to interact with a topic and with one another to come to a greater clarity about what they themselves believe about an issue and to understand what others with different perspectives believe about it as well.</p> <p>There is an expert on this topic in the room with us to support our conversation, but not to become the authority on the topic or the focus of it. The purpose of the expert is to share some fundamental facts in as objective a way as possible to help facilitate your conversations.</p> <p>The format of the dialogue is as follows. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review some conversation agreements that will guide our time together.</li><li>• hear from our expert for about 15 minutes—their role is to give us some of the basic outline and detail relevant to the issue—sharing core dilemmas and competing narratives.</li></ul>
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5 min	<p><b>Agreements</b></p> <p>Your group should use the agreements that they have already created or some version of a list like this one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Speak for yourself and not on behalf of others, and refrain from asking others to speak for other people</li><li>● You can pass or “pass for now” without explanation</li><li>● Allow others to finish their speaking</li><li>● Share the airtime and keep to time limits when they are in place</li><li>● Please do not engage in side conversations</li><li>● Maintain confidentiality about other people’s stories —you can speak about your learning and experience, but not the details of what others have said</li><li>● If you hear or see something that feels hurtful to you, name the impact and inquire about the intent rather than making assumptions or accusations</li></ul> <p>Say: “How do those sound to everyone? Is there anything else that is needed or anything we want to modify or reexamine?”</p> <p>Get a thumbs up or some other sign of approval for these agreements guiding the time together.</p>
15 min	<p><b>Expert Introduction and Framing of the Issue</b></p> <p>The expert should give enough facts to help people understand the major dilemmas that are at the heart of the dialogue. They should share the major competing narratives as neutrally as possible such that people from any position would feel they have been represented to some degree.</p>



5 min	<p><b>Individual Reflection</b></p> <p>Say: “On your own, reflect on the following questions silently, writing notes as it is helpful to you to process these questions and share them later.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What values do you hold as you consider this topic?</li><li>• Is there an experience in your life that informs your thoughts and feelings?</li><li>• What concerns do you have as you consider this topic?</li><li>• What hopes do you have as you consider this topic?</li><li>• Having reflected, what would be helpful to ask the expert that would help you understand the situation and your own beliefs more fully?</li></ul> <p>Write your question down on an index card or sticky and give it to the facilitator.”</p>
5 min	<p><b>Pairing</b></p> <p>Say: “In pairs, talk about the reflection prompt that most interested you.”</p> <p>While people are paired up, facilitators should sort the questions and work with the expert to identify where the most curiosity lies and prepare for some answers.</p>
10 min	<p><b>Further questions of the Expert</b></p> <p>The facilitator will read several questions—asking the expert to keep their answers brief enough to get through several questions in 10 minutes.</p>
20 min	<p><b>Dialogue Groups:</b></p> <p>In small groups, each participants hould have 3 min each (timed) to respond. Go around until each participant has had the chance to share.</p> <p>Say: “As you consider this situation, share an experience you have had that would help others understand how you have come to the beliefs you have about this issue. Also share a core value that is at the heart of this issue for you.”</p>



15 min	<p><b>Questions of genuine interest &amp; connected conversations</b></p> <p>Staying in your group, say: “Now that we’ve had an opportunity to hear from everyone, this is the time to deepen your understanding and learn more from one another. This portion of the dialogue will have less structure and will not follow a go-round structure. During this time, we hope that everyone will at least have a chance to either ask OR answer a question of genuine interest.</p> <p>When you ask each other questions, ask questions that invite people to share more, to speak more deeply, or to clarify something they said. There is no perfect way to ask a question—but we encourage you to lean into the questions that feel inviting and genuine. Remember the purpose is to deepen your understanding of something someone said or to make connections between what you heard and what you’re curious about.</p> <p>All of the communication agreements are still in effect during this session, including the ‘pass’ rule. So, if you’re asked a question and you don’t feel equipped or willing to respond, you don’t have to—and you don’t have to explain why.”</p>
5 min	<p><b>Closing and take-aways</b></p> <p>One thing you are taking from this dialogue that you would like to continue to think about, dialogue about, or do as a result?</p>
5 Min	<p><b>Closing from facilitator and referral to more sources</b></p>