



Dialogue → Dialogic

Moving from noun to adjective

Reflective Structured Dialogue (RSD) is an **approach**, rather than a model.

In its most rigorous form, RSD has a particular **format**: small circles with a facilitator, several go-round questions that follow a particular question arc, time to ask each other questions of genuine curiosity, and a closing. It is marked by particular **structures**: communication agreements, think/write/speak, pause between speakers, etc. In this form, **dialogue** is a noun.

But RSD is also a **way** of being—of communicating, listening, reflecting, and asking questions in ways that restore trust, deepen mutual understanding, and build the relationships that make change possible. It is flexible and adaptable, able to meet the needs of specific contexts and populations (for example, higher ed classrooms or community meetings).

In this form, RSD is **dialogic**. It's a modifier. You might have dialogic meetings, dialogic lesson plans, dialogic town hall meetings, dialogic strategic planning, or dialogic decision making. In all these cases, RSD serves as an approach to design more engaged, connected, and purposeful gatherings.

In practice, this means that **dialogic practices, structures, and principles** can be infused into or modify many other existing formats, gatherings, and moments, to support the purposes of RSD: increased trust, mutual understanding, and stronger relationships.

There isn't a road map or an answer key for exactly how to integrate dialogic practices into every situation. But there are **key principles** to keep in mind. In the next section, each of these is reframed as a question to ask yourself when trying to build more dialogic spaces and engagements.



Questions to Consider

Start where you can. → Where do I have agency?

There are many things that may be out of our control. Focus where you have agency and choice, even if that feels like an incredibly small sphere of influence. Work where you can, with whomever you can, to make the dialogic shifts you can.

Anchor in your purpose. → What is my purpose?

Be clear about your purpose—connections, trust, relationships, understanding—and make sure folks are on board. Whether it's a classroom or a staff meeting, having an explicit shared purpose is crucial.

Pay attention to patterns. → What is working? What is stuck?

What patterns or dynamics are working for your group or community? What might need to be shifted or changed to support your purposes? What are you hoping to promote or prevent? How might a dialogic structure or practice help build a new, more constructive pattern? You might need shared guardrails (agreements) or equity in the space (timed speaking). Each element of RSD encourages some ways of being and mitigates others.

Stay curious. → What am I missing?

In the words of Parker Palmer, “When the going gets tough, turn to wonder.” When you're up against a challenge or things get stuck, lean into curiosity. Ask yourself: What unmet needs, hopes, or values are underneath these concerns or frustrations? What trusted person or group can I turn to for insight? How might this stuckness actually reveal a deeper shared purpose?



Practice

Context: What existing space, gathering, or context do you want to shift to being more dialogic?

Ask yourself: Where do you have influence? What is your purpose? What is working/stuck? What are you missing?

Dialogic Structures & Practices: What kinds of structures and processes could you initiate? For example: communication agreements, think/write/speak structure for conversations, connecting questions, building in spaces for reflection, etc.

A Dialogic Way of Being

We may have all the structures, tools, ideas, and skills—but **how we do this work** matters. Below are a few reminders as you think about how to **be** more dialogic in your leadership, facilitation, planning, and collaboration.

Embodying a dialogic way of being might look like:

- Welcoming pushback with curiosity and holding your expertise lightly
- Holding tensions and transparently managing dilemmas
- Staying connected to mind, heart, and body
- Creating spaces that make people feel connected and empowered

Do what you can, when you can, to add dialogic elements to the way you learn, work, and collaborate. After a little time, it will become just the way you do things—and help you build a healthier, more connected community.