

# Activity 2.6 Building on the Ideas of Others

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Last Updated 08/23/2023



## Description

Improvisational comedy has developed a rule of thinking which is called “Yes, and ....” The idea is that you accept what is said and then you add to it. The “yes” confirms the other speaker while the “and” builds on the idea. This process can create an environment of collaboration rather than competition.

## Learning Goals

- Develop the practice of listening and affirming what is heard rather than negating others.
- Practice generous listening by identifying ideas or arguments that can be built upon.

## Instructions (40 minutes)

<b>Set Up</b>	<p><b>Prepare for the Activity</b></p> <p>Organize participants into pairs.</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p>	
<b>Step One</b>	<p><b>Practice Negating Others (Yes, but...)</b></p> <p>Share the “yes, but...” prompt shown below with participants. Remind them to not overthink it and explain that this will be a very quick exchange of ideas.</p>	<b>5 min</b>

<sup>1</sup> **Citation for this activity:** Don Waisanen and Shannon Wheatley Hartman (2023). Building on the Ideas of Others. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-2>

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	<p>Prompt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pretend that you are planning a vacation together. One person makes a suggestion and the other person responds with, “yes, but...” Continue with this process for 2 minutes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> Do not debrief after two minutes. Instead, transition immediately into the next prompt. Debrief both experiences together after the next prompt.</p>	
<b>Step Two</b>	<p><b>Practice Confirming Others (Yes, and...)</b></p> <p>Introduce the new prompt and invite the same pairs to practice. Prompt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try again to plan a vacation together, but this time practice saying “yes, and...” No matter what your partner says, figure out how to confirm it and build upon it. Continue this process for 2 minutes.</li> </ul>	<b>5 min</b>
<b>Step Three</b>	<p><b>Compare the Two Experiences</b></p> <p>As a full group, debrief the two experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you excited for your vacation? How did planning this trip feel different from the previous effort?</li> <li>• How can we bring this energy and sense of fun into our more serious conversations?</li> </ul>	<b>5 min</b>
<b>Step Four</b>	<p><b>Practice Generative Discussion</b></p> <p>Anticipate that participants will think it is easy to build on ideas of others when nothing is at stake (i.e. it’s a hypothetical vacation). Explain how looking for small pieces of truth in more difficult discussions is key for creating a generative discussion environment.</p> <p>Create a policy statement that is relevant for your group or choose one below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy A: We need stronger regulations against disinformation.</li> <li>• Policy B: We need stronger policies to guarantee affordable housing for all residents in our community.</li> <li>• Policy C: We need to support all policies that prioritize environmental sustainability and acknowledge the urgency of climate change.</li> <li>• Policy D: We need a public policy that addresses political polarization in our communities.</li> </ul> <p>In small groups (4-6 ppl), ask participants to discuss the topic while practicing the “yes, and...” technique.</p>	<b>20 min</b>

<b>Step Five</b>	<p><b>Debrief as a Full Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does “yes, and...” mean that you have to agree? How can you use “yes, and...” to create space for constructive dissent or disagreement?</li> <li>• Share and discuss the <a href="#">“Yes, and...” slide</a>.</li> <li>• How did “yes, and...” affect your listening skills? How did it impact the content, direction, and power dynamics within the discussion?</li> </ul>	<b>5 min</b>
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## Reflection Journal

- How did the need to provide a “yes, and ...” response help you see the positives of other points of view?
- Describe how difficult it was to use a “yes, and ...” response to a statement you found fundamentally wrong. What are the limitations of the “yes, and...” approach? When might it be better to use “yes, but...” or intentionally negate or disagree with a perspective? When is it better not to build on the ideas of others?

## Practice Journal

This week, don’t just practice “yes, and...”—say yes to life! When asked to do something or engage with something, practice saying “yes.” This experiment is not just building on the ideas of others—it is stretching yourself or encouraging yourself to lean into possibilities. Describe one example of saying “yes” and how it pushed you this week.

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Waisanen, Don. *Improv for Democracy: How to Bridge Differences and Develop the Communication and Leadership Skills Our World Needs*. State University of New York Press, 2020.
- [Microvalidations](#): Morgan Roberts, Laura, et al. “An Antidote to Microaggressions? Microvalidations.” *Harvard Business Review*, Harvard Business School Publishing, 15 May 2023, hbr.org/2023/05/an-antidote-to-microaggressions-microvalidations. Accessed 25 Aug. 2023.

## Activity Cluster

2.6 Building on the Ideas of Others

[3.7 Practicing Generosity of Interpretation](#)