

# Activity 1.3 Anticipating Conflict and Forming Group Guidelines

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Last Updated 08/27/2023



## Description

This activity empowers group members to anticipate potential conflict in group discussions and create guidelines that will address these concerns and bring out the best characteristics of the group.

## Learning Goals

- Anticipate group dynamics with a specific focus on potential group conflict.
- Work together as a group to establish guiding principles.

## Instructions (60 minutes)

<p><b>Set Up</b></p>	<p><b>Prepare for the Activity</b></p> <p>Organize the participants into pairs or small groups (5-6 ppl).</p> <p>If the group completed <a href="#">Activity 1.1 What is Collaborative Learning?</a>, then use the lists of positive and negative attributes as a starting point for this activity.</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p>	
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<sup>1</sup> **Citation for this activity:** Shannon Wheatley Hartman (2023). Anticipating Conflict and Forming Group Guidelines. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-1>

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<p><b>Step One</b></p>	<p><b>Generate Lists of Positive &amp; Negative Attributes</b></p> <p>Invite participants to think back to a time when they were working with others on a project. In pairs or small groups, ask them to generate a written list of both positive and negative traits that they associate with collaboration. Do not debate or discuss the validity of contributions. Generate broad lists. Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What made the collaboration work well? Ex: clear communication, shared goals, feelings of inclusion or trust.</li> <li>• What made the collaboration challenging? Ex: dominating personalities, power dynamics, no follow through of tasks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> If the group has already completed <a href="#">Activity 1.1 What is Collaborative Learning?</a>, you can skip this step.</p>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Two</b></p>	<p><b>Prioritize Attributes</b></p> <p>In pairs or small groups, ask participants to discuss which of the negative attributes they are most concerned about. Prompt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which negative attributes are most likely to occur in our discussions or with our particular collaboration? Select the top three concerns or negative attributes.</li> </ul> <p>When finished, repeat this process but focus on positive attributes. Again, ask participants to reflect on this particular group and decide which positive traits would be most helpful. Prompt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which positive attributes would benefit our discussions the most? Select the top three positive traits or attributes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Three</b></p>	<p><b>Discuss as a Full Group</b></p> <p>Regroup as a whole and invite each small group to share their top three positive and negative attributes. Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do we see overlap or common themes?</li> <li>• As we review our consolidated lists, what might be missing?</li> <li>• What are the top five positive or negative traits for our group as a whole?</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitator Tip:</b> The group might quickly reach consensus on their top concerns or you may want to offer a way for individuals to vote on top traits, like a rank choice voting.</p>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>

<p><b>Step Four</b></p>	<p><b>Craft Guiding Principles</b></p> <p>Once the group has identified approximately their top five traits (positive or negative), create a space where they can craft sample guidelines that reflect these traits. This could be done on a white board or shared google document. For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If the concern is “negativity,” then the guideline might be “Bring your positive attitude and energy. Have fun!”</li> <li>2. If the concern is “dominating personalities,” then the guideline might be “Make room for everyone to be heard. Listen to understand.”</li> <li>3. If the positive trait is trust, then the guideline might be “Respect our community. Critique ideas, not people.”</li> </ol>	<p><b>20 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Five</b></p>	<p><b>Debrief as a Full Group</b></p> <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often should we revisit this list?</li> <li>• What should be our process if someone violates our stated principles?</li> <li>• When are guidelines limiting and/or unproductive?</li> <li>• How might we adjust in anticipation to these concerns?</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>

## Reflection Journal

- How important are guiding principles for group discussion?
- Can you think of a time when you wished principles were described upfront? How would the discussion have been different?
- How important is it to manage expectations in discussions? When is it a bad thing or too constricting?
- What are some more radical guiding principles that you would like to see implemented if only as an experiment?

## Practice Journal

This week, use these guiding principles in another group discussion or encounter (work, home, school, etc.). Did you notice your discussion behavior change? Does it matter if others are unaware of the principles guiding your participation? Did others notice a change in your discussion behavior? How or where else might you incorporate these or other principles?

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Forthcoming

## Activity Cluster

[1.1 What is Collaborative Learning?](#)

1.3 Anticipating Conflict and Forming Group Guidelines