

# Activity 3.1 Critical Thinking in Discussions

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## Description

We often associate the practice of critical thinking with reading and examining text. How do we practice critical thinking in real time while actively engaging in dialogue with others? This activity is an adaptation of the CLUE approach and designed to encourage critical dialogue.

## Learning Goals

- Develop strategies to critically reflect while in discussion with others.
- Critically analyze contributions while participating in discussion with others.

## Instructions (60 minutes)

<p><b>Set Up</b></p>	<p><b>Prepare for the Activity</b></p> <p>Select a relevant topic for discussion. It is best if all participants review a shared learning resource before the discussion. This might be an article, video, photograph, blog, or even a meme related to a contemporary topic.</p> <p>Share the <a href="#">CLUE Worksheet</a> with participants.</p> <p>Organize participants into small groups (4-6 ppl).</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p>	
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<sup>1</sup> **Citation for this activity:** Jessica Friedrichs (2023). Critical Thinking in Discussions. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-3>

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<p><b>Step One</b></p>	<p><b>Discuss the Topic and Resource in Small Groups</b></p> <p>In small groups, engage in normal discussion of the topic. Participants share their initial reactions, reflections, or opinions about the topic and the shared resource. Small group prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your position on this topic? How does the shared resource support or challenge your position?</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Two</b></p>	<p><b>Introduce the CLUE Worksheet and Consider the Source</b></p> <p>After the initial round of discussion, invite participants to consider the source of the statements being offered. Each participant should take a moment to review the following prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are people contributing to the discussion? Are they citing sources (external evidence)? Are they referring to personal experiences (anecdotal evidence)? Or, are they making general statements without much evidence or support?</li> <li>• How are people presenting their ideas? With authority? With caution or caveats? Which approach is most convincing as you hear their comments?</li> <li>• What authority does the person speaking have on this topic? Are they a reliable source of information?</li> <li>• Do the people speaking have some sort of political leaning or agenda in this discussion?</li> </ul> <p>Reconvene the discussion, while encouraging participants to take notes under the “C” section of the worksheet.</p>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Three</b></p>	<p><b>Lay Out the Arguments</b></p> <p>Pause the discussion and invite participants to review the next section of the worksheet focused on laying out the argument, values, and assumptions within the discussion. As the conversation continues, ask participants to jot down notes in response to the prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the point other participants are trying to convey? What position are they taking?</li> <li>• Do you agree with their argument or position? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What assumptions about the world does the discussant make?</li> <li>• What is one value you think another discussant holds? Provide evidence for this, perhaps use a quote from the discussion.</li> </ul> <p>Reconvene the discussion, while encouraging participants to take notes under the “L” section of the worksheet.</p>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>

<p><b>Step Four</b></p>	<p><b>Uncover the Evidence in the Discussion</b></p> <p>Pause the discussion to review the next set of prompts in the worksheet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which discussant is most convincing?</li> <li>• Does this person present evidence to back up their claims? Do they offer clear arguments?</li> <li>• What about their contributions seem convincing? Why are you persuaded by their contributions?</li> </ul> <p>Reconvene the discussion, while encouraging participants to reflect on the prompts and take notes under the “U” section of the worksheet.</p>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Five</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluate the Conclusion</b></p> <p>Ask participants to wrap up their discussions. Invite all participants to share a concluding thought or remark. Ask participants to reflect on the last section of the worksheet and jot down their ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the group reached consensus? If not, how has the discussion group been divided? On what grounds? What drives the division?</li> <li>• Is one side more convincing than the other? What do you base this on?</li> <li>• Have you rethought any of your beliefs as a result of this discussion? What convinced or challenged you?</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Six</b></p>	<p><b>Debrief as a Full Group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which section of this worksheet was easiest to complete during the discussion? Which section was hardest to complete in real time?</li> <li>• How might you use clarifying questions to insert constructive but critical questioning within a discussion?</li> </ul>	<p><b>10 min</b></p>

## Reflection Journal

- Look back at your notes and consider how your perspective of your own and others' arguments and opinions changed as you worked through the CLUE framework.
- Which step was most difficult? What does this framework draw attention to in its focus on how people are using different resources to make arguments?
- How might going through this process help a group engaged in collaboratively trying to address a challenge?

## Practice Journal

This week, use the CLUE worksheet to practice critically engaging in a discussion. You may need to record your notes after the discussion. Which step was most useful?

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Jessica Friedrich's Critical Feeling and Thinking in Discussion \(Guns & Society\) powerpoint slide deck](#) - Tip: Use this slide deck with images and discussion prompts from this activity and [Activity 3.2 - Critical Feeling in Discussions](#) to do these activities together.
- Barbour, Christine, and Matthew J. Streb, editors. *Clued in to Politics*. CQ Press, 2014.
- [Critical Thinking](#): Byrd, Jack. "Questions—and Critical Thinking in Discussions." *Interactivity Foundation*, 11 Aug 2021, [www.interactivityfoundation.org/questions-and-critical-thinking-in-discussions/](http://www.interactivityfoundation.org/questions-and-critical-thinking-in-discussions/). Accessed 3 Sep. 2023.

## Activity Cluster

[3.2 Critical Feeling in Discussions](#)

3.1 Critical Thinking in Discussions