

# Activity 2.6 Building on the Ideas of Others<sup>1</sup>

## 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 your own thoughts. The “yes” is confirming the other speaker while the “and” is adding your own contribution. Together, you are building an idea or set of ideas. This process is different from what we often hear in a discussion (“yes, but...”) which is a negating response that is more likely to create an environment of competition rather than collaboration.

## Learning Goals

- Develop the practice of listening and affirming what is heard rather than negating others.
- Practice listening for ideas or arguments that can be built upon through collaborative discussion.

## Practice (40 minutes)

<b>Step One</b>	<p>In pairs, experiment with saying “yes, but...” together. The facilitator can select one person from the group to model the “yes, but...” prompt.</p> <p>Prompt: In pairs, 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.</p> <p>Debrief as a full group: How is your vacation planning going? What was hard about planning it? Are you excited about going on vacation?</p>	<b>5 min</b>
<b>Step Two</b>	<p>Once again, place the participants in pairs (the same or new set of pairs).</p> <p>Prompt: 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.</p> <p>Debrief as a full group: Now, are you excited for your vacation? How did planning this trip feel different from the previous effort? How can we bring this energy and sense of fun into our more serious conversations?</p>	<b>10 min</b>

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

<p><b>Step Three</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>In small groups, <b><i>pick a relevant or pressing topic</i></b>. If you need ideas, check out any of the policy possibilities described in the <a href="#">IF Discussion Guidebooks</a>.</p> <p>Encourage the group to discuss one or two of the policy ideas (if using the discussion guide), but instead of going around the circle, use a more organic discussion style while encouraging all participants to be mindful of using “yes, and...” rather than “yes, but...”</p>	<p><b>20 min</b></p>
<p><b>Step Four</b></p>	<p><b><i>Regroup and debrief:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did “yes, and...” change the content of the discussion?</li> <li>• How did “yes, and...” affect your listening skills? How did it impact the discussion?</li> </ul>	<p><b>5 min</b></p>

## Reflection Assignment

- 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

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