

# Activity 3.7 Practicing Generosity of Interpretation<sup>1</sup>

## Description

This activity will help participants to develop an appreciation for patience and internalize mind tricks that will help to humanize discussants who are difficult to engage in discussions.

## Learning Goals

- Participants will be able to engage more carefully in discussions and be less reactive.
- Participants will learn how to reframe questions and comments in a more generous light.
- Participants will help to co-create collaborative spaces that are safe for all to contribute.

## Practice (55 minutes)

<b>Step One</b>	<b>As a group, create a list of Patience Principles.</b> These are ideas or practices that will encourage the group to remember and practice patience with one another. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Language is imperfect and we are all imperfect speakers.</li><li>• What is said and what is heard are not always aligned.</li><li>• Focus on the idea, not the person.</li><li>• Inarticulate means to struggle with big ideas.</li><li>• Innovative or “breakthrough” ideas are often misunderstood at first.</li><li>• Look for the “nuggets of truth” in all statements.</li><li>• Never aim to embarrass or humiliate.</li></ul>	<b>10 min</b>
<b>Step Two</b>	<b>Introduce and/or generate “humanization mind tricks.”</b> These are mental tricks to keep in mind during the discussion. These tricks are not to be condensing or patronizing but, instead, are sincere efforts at humanizing a perspective different from one’s own. For example, when someone says something that seems to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uninformed or elementary, imagine them as a much younger kid who is trying to learn.</li></ul>	<b>10 min</b>

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<sup>1</sup> **Citation for this activity:** Shannon Hartman (2021). Practicing Generosity of Interpretation. In Hartman, Britt, & Byrd (Eds). *The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/module-3-critical-collaboration>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unaware or technologically backward, imagine them as your beloved grandparent who just needs a little more information.</li> <li>• Culturally insensitive, imagine them as a visitor from a distant region who needs to be gently introduced to current custom.</li> <li>• Factually inaccurate, imagine them as the overzealous uncle who needs to be respectfully engaged with evidence.</li> <li>• Hostile or angry, imagine them as a person going through a very difficult life experience.</li> </ul> <p>Tip: the idea is not to cower to bad ideas or people acting in bad faith. The idea is to imagine a person that you respect or love and imagine that this person is in the discussion. Give your discussants the same patience and open-mindedness that you would afford to this person you admire.</p>	
<b>Step Three</b>	<b>Engage in exploratory discussion.</b> If a topic is needed, check out What IF...Scenarios or IF Discussion Guides. Keep the Patience Principles and Humanization Mind Tricks in a place that is visible during the discussion (on flip charts or black board).	<b>25 min</b>
<b>Step Four</b>	<b>Regroup and Debrief.</b> How did your participation in the discussion change? Without revealing specifics, which principle was most helpful? Which mind trick was most useful? What might you add to these 2 lists?	<b>10 min</b>

## Reflection Assignment

- Why is it important to practice generosity in collaborative discussions? What does generosity allow for or make possible?
- When might you want to limit your generosity of interpretation? Under what conditions? Even under those conditions, try to imagine what generosity might afford or allow to happen?

## Practice Journal

This week, practice saying “That’s a great idea” or “That’s a really good question.” Make this your automatic response but then follow-up with HOW it IS a great idea or good question. Practice the skill of seeking out and then reframing the best in each comment or question. Describe your experiences of doing this for a week.

## Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Jack Byrd, [“Breakthrough Facilitation”](#) (2 minutes) A short blog post that emphasizes the difficulty of effectively facilitating a conversation, and demonstrates how students may feel as they are being evaluated.