

FOR WHOM ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?

ASK **BIG**
QUESTIONS

CONVERSATION GUIDE
FOR FACILITATORS

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FACILITATOR CONVERSATION GUIDE

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Tasks:

- Set up room for conversations with all necessary materials
- Hand out surveys to participants and collect them before the conversation begins

1. ASK (5 MINUTES)

Tasks:

- Welcome everyone and remind them of the question you will be discussing in today's conversation
- Offer a brief explanation of Ask Big Questions
- Give a short overview of the agenda
- Set the tone by reading the Code of Mutual Responsibility together.

Text:

About Ask Big Questions

Ask Big Questions is a project devoted to helping people understand themselves and each other, and strengthening our communities in the process. It's called Ask Big Questions because the questions we'll be talking through as a group are ones we believe matter to everyone and that everyone can answer. They might be challenging questions, but they're not "hard;" they're not questions that require expertise to answer. They're questions we all have stories about, questions all of us share. We believe that asking and talking about Big Questions as a group helps us learn to genuinely hear one another. It helps us grow our ability to trust each other. It builds community.

Today's Schedule:

- ASK: We'll look at the question we're considering together and make some mutual agreements for our group conversation.
- SHARE: We'll do an opening activity connected to the Big Question of this conversation: For Whom Are We Responsible?
- LEARN: We'll read and discuss a poem.
- DO: We'll reflect on our conversation together and what we have learned about ourselves and one another.

Ask Big Questions Code of Mutual Responsibility

In order to accomplish the goals we have for today's gathering, we ask everyone to agree to a few guidelines that can help create a more responsible and safer space for this conversation. We agree that:

- What is said in this conversation stays in this conversation, and may not be repeated outside it.
- We will recognize each other's right to be human. This conversation may trigger strong emotions, and we may feel or think in a way that is inconsistent with other times we have talked about the subjects and issues that come up. These feelings are real and genuine, and we don't need to apologize for them.
- We will speak to be understood, not to convince. We will listen to understand, not to score points. We will disagree with respect, and with the goal of better understanding others and ourselves. We won't rush to fill the silence.

Finally, we recognize that Ask Big Questions builds community through conversations; it is not group therapy. While we hope that everyone here will feel safe in this space, we respect anyone's need to leave the conversation at any point. A list of campus resources can be found below, and we invite you to seek out conversation and counselling with these resources if you need support.

2. SHARE (12–15 MINUTES)

Tasks:

- Ask the group to consider the question for Share
- Give everyone a moment to collect their thoughts
- Ask each person to introduce themselves and share a brief answer.

Text:

To begin, please take a moment and think about this question: When you hear the word ‘responsible,’ who comes to mind? Do you have a story about that person? Please take a moment to reflect on this question, and then we’ll introduce ourselves by sharing our name and who we thought of.

3. LEARN (25–30 MINUTES)

Tasks:

- Introduce the interpretative object and provide brief context about it
- Experience the object together as a group
- Facilitate a discussion that moves from 1) examining what is happening in the object to 2) what the author’s intent was to 3) how the object resonates with (or against) each individual’s personal beliefs, opinions, and experiences.

Text:

The dictionary defines “responsible” as “having control or authority,” or “being accountable for one’s actions and decisions.” To be responsible for someone in this sense seems to mean using our power in good faith: not abusing it, and not failing to use it when called upon to do so. A legal dictionary broadens the definition of ‘responsible’ to include, “characterized by trustworthiness, integrity.” In this sense, to be responsible is to be faithful—to our relationships with others, and to our own history and calling. Today, we’re going to begin by reading a poem by poet Lowell Jaeger.

Okay
Lowell Jaeger

There's a man in the road, waving.
We're driving home from Hot Springs,
my wife and I, and our three kids.
He's holding something bundled
in his arms. *Don't stop*, my wife
telegraphs to me with a sideways glance.
I'm okay with that.

It's a dog! the kids shout, *He's*
carrying a dog! So, okay, I stop,
roll down the window.

Please help, the man says, tears
leaking down his stubbled chin.
The dog is bleeding. He's rolled up
in an old rug, eyes open, miserable.
I just run over my dog, the man
blubbers, He's drunk. And stinks.

Okay, I'm thinking, I'm stuck
with this. The kids squeeze together;
the man and dog huff and groan,
sniffle and slide themselves into
our lives. My kids' faces in the rearview
are pinched, afraid to breathe –
wet dog, blood, booze, rotting socks.
The man whimpers, cradles his dog,
I'm f-ing sorry, man. So f-ing, f-ing
sorry. This is less than okay.
We spit gravel behind us and speed
back to Hot Springs to find a Vet.

It's a Sunday, my wife whispers, *everything's*
locked up. I'm thinking, Okay, what now?
At the one payphone on Main, I pull over
to let the man and dog out. *You better call*
someone, I say. My voice sounds afraid.
The man's eyes are shut, not asleep,
but almost. The dog's eyes are shut, too.
You better call someone, I say louder,
Okay? Okay?

The man stands at the payphone, his dog
bundled on the sidewalk. He just stands there.
My kids cry silently. My wife trusts me
to be the man she hopes I am. I don't
know what's okay and what's not. The man
is fumbling in his empty pockets for change.
I feel a lot like that.

Questions for Discussion:

What's happening in the object?

- Is there anything in the poem that isn't clear to you?
- Who is in the car?
- What do they see on the side of the road?
- What happens?
- What is the situation for everyone at the end of the poem?

What's the author's intent?

- Why did the man driving the car stop? Why do you think he first didn't stop, and then later did?
- Who, if anyone, do you think is taking responsibility for something or someone in this story? Who, if anyone, is neglecting responsibility in this story?
- What do you think of the family leaving the man and his dog at the pay phone? Did they have a responsibility to do anything more? Why or why not?
- What do you think the man means at the end of the poem when he says, "My wife trusts me to be the man she hopes I am"? What kind of man do you think she trusts him to be?

How does it resonate with us?

- Would you have stopped the car if you were driving? Why or why not?
- What things do you consider when deciding if you feel like you have a duty or responsibility to someone?
- Who do you think has a responsibility for/to you?
- Think of a group or community that you identify with—this might be a group you consider yourself included in based on something like gender, nationality, race, sexuality, or religion, it might be a large community of people with shared interests, or something else. What, if anything, do you consider to be your responsibility to others in that group with you? (That is, do you feel there is any particular behavior, action, or attitude you owe them because you share an identity?) And is there any responsibility you think the group you belong to has toward others who are not a part of your identified group?

4. DO (15-18 MINUTES)

Tasks:

- Explain that the group is going to conclude the conversation by reflecting on the thoughts and ideas that were just shared in the room.
- Pass out post it notes and ask participants to write down, in a phrase or sentence, some of the things they noticed according to the prompts below. They should use a new post it for each separate thought or phrase. They should not put their names on their post its.
- Once participants have had a few minutes to reflect and write, ask them to place their post its on the wall under the appropriate categories
- Ask each participant to chose one post it note that someone else wrote that resonates with them
- Return to the circle and share the post it notes each person chose.

Text:

On the BLUE post-its, please write any and all insights about yourself that you gained during the course of this conversation. Did you notice something new about how you view the world, or yourself? Did you articulate clearly something notable about your own values?

On the YELLOW post-its, please write any and all insights you had about others. How did this conversation help you to better understand someone else in this room? How did this conversation change the way you regard the group as a whole, or people in general?

On the PINK post-its, please write any questions you still have. These can be questions that the conversation raised for you, or things that you came into the conversation wondering about and didn't feel resolved about by the end.

When you're done writing, please put your notes up on the wall, grouped by color, under the correct sign. We'll then take a few moments to look at what everyone has written. After everyone's notes are on the wall, please take one post-it that you DIDN'T write, but that resonated with you. Then we'll return to our seats and each share what notes we took, and why.

5. CLOSING (3-5 MINUTES)

Task:

- Ask participants to put post its back up on the wall.
- Intentionally close the conversation by thanking participants and reminding them of any future conversations. Stick around for a few minutes in case anyone wants to talk with you one on one.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Tasks:

- Take pictures of all of the post its on the wall (make sure its in focus!) and send the pictures to data@askbigquestions.org
- Put the surveys you've collected in a self addressed envelope to send back to ABQ
- Jot down a few notes for yourself about how you feel at the end of the conversation- what you thought went well and where you might want to try something new in the future.

TIPS FOR USING THE FACILITATOR CONVERSATION GUIDE

BEFOREHAND

While the most visible part of the facilitator's work happens during the conversation, the job actually starts before anyone enters the room. Before the group arrives, we should check our materials list and prepare ourselves for the first time everyone walks into the room to make sure the conversation goes as smoothly as possible and the greatest number of people will feel comfortable and welcome.

MATERIALS (all of which can be found in the Ask Big Questions toolkit):

- Pre-addressed envelope to send surveys after the conversation
- 3 colors of post it notes
- Pens
- Laminated signs that say "Self", "Other" and "Questions"
- Masking tape to hang signs

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Do you have all the materials you need? Do you need to set up anything before people arrive?
- Does the place you're having the conversation create a space in which people can feel safe?
 - Is it a closed space? Does it have a door you can close to ensure privacy and confidentiality when needed?
 - Does it have windows to let in light? Can everyone sit comfortably in a circle?
- Are you scheduling the conversation at a time when everyone can be physically awake and present? Will people be hungry? Will you provide food or drink? Will they be tired or sleepy after a meal?

It's a good idea to get to the space 15-30 minutes before participants arrive. As they come in, introduce yourself and welcome them. A great opening question can be, "What brings you here today?" Once everyone is gathered, you can ask for volunteers to read the text below and begin.

AS PEOPLE COME IN

As you welcome people entering the room, hand them the participant guide and ask them to fill out the brief form in the back. Some participants will arrive just a moment before you are supposed to start (or even right at the time). The form only takes a moment, let everyone know they have just a minute or two left and then collect the forms. It's important to start the conversation within 5 minutes of your start time.

ASK

Once everyone is gathered, begin the conversation by framing what is going to happen over the course of the next hour. By taking the time to go over the schedule, the question, and the context for this conversation, you'll help create an environment in which people feel comfortable and ready to participate. You can do this by asking participants to read the corresponding parts of the participant guide out loud, or you can summarize these things in your own words- just be sure to think them through ahead of time so that its clear and concise.

Finally, before you begin, be sure to review the code of mutual responsibility as a group. It's important to actually read this out loud together (as opposed to you summarizing it). This helps to remind everyone of the expectations for their participation and gives you something to refer back to if any tension arises later on in the conversation.

SHARE

Why do we start with Share rather than just jump into the heart of the conversation? Some people (perhaps including you) are comfortable getting right down to business and freely sharing their thoughts and opinions when asked. Others take a little more time and wait to speak until they feel more comfortable with the people present and understand what's being asked of them. Ask and Share gives us a starting point where participants can begin by talking about something they know a lot about (their own life) and grow more comfortable with others.

Good Facilitators Remember:

Silence is a good thing! This is the #1 thing with which every facilitator must learn to get comfortable. People are silent when they are thinking. The average person takes 7 seconds to process a question and formulate a response. Is the silence driving you nuts? Trust that the group is thinking and that they want the conversation to succeed just as much as you—eventually, they'll speak up! Over time, many facilitators and conversation participants come to value the ability to be quiet together in a group as one of the most important parts of a group conversation.

Practical tip: Make yourself count (slowly!) to 10 before you try asking a question in a new way. Resist asking lots of questions to fill the silence—it only makes it harder to think, and it interrupts the silence, which can sometimes be the most beautiful part of the conversation.

NAME YOUR TRANSITIONS: Sometimes it's tempting to read the instructions and then get out of the way. Often, groups benefit from having the facilitator name what's happening and what they are supposed to be doing, especially if it's a multi-step process (e.g. "Ok, now that we've wrapped up our conversation with our first partner, we're going to find a second partner. This may mean you need to walk to a new spot in the room.") This trick also works if something isn't going according to plan (e.g. "My stopwatch appears to be broken—everyone hang on one second while I grab my phone so I can keep track of time.") By naming what's happening in the in-between-time, everyone knows what's going on and feels comfortable, even if there's a glitch or some confusion.

LEARN

The "Learn" section is the heart of our conversation. Remember that the interpretive object you are using is intentionally chosen so that the conversation can begin about the object and move gradually towards personal reflection. Before the conversation, look over the questions that are included in the Learn section. While you don't need to ask every question, you should ask some from each category.

Most important: the order of the questions matters! Moves from 1) examining what is happening in the object to 2) what the author's intent was to 3) how the object resonates with (or against) each individual's personal beliefs, opinions, and experiences. Interpretive discussion is what primes the conversation for better reflection. By focusing on the questions of "What does the text mean when it says X?" or "What is it trying to say?" we allow the individuals in the group to work through their own issues in dialogue with the object, and we help the group form stronger bonds by doing the shared work of trying to interpret it. This then enables the more reflective, personal dimension of the conversation to begin on a deeper level. Remember: Trust your group, and trust the object!

Providing Context:

Rather than jumping in to experiencing the interpretive object together, it's helpful to provide some background information about what everyone is about to experience. There's text provided or you can plan to say a few things yourself- perhaps about where this object comes from, who the author is, and a few thoughts about how it relates to the question.

Experiencing the interpretive object together

It's important that everyone has access to the object and can see/hear/or read it at the same time as everyone else. That might mean making more copies or finding a way to project a screen. This helps everyone feel comfortable sharing their opinion.

Facilitating a discussion

Think through the questions you want to ask in advance - you don't have to ask all the questions listed, but you'll want to ask some from each category.

Good Facilitators Remember:

TAKE TURNS: As the facilitator, you are there to balance the talkers with the listeners to make sure everyone is heard.

SET THE PACE: Great conversations will move through all of the sections of questions so that participants have time to talk both about the objects and about themselves. Keep track of time, and if the group is getting stalled in one section, name the transition ("I want to move us into the next question so that we don't run out of time").

DON'T PANIC IF THERE'S TROUBLE: Some of the most important conversations we can have aren't perfectly smooth. You can look at our troubleshooting resource for some thoughts about how to handle common problems.

DO

This final section helps everyone—individually and as a group—reflect on what they felt, heard, and learned in the conversation, and make connections between the conversation and the rest of their lives. Sometimes our best insights don't come in the moment, but when we have time to think about it after the fact. By having a reflection section that is different than simply sitting in a circle and talking, we can engage our minds, hands, and hearts in new ways that lend insight into what we are thinking and feeling.

Good Facilitators Remember:

MODEL: Sometimes it's easier to understand instructions by demonstrating the tone you are hoping for in your own comment. (e.g., "I learned that my first instinct is often...")

ENCOURAGE SPECIFICITY: Sometimes comments are vague or generic because the participant isn't quite sure what to say or how to express what they think. A gentle question ("Can you give us an example of when you felt this?") can help open up the comment. It can even help to simply say, "Can you say more about that?"

IF THERE IS RESISTANCE, EXPLAIN, DON'T APOLOGIZE: When groups are asked to do something other than simply talk, sometimes one or more participants will resist. Many of us have sat through sessions where we have felt silly or embarrassed or felt that our time was wasted. Rather than apologize ("I know, this sounds stupid, but I think it will be fun") try explaining the rationale in a short sentence ("Writing on post-its helps us focus our thoughts and lets us see a snapshot of what the group is thinking.") By sharing the reasons behind an activity with the group and how it connects to the central purpose of the conversation, facilitators can help smooth the transition into the activity.

CLOSING

Make sure to intentionally and mindfully end the conversation. You can simply thank everyone for coming or you can lead the group in an activity.

FOR WHOM ARE WE RESPONSIBLE?

ASK **BIG**
QUESTIONS

CONVERSATION GUIDE
FOR PARTICIPANTS

ASK

About Ask Big Questions:

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Today's Schedule:

- ASK: We'll look at the question we're considering together and make some mutual agreements for our group conversation.
- SHARE: We'll do an opening activity connected to the Big Question of this conversation: For whom are we responsible?
- LEARN: We'll read and discuss a poem.
- DO: We'll reflect on our conversation together and what we have learned about ourselves and one another.

Ask Big Questions Code Of Mutual Responsibility

In order to accomplish the goals we have for today's gathering, we ask everyone to agree to a few guidelines that can help create a more responsible and safer space for this conversation. We agree that:

- What is said in this conversation stays in this conversation, and may not be repeated outside it.
- We will recognize each other's right to be human. This conversation may trigger strong emotions, and we may feel or think in a way that is inconsistent with other times we have talked about the subjects and issues that come up. These feelings are real and genuine, and we don't need to apologize for them.
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Finally, we recognize that Ask Big Questions builds community through conversations; it is not group therapy. While we hope that everyone here will feel safe in this space, we respect anyone's need to leave the conversation at any point. A list of campus resources can be found at the end of your guide, and we invite you to seek out conversation and counselling with these resources if you need support.

SHARE

What comes to mind when you hear the word “responsible?”

LEARN

The dictionary defines “responsible” as “having control or authority,” or “being accountable for one’s actions and decisions.” To be responsible for someone in this sense seems to mean using our power in good faith: not abusing it, and not failing to use it when called upon to do so. A legal dictionary broadens the definition of ‘responsible’ to include, “characterized by trustworthiness, integrity.” In this sense, to be responsible is to be faithful—to our relationships with others, and to our own history and calling. Today, we’re going to begin by reading a poem by poet Lowell Jaeger.

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my wife and I, and our three kids.
He's holding something bundled
in his arms. *Don't stop*, my wife
telegraphs to me with a sideways glance.
I'm okay with that.

It's a dog! the kids shout, *He's
carrying a dog!* So, okay, I stop,
roll down the window.

Please help, the man says, tears
leaking down his stubbled chin.
The dog is bleeding. He's rolled up
in an old rug, eyes open, miserable.
I just run over my dog, the man
blubbers, He's drunk. And stinks.

Okay, I'm thinking, I'm stuck
with this. The kids squeeze together;
the man and dog huff and groan,
sniffle and slide themselves into
our lives. My kids' faces in the rearview
are pinched, afraid to breathe –
wet dog, blood, booze, rotting socks.
The man whimpers, cradles his dog,
*I'm f-ing sorry, man. So f-ing, f-ing
sorry.* This is less than okay.
We spit gravel behind us and speed
back to Hot Springs to find a Vet.

It's a Sunday, my wife whispers, *everything's
locked up.* I'm thinking, Okay, what now?
At the one payphone on Main, I pull over
to let the man and dog out. *You better call
someone*, I say. My voice sounds afraid.
The man's eyes are shut, not asleep,
but almost. The dog's eyes are shut, too.
You better call someone, I say louder,
Okay? Okay?

The man stands at the payphone, his dog
bundled on the sidewalk. He just stands there.
My kids cry silently. My wife trusts me
to be the man she hopes I am. I don't
know what's okay and what's not. The man
is fumbling in his empty pockets for change.
I feel a lot like that.

Questions for Discussion:

What's happening in the object?

- Is there anything in the poem that isn't clear to you?
- Who is in the car?
- What do they see on the side of the road?
- What happens?
- What is the situation for everyone at the end of the poem?

What's the author's intent?

- Why did the man driving the car stop? Why do you think he first didn't stop, and then later did?
- Who, if anyone, do you think is taking responsibility for something or someone in this story? Who, if anyone, is neglecting responsibility in this story?
- What do you think of the family leaving the man and his dog at the pay phone? Did they have a responsibility to do anything more? Why or why not?
- What do you think the man means at the end of the poem when he says, "My wife trusts me to be the man she hopes I am"? What kind of man do you think she trusts him to be?

How does it resonate with us?

- Would you have stopped the car if you were driving? Why or why not?
- What things do you consider when deciding if you feel like you have a duty or responsibility to someone?
- Who do you think has a responsibility for/to you?
- Think of a group or community that you identify with—this might be a group you consider yourself included in based on something like gender, nationality, race, sexuality, or religion, it might be a large community of people with shared interests, or something else. What, if anything, do you consider to be your responsibility to others in that group with you? (That is, do you feel there is any particular behavior, action, or attitude you owe them because you share an identity?) And is there any responsibility you think the group you belong to has toward others who are not a part of your identified group?

DO

On the BLUE post-its, please write any and all insights about yourself that you gained during the course of this conversation. Did you notice something new about how you view the world, or yourself? Did you articulate clearly something notable about your own values?

On the YELLOW post-its, please write any and all insights you had about others. How did this conversation help you to better understand someone else in this room? How did this conversation change the way you regard the group as a whole, or people in general?

On the PINK post-its, please write any questions you still have. These can be questions that the conversation raised for you, or things that you came into the conversation wondering about and didn't feel resolved about by the end.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Center for Counseling & Student Development

261 Perkins Student Center

Telephone: 302-831-2141

Monday, Thursday, and Friday: 8 am – 5 pm; Tuesday and Wednesday: 8 am – 6 pm

<http://sites.udel.edu/counseling/>

Student Health Services

282 The Green

Laurel Hall

Phone: (302)831-2226

<http://www.udel.edu/studenthealth/>

Religious & Spiritual Life

<http://www.udel.edu/spirituallife/>

FIRST-TIME PARTICIPANT SURVEY

(Please only fill out this survey if this is your first conversation in this series.)

Today's conversation allows us to reflect on our own experiences in the world around us. Surveys like this one provides measurable evidence that helps us to evaluate Ask Big Question's effectiveness and to track the change in campus climate over time. Sharing your answers to the questions below will help us to assess student interaction on campus.

Responses will never be published in connection with your name.

Today's Date: _____ Name: _____ Email: _____

Year you started college: _____

Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have found a community on campus.					
I have struggled to find a community.					
I feel connected to more than one community.					
I feel connected to the larger campus community.					

Imagine that University of Delaware is the best campus community it can be. What does it look and feel like?

	Very distant	Distant	Neither close nor distant	Close	Very close
How close do you feel the campus is to this vision?					

Please give this survey to your facilitator. Thank you!

FACILITATION RESOURCES

ASK **BIG**
QUESTIONS

WHAT DOES A FACILITATOR DO (AND NOT DO)?

Most conversations we have on a regular basis don't involve a facilitator. Usually they are private conversations, just with family or friends. Sometimes they are semi-public conversations, led by a teacher in a class or an employer at our job. Occasionally, they are public conversations. These are often led by a moderator, who is typically considered an expert on the subject at hand.

A facilitator is not an expert on the subject nor are they a teacher. They are there to help as many participants as possible feel welcome, included, and engaged in the discussion. How do they make that happen? Facilitators use a *structure* (in this case our Ask Big Questions Conversation Guides) to create a transparent flow to the conversation that all participants can be aware of, and then they infuse it with their own *style*.

Your style will grow and shift as you find your feet as a facilitator; it is a reflection of your unique personality, strengths and abilities. Are you comfortable talking in front of a crowd? Do you always know the perfect joke to put the whole room at ease? That's a great way to facilitate. Are you a little more quiet and an excellent, deep listener? That's also a great way to facilitate. Who you are as a facilitator will reflect who you are as a person.

Read, Respond, Reflect: The Three Core Actions of Facilitation*

There's no one way to facilitate a conversation, but there are a few core moves, or actions, that all facilitators hold as they do their work. These core moves are: reading, responding, and reflecting.

Reading (What's going on in this conversation and with this group?)

Just as a quarterback on a football field or a conductor in an orchestra must "read" what's happening on the field or stage, a facilitator needs to be in tune with what's happening in their group. This helps the facilitator to make decisions about what to do next (which sometimes is to do nothing at all!). Reading a room requires the facilitator to focus on listening to and observing what the group is communicating both verbally and nonverbally. Often this means the facilitator talks less than they might as a participant.

Responding (or not!)

Reading a room primes a facilitator to respond to both problems and opportunities. Facilitators are constantly making decisions during a conversation, including the decision not to do anything. Facilitators must strike a balance between intervening so that the group stays on track, doesn't spend too much time in one section of the conversation, and isn't dominated by a select few, and letting a conversation have a natural flow so that participants don't feel overly managed by the facilitator. Just being aware of striking this balance can help a facilitator when weighing whether or not to jump in.

Reflecting (What did you learn?)

Facilitation takes practice. People become better facilitators by having multiple opportunities to lead and adjusting based on what they learn. After each conversation, good facilitators reflect (sometimes with their group or their campus advisor) on what went well and what they could improve next time. Remember to trust your group, and then don't be afraid to try new styles and approaches, or name what's happening to the room (e.g. "Last week we ran way over, so this week I am going to try a new strategy to help manage our time").

A Quick Word on What Facilitation Isn't

While there are countless styles of facilitating, it's worth mentioning what the job is *not*. Facilitating is not about imparting a specific idea or lesson to the group. Facilitating is also not about avoiding conflict; it's about creating the kind of place where people who disagree can talk to each other productively—in a way that helps them appreciate and learn from each other, rather than disengaging or getting into a fight. Finally, facilitating is not therapy. As facilitators, we don't have the necessary training to help others in this way. We can support them in seeking the help they need, but it's actually our job to make sure the focus isn't on just one person's story. We want each person to feel comfortable contributing their unique experience and viewpoint.

**This framework for facilitating is based from the concept of the facilitators' "thinking dispositions" as described in book The Facilitator's Book of Questions (Allen, Blythe, Teachers College Press, 2004), which we at Ask Big Questions love and highly recommend*

MINDSETS FOR FACILITATORS

Leading a conversation can be a nerve-wracking experience. As facilitators, we put ourselves in charge of the group's experience and so we are invested not only in the quality of the conversation but in each participant's feeling of inclusion. We would like for every person in the conversation to feel that their thoughts, ideas, and identity are valued.

There's a lot we can do to help each participant feel welcome and to help the conversation be rich, engaging, and structured. What we can't do is avoid all disagreements and conflict—after all, when humans interact and communicate, there are always going to be differences of opinion and there may sometimes be tensions and flared tempers.

As facilitators, our aim is to steer sources of tension and disagreement so that they lead to powerful moments of connection and conversation—even if they are difficult or tense—in which participants feel supported and welcome, and talk and listen across their lines of difference. In this section we'll share some key mindsets to approaching conflict and then some common problems and techniques for deploying them.

Mindset #1: Disagreement is not a bad thing.

While it's tempting to hope for a conversation that doesn't have any disagreement—those conversations can be the least impactful—without room for growth and change and, frankly, sometimes boring to those participating. That's not to say that the goal of a conversation is disagreement, but it's important to remember that when participants disagree with each other in a respectful and engaged way, that indicates that people are invested in the conversation. Sometimes broad agreement in a group isn't about everyone actually agreeing but about a lack of dissent—that people don't feel comfortable speaking up with an opinion or are disengaging from the conversation.

Mindset #2: When in doubt, name the moment (but not the person).

This is one of the most important rules of facilitation: When you are leading a conversation and things feel wonky or tense, name it to the group ("It feels like we are uncovering places where our group disagrees with one another. Can we think about how we can best listen to one another's experiences even if they are different from our own?"). Naming what is happening in the room—rather than sidestepping it and hoping it dissolves naturally—is key to helping everyone recognize the dynamics of the conversation, which they may not be fully aware of, especially if the tension is not overt. It also surfaces the conflict so that it can be processed and directed in a way that makes all parties feel heard and respected even if it can't be fully resolved. By naming the moment ("It seems like there a number of side conversations happening right now. Let's bring everyone back into the group so that we can all hear each other's opinions, even if they are in conflict with some of what has already been said") the conversation can deepen and grow, rather than become splintered or fractured.

But remember, the trick is to name the moment that is happening, not the person who might be at the center of the moment for better or worse. (You don't want to say, "I feel like Antonio is really dominating the conversation," or "I am noticing that Emma is attacking Josh for using sexist language," or even statements that might seem positive like, "Can we all try to make 'I' statements like Crystal is doing?") Naming people instead of behaviors puts people on the defensive, which makes it harder for them to recognize and correct their behavior.

Mindset #3: Trust the group, trust the process, trust the object

As facilitators, we fundamentally believe that people can learn the most from one another, and that groups of people can have powerful conversations that can change the world. This means that we have to trust that the group—any group!—will have fulfilling conversations and not over-manage them. We also have to trust that the structure we're using is a good one and that sticking to it will help us have richer, deeper conversations. And finally, we have to trust that the interpretive object chosen for the conversation guide will be a catalyst for thoughtful conversation. We need to trust these things not because the goal is to mindlessly follow a particular program, but because having trust in others and in the materials we are using means that we can let go of some of our worry and not feel responsible for every second of a conversation. It also lets us sit comfortably in silence without panicking, and trust that the group is thinking.

TROUBLESHOOTING

What do I do if someone is dominating the conversation?

In this scenario, someone, or perhaps a few people, are dominating the conversation. It's not so much that what they are saying is problematic as how often they are talking. By jumping in with comments at every turn, quieter participants aren't joining in the conversation.

What to do?

- *Create a speaking order and stick to it.* If multiple people raise their hands, create a short speaking order ("From left to right, let's hear from Jordan, Malik, and Sarah"). The important part is to stick to it even if someone tries to jump in to respond.
- *Invite others to speak.* Saying, "I'd love to invite anyone who hasn't had a chance to speak yet to share your thoughts," is a neutral way of inviting in more voices without putting the focus on any individual participant.
- *Ask the person to hold off.* Often participants who dominate conversations are aware that they talk a lot. Sometimes saying, "I'd love to hear your comment but first I want to make sure anyone who hasn't had a chance to speak yet gets a chance," can be an easy way to open up the conversation and gently remind the person to allow others to speak.

What if there's resistance to the activity?

Sometimes participants can be resistant to a particular section of a structured conversation. Or sometimes simply the *idea* that others may not go along with the structure of the conversation guide is enough to make a facilitator nervous. An important thing to remember is that resistance is often about other people's fears of being vulnerable in front of a group or looking stupid. (That can be true for you too.)

What to do?

- *Explain the purpose.* The structure isn't arbitrary, rather it's designed to build a space where many different kinds of thinkers and talkers can participate.
- *Don't panic.* Resistance never fully goes away. It's important to know that if it springs up (in you or in the group) it's not a sign that you are doing something wrong; rather, it is a sign that something—the setting, the material, the activity—is making people react. This can be a great and powerful thing.
- *Stay strong.* Many times a resistant person will back down if you calmly and clearly ask them to try.

What do I do if someone is offensive?

It can be tricky if a participant is speaking in a way that is offensive or is clearly offending others in the group. As a facilitator, it's important that you don't ignore the moment. The goal is to address the participant's behavior or speech in a way that allows him or her to grow from the experience and to adjust without feeling shamed.

What to do:

- *Correct offensive language.* Speak up if someone is using an inappropriate or pejorative term. It's important that others in the room see that it won't go unnoticed. You can ask for them to restate what they are saying in a more appropriate way.
- *Refer to the agreements set at the start of the conversation.* This can help point to the kind of behavior you expect without singling out a specific person.
- *Speak from individual experience.* If participants are extrapolating about groups of people, ask them to speak from their first-person experience in a specific, story-based way.
- *Ask for help.* It's hard to cover all the ways you should address offensive behavior in a short document like this. Bring the problem up with your campus advisor or other campus resources. If the conversation goes badly one week, be open about trying something new the next week. By being committed to creating intentional spaces for conversation and working through problems, we can model to others how to do this in their own lives and in other communities.

What if I feel strongly about the subject?

Sometimes the hardest conversations to facilitate are the ones dealing with topics that we are most passionate about. The key is to remember the role of the facilitator in the conversation and create the space for others to benefit from thinking, talking and listening together.

What to do:

- *Resist being the expert.* Big Questions are intentionally designed so that everyone can have an opinion about them, without extensive background knowledge.
- *Ask yourself if you are contributing to the content or the process.* As a facilitator, your responsibility is to the process. Check in with yourself about how the comment will help shape the full group's experience.

What do I do if I start to run out of time?

What to do:

- *Pay attention to the clock!* It's better to have a wristwatch or stopwatch than a cell phone (so you won't get distracted by texts or notifications), but check in during the conversation to make sure you are staying on track.
- *Practice "time-telling" with the group.* It's perfectly appropriate to let the group know how much time is left ("We have 3-4 minutes left for this section of the conversation) so that they can understand where they are in the conversation.
- *Segue when possible.* Seize the opportunity when a comment is made that leads perfectly to the next portion of the conversation. When that doesn't happen naturally, just name the transition and move the group forward.

How do I get better at facilitating?

Most facilitators get better simply by getting a lot of practice. Getting yourself into (and out of) tricky moments in group conversations is what helps build your skillset and your confidence.

What to do:

- *Identify your strengths and weaknesses.* Take some time to think about what you excel at and where you could use some extra practice. Think about how you behave in formal and informal conversations, both individual and group.

- *Reflect.* Take a few minutes after a conversation to think about what went well and what was rocky (or felt rocky to you, even if the group didn't seem to notice). Try to be specific about the moment and about your role in it.
- *Get feedback (but not from everyone).* Unstructured feedback isn't the most helpful so avoid asking the full participant group about how you are doing. But feedback from a few people (or from a campus advisor) can help illuminate what you are doing well and where you might want to try new strategies. Good feedback is descriptive rather than evaluative, specific, and focused on what you can try next time.
- *Experiment.* Try new things. Watch other facilitators in action and copy the things they do that you like best. If it doesn't go perfectly that's more than fine, but you become a better facilitator by having the courage to experiment and explore.

The logo for 'ASK BIG QUESTIONS' is displayed in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The word 'ASK' is on the left, 'BIG' is in the middle and larger, and 'QUESTIONS' is on the right. The text is set against a dark purple background that has a diagonal split, with a lighter purple section on the left and a darker purple section on the right.

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