

Practicing Honest, Constructive Dialogue In Your Community

Thought Book



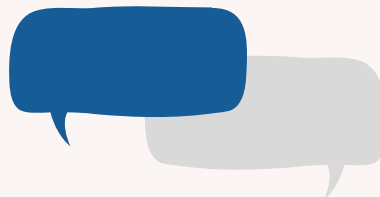
**GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY**

**PADNOS/SAROSIK CENTER
FOR CIVIL DISCOURSE**

Principles of Conversation

by Margaret Wheatley

- Acknowledge one another as equals.
- Try to stay curious about each other.
- Recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners.
- Slow down so we have time to think and reflect.
- Remember that conversation is a way that humans think together.
- Expect it to be messy at times.



Civil Discourse **Guidelines**

- Listen to understand.
- Use “I” statements.
- Speak from lived experience; tell stories.
- Avoid the word, “but”.
- Avoid “fighting words”.
- Speak to grow the conversation; connect what you say to what the other person just said—build upon each other’s perspectives.
- Rather than focusing on points of disagreements, talk about the values behind each person’s perspective. For example, folks who disagree about gun control may share values about keeping people safe. Begin your conversation at a point of mutual understanding or share values.
- Consider the gray areas for you or the mixed feelings/uncertainty you might have about an aspect of your position. Talk about each other’s gray areas—they are conversation openings.
- Remember, “Each person has something to teach me” (even if it is hard to recognize).
- You have a right to be understood—so does the other person. Remain curious about the other’s person’s perspectives—why does this person hold this position? Why do you hold yours? What are the life experiences that have shaped people’s positions? If possible, share a bit about these life experiences.
- Accept that you are trying to be understood, not trying to change the other person’s mind. Let this sentiment guide what and how you share.
- Know when to “hit pause.” Whether it’s taking a deep breath, a break, or ending the conversation for the moment, sometimes the most constructive choice is to pause the conversation until emotions simmer down.

Heterodox Academy

is a non-partisan collaborative committed to open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement on campuses of higher education. *Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies*, while geared specifically for university students, is informative for the general public as well. This handout can help people identify common logical fallacies—things that people often say when trying to prove a point but that actually don't provide evidence for the point being argued.

<https://heterodoxacademy.org>



Thinking Logically: Learning to Recognize Logical Fallacies

Created by Samantha Hedges and Joe Metzka

Arguments are presented to persuade someone of a particular view. Credible evidence is an important component of informed, persuasive arguments. When credible evidence is not available, the one presenting the argument often defaults to using other devices to sway thinking, such as logical fallacies. **Logical fallacies are common errors in reasoning that undermine the logic of an argument. Fallacies can be illegitimate arguments or irrelevant points and are often identified because they lack evidence that supports their claim.**

Students need to be aware of these fallacies to present their own viewpoints and engage in open inquiry effectively. One must avoid making fallacious arguments and identify fallacious arguments presented by others to productively engage in open inquiry and constructively disagree with the perspective.

This resource outlines common logical fallacies that students may have experienced in their own interactions or those in their social networks. Towards the bottom of the resource, there is a list of additional logical fallacies that students can research and suggestions for activities that can be adapted for high school or college students.

Common Logical Fallacies

Ad Hominem

Ad Hominem means “against the man”. *Ad Hominem* is when you attack the personal characteristics of the person you’re debating instead of attacking the argument the person is making. In political debates, this is known as “mudslinging”.

Example:

Candidate 1: “I’m for raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.”

Candidate 2: “You’re for raising the minimum wage, but you’re not even smart enough to run a business.”

Candidate 2 attacked the intelligence of Candidate 1 rather than the merits of the minimum wage policy proposed.

Anachronistic

Anachronistic is when you judge something from the past by today’s moral standards. This fallacy is often committed when concepts and ideas are misappropriated in time.



Example:

"The statue of Abraham Lincoln should be removed because he did not sufficiently show that black lives matter."

The person making this argument uses modern-day standards of the Black Lives Matter movement to judge Lincoln's decisions during the Civil War.

Anecdotal

Anecdotal is when you use personal experience to make an argument instead of evidence. Arguments that rely heavily on anecdotal evidence overlook that one (possibly isolated) example can't stand alone as definitive proof of a greater premise.

Example:

"Basketball players are generally tall." *"Actually... I know of this guy who was 5'9" and made it to the NBA..."*

A basketball player who is 5'9" can exist, but that player does not refute the evidence that most basketball players are taller than 6'.

Appeal to Authority

Appeal to Authority is when you argue that if one credible source believes something, it must be true.

Example:

"My science teacher says that washing your hands is the most effective way to combat a disease. She is a biology teacher, so it must be true. Any evidence saying otherwise must be false."

The biology teacher may be correct, but additional evidence should be sought before concluding.

Appeal to Emotion

Appeal to Emotion is also known as *ad misericordiam*, which in Latin means "argument to compassion."

Appeal to Emotion is when you appeal to the compassion and emotional sensitivity of others when these factors are not strictly relevant to the argument. You make a claim based on sympathy or empathy instead of just or logical grounds. This is a "pathos" appeal and is very common in commercials and is a common tactic of politicians.

For example:

"Sarah did not want to eat all of her food on her plate. To get Sarah to eat her food, her mom told her to think of all the starving children in the world who do not have food at all."

Sarah eating all the food on her plate does not affect whether children elsewhere will go without food.



Bandwagon

Bandwagon is when you present what most people or a group of people think to persuade another to think the same way. By claiming “everyone is doing it,” you are appealing to the popularity of something to validate it.

Example:

“Everyone that I’ve spoken with thinks that raising the minimum wage will help workers, so we should raise the minimum wage.”

Support among the general population for a policy does not mean it is an effective policy.

Circular Argument/Reasoning

Circular Reasoning is when you begin with a claim you are trying to conclude with and when you restate your argument rather than prove it.

Example:

“Eric is a good communicator because he speaks effectively.”

The conclusion is that Eric is a good communicator, but no evidence has been presented to support this claim. Saying he is an effective speaker is the same as saying he is a good communicator.

False Dichotomy

False Dichotomy is when you simplify an argument by reducing it to two sides. An argument is presented as having only two sides when there are actually more. This is also called “either/or” fallacy or “black/white” fallacy—for example, you are either with us or against us.

Example:

“If you are against the war, then you don’t support our troops.”

This argument does not acknowledge that one can be against going to war and support troops.

Hasty Generalization

Hasty Generalization occurs when you rush to a conclusion before you have all the facts. Your argument is then based on insufficient or biased evidence.

Example:

“I heard that teenagers vandalized the park downtown last night. Teenagers are so irresponsible and destructive.”

The person claims that *all* teenagers are irresponsible and destructive because of one incident and the actions of a *few* teenagers.



Motte and Bailey

Motte and Bailey is when you conflate two positions that share similarities, one modest and easy to defend (the “motte”) and one much more controversial (the “bailey”). You advance the controversial position; then, when challenged or asked for evidence, you retreat to the less controversial position.

Example:

Activist: “Homeless people should have the right to shelter, food, and health care. They should be given an apartment for free, a monthly supply of food for a year, and free medical care for a year.”

Politician: “I can get on board with food and health care for a year, but I don’t support giving people a free apartment.”

Activist: “Then you don’t believe in the right to shelter, food, and health care for the homeless.”

The “motte” is the rights that the homeless should have. The “bailey” is the specific policy prescriptions.

Moving the Goalposts

Moving the Goalpost is when you add related propositions during an argument with just enough content altered to continue an argument or change the argument’s terms during the argument. This is done to avoid losing the argument after the initial claim has been successfully counter-argued. Activists often do this to maintain support for (or outrage about) their issue of interest.

Example:

Activist: “Women will have equal rights when they are welcomed into the workforce.”

Counter argument: “Women do hold many positions in the workforce as teachers, nurses, and other social service positions.”

Activist: “Those aren’t the same types of jobs as men have. Women won’t have equal rights until they are employed in the same types of positions as men.”

Counter argument: “Both men and women are directors of organizations and principals of schools.”

Activist: “The proportion of men and women in those positions is not equal. Women won’t have equal rights until all corporations hire the same number of women and men for leadership positions.”

The activist started with a proclamation about what is necessary for women to achieve equal rights. When her claim was refuted, she moved onto another claim about what is needed for women to achieve equal rights.

Red Herring

Red Herring is when you focus on arguing for an irrelevant topic to distract the audience. This is done to avoid opposing arguments rather than addressing them.

Red Herrings were stinky fish used to throw hunting dogs off the scent and test them.

Example:

A reporter asks a politician about healthcare.

"Healthcare is an important issue in this country, just like national defense. During my four years as a senator, I helped increase our defense budget to protect citizens of this country."

The politician introduces the topic of national defense to distract the reporter from her original question about healthcare.

Slippery Slope

Slippery Slope is when you argue that if A were to happen, then B will happen, eventually leading to Z happening. In other words, the argument equates A and Z.

Example:

"If you don't let me go to the party, I'll be a loser with no friends. I'll never get a date and then die poor and lonely with five cats!"

This argument claims that by not going to one party, he will die poor and alone. But not going to a party does not necessarily lead to dying poor and alone.

Straw Man

Straw Man is when you attack a position that the other person does not actually hold, or when you try to weaken an opponent's actual position to discredit them by misrepresenting their argument.

Example:

Political candidate 1: "Private prisons should be closed because corporations should not make a profit from jailing people."

Political candidate 2: "So, you don't support workers? If you close private prisons, many people will lose their jobs."

Candidate 2 is trying to claim that Candidate 1 does not support worker's rights to discredit the argument for closing private prisons.

Often, *Ad Hominem* and *Straw Man* fallacies are intertwined.



Tu Quoque

Tu Quoque is also called “appeal to hypocrisy” and in Latin means “you too” or “you also.”

Tu Quoque is when you answer criticism with criticism or turn an argument back around on the other person. You apply the logic that because someone has done something, that it justifies someone else doing the same thing.

Example:

Dad: “You can’t quit baseball. Give it time and you will get better.”

Child: “But you quit baseball, so I should be able to quit too.”

The child is trying to argue that she should be allowed to quit baseball because her dad did rather than supporting why she should be allowed to quit.

List of Additional Logical Fallacies

Appeal to Ignorance

Appeal to Nature

Begging the Claim/Question

Burden of Proof

Card-Stacking

Correlation Not Causation Fallacy

Equivocation

Fallacy Fallacy

Gambler’s Fallacy

Genetic Fallacy

Moral Equivalence

No True Scotsman

Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc (aka Post Hoc)

Slothful Induction

Sunk Costs

National Conversation Project

The National Conversation Project offers this set of three questions for helping people talk through contention and disagreement. It is often helpful to have individuals privately reflect on these questions before opening up the dialogue to the group.

1. What is your personal history with this issue?

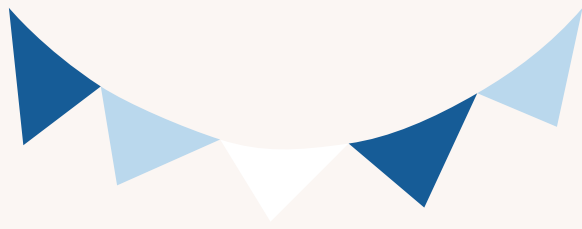
- Beginning with one's personal history with an issue helps people articulate the why of their perspective about the issue under discussion.
- Recall the tree metaphor. One's personal history with an issue is a root level reflection because it is about one's human experience.

2. What are your particular beliefs about this issue (what is really at the heart of it for you)?

- Moving then to one's beliefs about the issue helps one articulate the what —what are one's actual values, principles, beliefs, attitudes, etc?
- Recalling the tree metaphor, one's particular beliefs about an issue happens at the above ground, tree branch level because it reflects one's ideas.

3. Are there any gray areas about this issue for you (aspects about which you have mixed feelings or uncertainty)?

- After reflecting on one's experience and thinking, identifying one's uncertainties about the issue helps one reach a place of conversation with others. The grey areas are where conversations can happen most constructively, especially when one is trying to deepen one's understanding about other people's perspectives and/or reach a group decision.



*Genuine conversations call for
suspending judgement, caring
enough to be curious, and
acknowledging that each person
has "something to teach me."*

In the pages that follow, you will find three reflective exercises to help you practice the conversational elements of respect, empathy, and gratitude. Respect challenges people not to make assumptions. Empathy stirs human connection. And gratitude keeps people humble. Practicing respect, empathy, and gratitude is a cornerstone of genuine dialogue and authentic civil discourse.

Practicing Respect

“Respect” comes from the Latin word, “spectare,” which means to look at; and “re” means to do again. To respect someone, then, is to look at them again—to really look at them anew. When we look at people with fresh eyes, when we consider another person with renewed and genuine curiosity, it can offer us a different perspective. And new perspectives can lead to deeper understandings.

This activity asks you to consider a familiar story from a slightly different perspective. Think of a situation in which you were involved recently. Write down what happened but rather than using “I” statements, write from the third-person. In other words, rather than using first-person language to tell a story from the perspective of “I”, describe what happened as if you are another person. For example, rather than saying, “When she said that to me, I became so angry that I couldn’t even think straight” you might say, “When she said that to Mark, his cheeks flushed red with anger, and he stumbled to get his words out.”

Consider doing this activity multiple times, with different situations, as a way to practice stepping outside of the “I” perspective and “looking again” from a different point of view.^[1]

^[1] The inspiration for this activity comes from educator, Calvin Terrell, who integrates the idea of “to look again” as a way to more honestly come to know other people.

Practicing Empathy

Steps for calming your mind & finding the good in people

Why is empathy important?

There is an “empathy” movement in the business world right now. Companies are spending a good deal of time and money training their employees to be more skilled in empathy. Companies are also evaluating business leaders on their empathy skills.

This is because empathy is a critical component of problem solving. When a person understands the thoughts, experiences and feelings of another person or group, they are better able to craft solutions to problems. This is because most problems rarely involve situations that are simply “right v. wrong.” As you already know, life is more often about situations involving “right v. right” problems.

What is the difference between sympathy & empathy?

Here is a cute and funny video on the difference between sympathy and empathy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Generally, sympathy is, pity, or feelings of sorrow for someone else who is experiencing misfortune. Empathy is the capacity or ability to imagine oneself in the situation of another, experiencing the emotions, ideas, or opinions of that person.

I am already empathetic, why should I be more empathetic?

Human beings are pretty good at being empathetic with people they already care about or who they perceive as belonging to their same “group.” What we are not so good at is being empathetic to people outside our own circles.

Which gets us back to problem solving. We cannot solve problems, whether in business, in society, or politically if we are unable to understand the experiences and needs of those of us outside our normal social circles. We will never solve problems by arguing about who is “right” or who is “wrong.” We can only solve problems when we focus on being as fair as possible to everyone and creating ethical and fair processes. And empathy helps us do all those things.

Don't we elect people to solve our problems? Why should I be worried about solving society's problems?

As detailed by the recent testimony of the former Facebook employee, social media platforms, political parties and other groups profit from keeping us fearful, angry, and divided. They make more money from negative and divisive content. (And it is possible to be addicted to anger and outrage.)

So, it is up to us to change what we pay attention to and to start to solve problems. Only by making fear, anger, and division unprofitable will the political and social media dynamics change.

Won't we all feel and live better when we can start solving problems, rather than arguing about them?

Here are a few fun and easy steps to grow our problem-solving skills by increasing our empathy:

A. Recall moment of empathy #1

Recall a time(s) when someone outside your normal social or work circles was kind to you. Or when someone very different from you helped you when you needed help.

Recall how that made you feel. How did it make you feel about yourself? How did you feel about the other person? How did it make you feel about people and the world in general?

Write down what happened, and how it made you feel. Whenever you are feeling down on the world, take this out and read about this event in your life. Try to recall those feelings.

B. Recall moment of empathy #2

Recall a time(s) when YOU were kind or helped someone very different than you or who was outside your normal social or work circles. How did that make you feel? What was it about the other person or situation that moved you to act? Write your answers down.

Compare your answers to both questions. Is there a common connection that the two people or situations shared? (Hint: human vulnerability, suffering and embarrassment are often keys which unlock our empathy to others.)

Didn't it feel good to help someone different than you? Look for opportunities to help others, even in small ways

C. Listen to someone else's story.

Ask them what their day to day lives are like. Questions to prompt these discussions are: 1) "tell me your story. Everyone has a story, and I would like to hear yours!" 2) "Tell me 3 things that bring you joy each day and tell me the 3 things that are challenges for you every day." 3) "What has happened in your life that made you a stronger person?"

You can practice this on someone in your normal social and work circles and when you are feeling confident, start listening to the stories of people different than you. Or people you do not like. You will be pleasantly surprised at how you will understand them better simply by learning more about them.

D. Smile at someone who is different than you.

This is an easy and fun one – just give someone a genuine smile. Not everyone will smile back but when they do, you will be pleasantly surprised at how good YOU feel for having given them a smile.

E. Go to a place where you know there will be people different than you.

Easy and interesting places to go are markets in different neighborhoods, houses of worship in other denominations and neighborhoods, community centers and schools. Use your smile and ask someone how their day is going – then watch – and feel – what happens next.

F. Join a community effort.

You will be guaranteed to meet people who share at least one of your values or experiences and who may be outside your normal social and work circles. Examples are to volunteer at a river or park cleanup event, join a grief group, be part of a community garden or serve at a homeless or battered women's shelter.

Good luck with building your empathy and problem-solving skills. And have fun doing so!

Practicing Gratitude



1. Write down 3-5 things that you are grateful for in your life. Take some time to reflect on what you have written.
 2. Meditate on everything and anything that you think deserves to be appreciated. No matter how big or small.
 3. Make a list of the 5 most appreciated people in your life. Reflect on why they have such an impact in your life. Focus on each person, each night for the next week and then describe 5 things about them that you are appreciative of.
 4. At the end of the week, you will have 25 things that you can be grateful for.
 5. Share your list with someone that you know and trust.
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This activity is based on Dr. Timothy J. Sharp's 100 Ways to Happiness: A Guide for Busy People.

With every conversation, keep in mind...

- Everyone has a right to be understood (*Wheatley, 2009*).
- Significant human needs surface when people disagree (*Makau & Marty, 2013*).
- We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes (*Wheatley, 2009*).



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