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Starting the Conversation

HIGH-QUALITY DISCUSSION PROTOCOLS TO PROMPT
COLLABORATIVE, RESPONSIVE LEARNING

BY USABLE KNOWLEDGE (/TAXONOMY/TERM/44761), ON MAY 9, 2017 5:03 PM

One in a series of strategies and resources adapted (http://us12.campaign-archive2.com/?u=7224353c1410911b1db235b0&id=84adb77ae2) by Usable Knowledge *from the Teaching and Learning Lab (https://tll.gse.harvard.edu/)at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (https://www.gse.harvard.edu/).*

Discussion protocols can be an important tool for prompting and structuring class conversation. These protocols create an outline of procedures for students to follow, often including assigned roles, specific directions, and details on timing.

Instructors use protocols for a variety of purposes, including:

- To enhance the structure and clarity of an open-ended task, such as brainstorming or generating ideas;
- To distribute participation by encouraging students to take turns and to alternate between speaking and listening;
- To assign clear roles and tasks so that students can maximize opportunities for collaborative work.

Some educators may worry that protocols can lead to an *overly* structured discussion that is less free flowing and organic. But structure can be useful when the discussion topic is controversial or when students feel reluctant to participate. Protocols can help educators highlight multiple perspectives about an issue or prevent one voice from dominating the conversation. Protocols can also encourage students to ask questions or give honest feedback.

 ** **Here is a collection of <u>high-quality discussion protocols (https://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files//Protocols_Handout.pdf)</u>** [PDF] **to serve common needs**. The PDF also has links to several rich repositories.

<u>Sarah Leibel (https://www.gse.harvard.edu/faculty/sarah-leibel)</u>, a lecturer at the <u>Harvard Graduate School of Education (https://www.gse.harvard.edu)</u>, finds protocols to be an invaluable teaching tool that can promote equity, create structure, and infuse energy into the classroom. They can "really democratize a space, ensuring that everyone has a voice and has access to the conversation," she says. Protocols can scaffold conversations She finds that protocols scaffold conversations so they unfold

in an efficient manner that allows students to interact with readings and with each other in deeper ways. Leibel also appreciates the way some protocols get students up and moving. "I want to build community quickly in the room, have many different people interact, and have many ideas surface," she says.

Leibel recommends developing a go-to set of protocols to use consistently throughout a course, so that students become familiar with them and can jump right into the activity.

Among her favorites is The Final Word (https://www.nsrfharmony.org/system/files/protocols/final_word_0.pdf) [PDF], also known as Save the Last Word — a text-based protocol that supports students in engaging deeply with key passages. One student selects a quotation from the text and reads it aloud. Other students take turns responding to the text, and the original student closes the discussion with a reflection.

Here are two other recommended protocols for digging into a text:

- Four A's (http://www.nsrfharmony.org/system/files/protocols/4_a_text_0.pdf): Students discuss assumptions, what they agree with, what they argue with, and what they aspire to, based on a specific text.
- Socratic Seminar (https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/socratic-seminar): Students discuss what the author was trying to convey by using evidence from a specific text. Students build on one another's ideas without intervention from the instructor.

See the full handout (https://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files//Protocols_Handout.pdf) for a cross-disciplinary range of protocols that promote critical thinking, perspective-taking, data analysis, and more.