



**SHEEDY FAMILY PROGRAM IN
ECONOMY, ENTERPRISE & SOCIETY**

Dialogue Training Manual

Table of Contents

Part 1: Context and Background

[Understanding Dialogue](#)

[Setting Group Norms](#)

Part 2: Five key elements of a dialogue session

[Element #1: Build Community](#)

[Element #2: Create Engaging Activities](#)

[Element #3: Ask Strong Questions](#)

[Element #4: Listen actively](#)

[Element #5: Debrief](#)

Appendices: Tools and examples

[Appendix A: Other Effective Dialogue Skills](#)

[Appendix B: Setting Norms Guide](#)

[Appendix C: Potential Ice-breaker Activities](#)

[Appendix D: Strong Questions Examples](#)

[Appendix E: Lesson Structure Example](#)

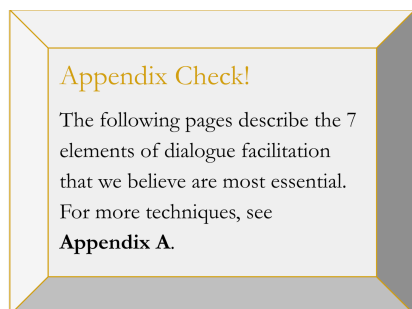
[Acknowledgements](#)

Part 1: Context and Background

Understanding Dialogue

In everyday life, a “dialogue” is any conversation in which **all participants share perspectives** on a question or idea and **listen carefully enough to empathize** with each other and develop their views.

In a good dialogue, participants will practice:



In this course, dialogue typically takes the form of **weekly conversations** around a few big questions:

What does “economy,” “enterprise,” and/or “society” entail? How do they impact our lives or careers? How can we better understand our own roles in them or responses to them?

The goal of Dialogue is **NOT** to answer these questions definitively. Just like everyday dialogue, the goals are to articulate and assess your own beliefs about the question and understand why others may think differently.

These goals are **different** from the goals of normal classroom discussions! In everyday use, “dialogue” and “discussion” are basically synonyms. But not here. Look at the chart that follows for a summary of the distinctions.

Dialogue vs. Traditional Discussion Sections

Traditional In-class Discussions	Dialogues
Purpose: Participants strive for mastery of course material .	Purpose: Participants strive to understand others' perspectives and develop their own views .
Peer leader serves as discussion leader, actively directing the conversation with frequent intervention/correction and Q&A.	Peer leaders work as dialogue facilitators, creating and maintaining an environment in which productive dialogue can occur.
A level playing field is often tacitly assumed, and differences or inequalities within the group may be ignored .	Differences and inequalities within the group are sought out and highlighted to help achieve shared understanding.

Setting Group Norms

A great way to help build community is to set group norms. **Group norms** are mutually agreed-upon ground rules aimed at fostering a respectful environment for productive dialogue. At your dialogue group's **first meeting**, you should collectively identify and agree on group norms you want to practice.

Steps to Establishing Norms:

1. Accept that it might be awkward.
 - The first session can sometimes be awkward, especially when setting norms, so **come ready to meet the awkwardness with energy and enthusiasm**, and know that **the better prepared you are, the less awkward it will be**.
2. Specificity over generality.
 - Norms are more effective when they are as **specific and concrete** as possible. Push one another to define general terms (i.e. “confidentiality”, “respectful”) and/or to clarify meaning through **specific examples of what it might look like**.
 - If you're still stuck, select the most relevant norm from Appendix B.
3. Revisit norms the next week and remember they are always up for revision.
 - After putting the norms into practice in a dialogue, **evaluate them as a group** and **make revisions as necessary**.

Appendix Check!

See **Appendix B** for a comprehensive list of strong guiding questions and sample group norms.

Part 2: Five key elements of a dialogue session

Element #1: Build Community

One of the goals of having dialogue groups is that you feel **a sense of community or belonging** within the Sheedy Family Program. It'll make your experience more enjoyable. It will also foster richer, more productive dialogues. When you feel connected to the other members of your group, you'll become more open to sharing ideas and listening with an open mind.

For that reason, things that build community – like small-talk about campus news or inside jokes – aren't a waste of time. Your dialogue time shouldn't be spent *only* on casual, not-course-related conversations. But if you spend the first few minutes of your time just hanging out or checking in on each other, that's a good thing. (You're, of course, also welcome to hang out as a group outside of your dialogue time, as you see fit.)

Last thing related to community building: We've probably all been in group settings where we find some aspect of it frustrating or unproductive. That may happen in your dialogue group, too. The best way to address this is to *build in regular time for constructive feedback on your group's dynamics*. The time you set aside for debriefing at the end of each session could be a good place to start. (See below for more on debriefing.)

Element #2: Create Engaging Icebreaker Activities

Warm-up or ice-breaker activities may seem cheesy, but they really do help build community. They can also be great places to undertake thought experiments or practice real world scenarios of philosophical ideas. Here are some tips for making successful ice-breakers through the term:

For the first few meetings...

Focus on developing familiarity.

Try to **incorporate name games** or “get-to-know-you” exercises.

Appendix Check!

See **Appendix C** for some ready-to-use activities.

By the middle of the semester,

Try designing an ice-breaker activity related to the meeting's topic.

Take a look at the readings for the day and the questions you want to consider. **Is there a warm-up activity that could lead into a greater philosophical discussion?** For instance, if the goal is centered around utilitarianism, maybe MIT's "[Moral Machine](#)" program would work well to introduce the group to the topic!

Element #3: Ask Strong Questions

Strong questions are the heart of a fruitful dialogue. Do you want to come away from your group's dialogue sessions feeling like you grappled with thought-provoking, meaningful things? If yes, take the time to prepare good questions, then ask them to your group clearly and confidently.

Identifying Strong vs. Weak Questions

Strong questions sustain, weak questions stall.

Strong questions are relevant to the topic at hand, invite reflection, and promote a deeper understanding of a speaker's remarks and the overall topic. They move the conversation forward and often evoke multiple responses. They typically begin with "How" or "Why."

Weak questions that elicit a single, right answer or simple 'yes-or-no' cut off reflective thinking and stall the conversation flow.

Tips for Asking Strong Questions

1. Start from what you know.

Sometimes, the best way to lead into a deep discussion is to **begin with your and your group members' personal experiences**. Start with a specific reflection question that will ease the group into the greater target discussion. For instance, if the meeting's focus question is "how do we decide what is true?" begin by asking, "where do you get your news, and why?"

2. Ask out of genuine curiosity.

Where do you want more understanding? Model intellectual virtue by focusing your questions on areas that you want greater clarity or understanding. Ask your group mates to clarify earlier remarks, reflect, or introduce other perspectives to invite a response.

3. Ask one question at a time.

You/your group may be tempted to ask multiple questions at once to allow many different responses. But what actually ends up happening is you all get overwhelmed and don't know which one to respond to! To minimize confusion and maximize response rate, discipline yourself to ask only one at a time.

4. Be comfortable with silence.

Silence is not necessarily a bad thing. Allow time for your group to reflect and sit with your question by slowly counting to 10 in your head before breaking in with your response. It's tempting to read others' silence as a sign that your question was bad, which makes you want to jump in and reframe it/answer it/diminish it. But, if you do, you'll take away chances for others to learn from it.

Appendix Check!

See **Appendix E** for examples of strong questions.

5. Resist self-deprecating.

“This is probably stupid, but...”, “This is just a really small thing...” “I think I’m just confused but...” It’s tempting to couch our questions (or answers) in language that diminishes our contributions. It’s a way to self-protect when we’re feeling vulnerable; we dismiss ourselves before someone else can. (“Phew, good thing I warned you that I might be stupid...”) But, if we don’t value ourselves or take ourselves seriously, who else will? Practice being brave.

Element #4: Listen actively

Facilitating dialogue is not just about asking strong questions. Hearing and understanding one another’s responses is just as critical to your success. Active listening will help you and your group mates feel heard and respected. That, in turn, will lead to trust and richer dialogues.

Practice Active Listening by:

Verbally...	Non-Verbally...
Asking open-ended or clarifying questions to pursue understanding	Face the speaker to demonstrate interest and recognize participation
Provide verbal affirmations such as “okay” or “yep” to signify that you are following what the participant is saying	Provide non-verbal affirmations like nodding or smiling to signal your understanding
Noting and/or following up with any emotion that comes out to demonstrate empathy and care	Lean forward to listen and show interest
Check for understanding by following up with a summary of what the speaker said to verify or clarify what was said	Make and maintain eye contact ¹ to connect with the speaker and give them your undivided attention
Thank the speaker for contributing to recognize their participation in the conversation	Hold an open, but relaxed posture to express impartiality and openness
Wait for the speaker to finish before jumping in to allow them enough time to complete their thought or provide further evidence	Pay attention to body language —focusing on facial expressions, movement, and posture—to read the unspoken feelings of the group or speaker

¹ Note that eye contact does not have the same significance in all cultures (e.g. eye contact may be avoided with instructors or members of the opposite sex).

Element #5: Debrief

Debriefing is the process of reflecting at the end of each dialogue session (last 5-10 minutes) to achieve the following **2 goals**:

- 1) Reflect on and summarize what happened during the session
- 2) Evaluate the session to improve future dialogues

The following questions are examples of things you might ask to achieve the two goals above.

With Your Group

Debrief the **content**

- ☐ Summarize the dialogue. What were your key takeaways?
- ☐ Did the dialogue cause anybody to reconsider any of their beliefs or values?

Debrief the **method or group dynamic**

- ☐ Did the structure of the session promote good dialogue?
- ☐ How well did we follow our group norms?
- ☐ Are we all engaged? Is there tension or awkwardness we can address? What would we like to do differently next time?

Debrief the **next steps**

- ☐ How can we incorporate what we've learned today into our lives moving forward?
- ☐ Looking at the readings or topic, what would you like to talk about next week?
- ☐ Are there any tasks or assignments that need to be completed this week?

Part 3: Appendices

Appendix A: Other Effective Dialogue Facilitation Skills

Technique	Why do it?	Options for How to Do It:
Provide a Content Advisory (when you are about to dialogue about an emotionally charged or personal issue)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow people to mentally prepare Avoid putting people immediately on defensive Set expectations for how to engage 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> What to say: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Be direct. “I want to talk about something that may be [intense/uncomfortable]: xyz.” OR “Hey, content advisory here: I want to talk about xyz.” Say why you would like to discuss it (relate it to the course goals, a previous dialogue session, or the group’s perceived interest in the topic) Say what you hope you all will gain from dialoguing about this topic. Ask “Is everyone cool with that?” Be willing to listen, if others have reasons for saying no.
Raise Counter Points (when your group is stuck in consensus or you feel certain voices are missing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote critical reflection Validate opposing positions Create a space for diverse opinions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ask “What might someone who disagrees say/feel about this?” or “As an exercise, how about if we generate a few alternative perspectives from which to look at this idea?” Remind people that your arguments don’t always have to reflect your personal beliefs. State an opposing view while maintaining your neutrality: “Others might have a different take on this issue. For example...” Then invite comments on this view: “Are there any advantages to this view?” “How would you respond?”
Repair Stagnant Conversations (when the conversation reaches “dead silence,” meaning it has reached a natural end or folks don’t know how to respond.*) *Note: You’ll get better at distinguishing between live & dead silences with practice!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revive a conversation that has stalled Provoke more interesting viewpoints 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Step back and ask: “Have we exhausted the dialogue topic? Have any perspectives not been considered?” Tweak the circumstances of the question in some way, and ask if that would change folks’ arguments? If so, how?

Appendix B: Setting Norms Guide

Component of Healthy Dialogue	Examples of Strong Norms (for when your group gets stuck on phrasing)
<p>Egalitarianism</p> <p>Think about the best conversations you have had where you disagreed with one another. What are some things that you did in that conversation that made it go so well?</p> <p>When you are offended by something that is said, what are the best ways to address the situation?</p>	<p><i>Share airtime.</i></p> <p>Be engaged in the dialogue, but leave space for others. Avoid interruptions.</p> <p><i>WAIT Rule</i></p> <p>WAIT stands for ‘Why Am I Talking?’ And serves as an unobtrusive, self-enforcement way to avoid anyone dominating the discussion. To work, group members must be frequently reminded of the rule to create a habit in their minds of speaking purposefully and avoiding rambling.</p> <p><i>The Ouch! Rule</i></p> <p>If at any time a group member is made uncomfortable by something someone said, they can say “ouch!” to signal their discomfort. In acknowledgement, the person who made the hurtful comment must say “oops!” If necessary, there can be further dialogue about this exchange.</p> <p><i>Yes/No to Swearing or Productive Swearing</i></p> <p>Is the use of swearing permitted during dialogue at all times? A group may choose to say yes to swearing if it is not directed at a person or if it is productive in the context of the conversation. This norm is sometimes better addressed anonymously since some people may be sensitive to peer pressure.</p>
<p>Self-Advocacy</p> <p>How can we make sure we all express our own views clearly?</p> <p>What if we get stuck when our ideas are not fully developed?</p>	<p><i>Use “I” Statements.</i></p> <p>When expressing a feeling, telling a story, or navigating a conflict, always express statements from the first person point of view rather than making accusations or blaming others. Say “I feel ___, when ___,” not “You do this thing that’s bad.”</p> <p><i>No one is the spokesperson for their identity group (race, gender, religion, etc.).</i></p> <p>Though they may reflect the views of the communities they belong to, people in dialogue are not expected to nor should they represent organizations or groups.</p> <p><i>Challenge yourself to say what you really mean.</i></p> <p>Direct and honest communication is important for good dialogue. Avoid sarcasm.</p>
<p>Vulnerability</p> <p>How can vulnerability be a good thing?</p>	<p><i>Don’t just jump in when the water’s warm.</i></p> <p>Challenge yourself to share your reaction even when you disagree or don’t relate.</p>

<p>How can we create an environment for everyone to feel open to sharing?</p> <p>What guidelines can we agree on now in order to create a learning environment in which we can ask each other anything?</p>	<p><i>Names stay, ideas leave</i></p> <p>Honor confidentiality by continuing to discuss interesting talking points outside of the classroom, but do so without attaching people's names to stories or beliefs.</p> <p><i>Address the statement, not the person.</i></p> <p>People may make statements that will offend or oppose the beliefs of others. In these situations, the group should react by addressing <i>what</i> was said, not <i>who</i> said it.</p>
<p>Active Listening</p> <p>What are some common distractions you face in conversation? How can we avoid distractions?</p> <p>How can we make sure that people feel that their voice is heard?</p>	<p><i>Put away the technology.</i></p> <p>Phones, laptops, and tablets should not be used during dialogue meetings.</p> <p><i>One speaker at a time</i></p> <p>Avoid side conversations or talking over people.</p>
<p>Suspension of Judgment</p> <p>How can we ensure that this is a "judgment free zone"?</p> <p>How can we make sure we stick to dialogue, not debate or discussion?</p>	<p><i>Assume best intentions.</i></p> <p>If something happens that causes tension within a dialogue (e.g., by offending others or derailing the dialogue), remind yourself everyone has good intentions and react accordingly.</p> <p><i>Five Minute Spotlight</i></p> <p>When someone feels a view is in the minority, is being overlooked, or is being misrepresented, they can invoke the Five Minute Spotlight. Dialogue is paused, and everyone in the group must for the next 5 minutes attempt to give the best possible case for that particular view. No one can raise objections without providing a rebuttal themselves.</p>
<p>Awareness of Background Assumptions</p> <p>How can we avoid falling victim to implicit biases?</p> <p>How can we make sure all perspectives get shared?</p>	<p><i>Look and listen for who is missing.</i></p> <p>Often, your group will reach consensus because you all share a particular background. When consensus happens, check your biases and ask what perspectives are not at the table.</p> <p><i>Ask about desired names & pronouns before using them.</i></p> <p>Don't assume you know someone's gender or name before they tell them to you.</p>
<p>Thoughtful Reflection</p> <p>How can we ensure that we are truly considering other perspectives?</p>	<p><i>Listen with an open mind.</i></p> <p>Think about what was said before formulating a response. Try to empathize with the viewpoint of the person speaking, even (and especially) if you disagree: Listen, and ask, for what experiences are behind the ideas they are expressing.</p>

Appendix C: Example Ice-breaker Activities

Early Semester (Meetings 1-3)

Name: Name Stories
Emphasis: Learning names
<p>Each person in your group should share for 3 minutes about the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the history of your name (first, middle, and last)? • What is your name's meaning and significance? • What does it feel like to have your name? <p>Then, the full group will take around 10 minutes to discuss any of the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it like to have your name? • Does your name reflect anything about your social identities? • Can people identify you accurately in terms of your social identities based on your name? • Do you think people make assumptions about you based on your name? • Have you ever felt discriminated against based on your name? Privileged because of your name? • Have you ever had to/wanted to change your name? Why? • How has reflecting on your name just now impacted you? <p><i>VARIANT:</i> Each person draws a picture that represents their name, then explains their drawing, then moves into the questions above.</p>

Name: Name that Tune (with 4 songs!)
Emphasis: Group bonding
<p>Description:</p> <p>This icebreaker activity adds a twist to the typical “Name That Tune” activity. Instead of having only one song playing, you have four songs playing at the same time! You would award a point for the correct title of a song and another point for the correct artist, which means that each round would offer a maximum of eight points. I would recommend that you create teams of at least four people in each group because the main point of this icebreaker is to allow students to grow closer through conversation.</p> <p>I would recommend Garageband to create a sound clip that plays all four songs at the same time. The first step is converting Youtube videos into mp3 versions by using an online converter. Then, you download the mp3 versions and place them into Garageband to have an audio clip that plays the mp3 versions of multiple songs at once. If you need further clarification, feel free to reach out to fjang@nd.edu.</p>

Mid and Late Semester (Meetings 4-9)

Name: What is your struggle?
Emphasis: Group bonding
Description: Pass out a sheet of paper to each student. Ask them “What is your struggle?” Give them 1 minute to write down their response on their paper, fold it, and return it to you (they are not to write their names on their papers). Then, shuffle them and return a random paper to each person. Each person then reads the struggle they were given one by one. Then, debrief. Ask questions such as “How did you feel when yours was read? What did you learn from this?” You want to get to the point of discussing how we all have struggles though we might not want to show it, then discuss why.
Name: Meaningful Life Scenarios
Emphasis: Meaning
Description: Write down what a meaningful life would be for you if: (1) You were the only person on earth (2) You believed the opposite about God (3) You knew you will live at least to 100 Go around sharing a thought for each scenario.
Name: Quick Compliments
Emphasis: Fast Warm-Up, Community Building
Description: Each person says a compliment to the person on their right one-by-one, until everyone has given and received a compliment.

Appendix D: Strong Questions Examples

Get to Know You/Ice-breaker Questions

- What are you proud of regarding your identity?
- What is the best book you read in the last 6 months? Why?
- What is the best movie you've seen recently? Why?
- What was the craziest dream you had in the last few weeks?
- What do you most like to do with a free hour? Why?
- How did you meet your best friend(s)?
- If you could choose to be an animal, what animal would you choose? Why?
- What do you think you will be doing ten years from now?
- What is the most significant thing that has happened in your life in the last three months? Why?
- What one personal object would you keep if you could take only one thing with you in a move? Why?
- What is your earliest memory of feeling different from others? How did that experience impact your beliefs?
- What person has influenced your life the most? Why?

Strong Dialogue Questions

Recall that strong dialogue questions relate to the topic at hand. Not every one of these questions would be appropriate for every session. Try imagining the kind of lesson that would call for each question here, then use them as a model for your own question-writing.

- What are three things that others don't know about your identity from looking at you that you wish that they knew?
- What types of courage do you see lacking on our campus?
- Describe a time when you were offended by someone's question about your identity. Why were you offended? What did you do? How do you think social power and privilege were involved in the situation?
- How have gender roles impacted your choice of study/career, interests, and/or daily life?
- Who were you taught to look up to? Who were you taught to look down on?
- What problems in our community compel you to take action or do you find to be in need of urgent change?
- What do you wish every student who graduated college knew more about?
- How do you seek out the truth in your own life and learning habits?
- Where does the classroom end?
- What aspects of your identity do you hide?
- In what settings or around whom do you tend to stay silent about issues you care about?
- What have you seen in your community that gives you hope for improved race relations? What discourages you?
- What and/or who do you think of when you hear "mental disability"?
- What comes to mind first when you hear the word "reality"? Why?
- Why should we care about the truth? Should truth be the primary end of the classroom?

- Has your faith/lack of faith ever been challenged? When?
- When do you feel the most alive? Why?
- If you had one hour before the world ended, what would you do? Why?
- Who would you turn to in a time of need? Why?
- What is your biggest worry? Why?
- What is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen? Why?
- Who challenges you the most?

Clarifying or responding to one another

- “Can you repeat what *student x* just said?”
- “What experiences inform that belief?”
- “Can you explain what you mean by ‘responsibility’ in this context?”
- “What might someone on the other side of this issue think?”
- “How else could this be interpreted?”
- “If you could summarize your thought in one sentence, what would it be?”
- “What responses do you hope others would have next time that happens?”

Sample questions for reflection on accomplishments:

- What do you think we accomplished this semester?
- How has being in this dialogue group affected you personally?
- How will you behave or think differently as a result of an experience in this group?
- How could our group have been better? What things could facilitators have done better?
- How have our group dynamics evolved over time?

Appendix E: Lesson Structure Example

We're not asking you to design a full dialogue lesson plan until the end of the term. Still, you might find this example helpful for thinking about the structure or flow of a typical, mid-semester dialogue. Note that the time allowances will change across the term. In the beginning, you'll need more time for ice-breaker activities and norm setting. Near the end, you'll want to dedicate more time to debriefing and reflection.

Overview / Goals:

- Students will reflect on the role truth plays in their decision to practice a religion.
- Students will form a view about whether religion tends to divide or unite the campus, and will share thoughts about what -- if anything -- should be done about this.
- Students will start to think about the impact that the afterlife should have on how they choose to live today (an issue that will be picked up in class on Wednesday).

Warm-up activity (10 min)

Split into two groups, tell each other stories and agree on your craziest one. The stories can be true but they don't have to be. Pick one person to describe your chosen story and then allow the other groups to ask direct questions to your group members. The other group should then decide whose story this truly is and who is lying.

Dialogue Intro (10 min)

Barometer and Discussion

- I actively practice a religion
- My religion influences my morality
- At some point in my life I have seriously questioned my religion
- At Notre Dame I feel comfortable and encouraged to practice my religion

Dialogue (10 min)

1. How important is religion and how can it affect our lives and decisions?
2. Can religion be restrictive or segregating?
3. How can religion bring people together? How does it bring students together here?

Afterlife activity (10 min)

Get in your same groups from earlier and pick a different person to present a concept of the afterlife you all agree on. 5 minutes to think.

Closing Discussion & Debrief

- What are we owed in the afterlife?
- If there isn't an afterlife what happens to us when we die?

What was interesting about today's dialogue/any topics to follow up on?

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The dialogue model we use is informed by our experiences running dialogue groups ourselves, and our team's initial training by the Sustained Dialogue Institute in 2015 and 2016. Several components of our manual have been drawn from Sustained Dialogue materials, including:

- Some of the components of dialogue and comparison to discussions on page 4,
- Some ideas found in the setting norms section on page 6, the difference between strong and weak questions and some of the tips on page 9,
- Many of the debriefing questions on page 10,
- The explanation of active listening and its verbal and nonverbal components on page 11,
- Many of the explanations of tips for resolving conflicts on page 12,
- Some of the effective dialogue techniques in Appendix A,
- Some of the sample norms in Appendix B, some of the activities found in Appendix D,
- Some of the strong questions in Appendix E.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Sustained Dialogue for helping to get our program up and running and for the excellent materials on which we drew for aspects of our own materials.