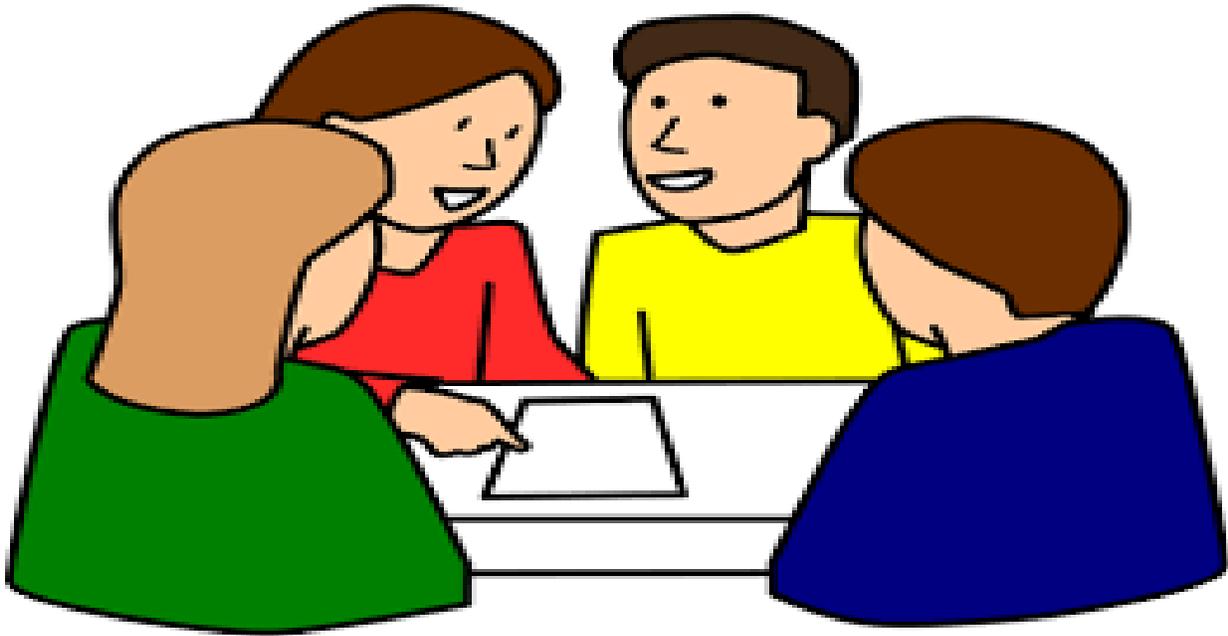# Group discussions

There are a number of specific skills that we can help our students develop to become better able to contribute effectively to group discussions.

- Why learn group discussion skills?
- Dynamics of group discussion
- Types of discussion
- Useful sub-skills for students
- Setting up group discussions
- Giving and encouraging feedback
- Conclusion

Why learn group discussion skills?

Developing group discussion skills is useful for everyday life as we regularly find ourselves having discussions amongst friends, family and colleagues. These may vary from very informal chats about day-to-day things, to more serious topics, for example a discussion about a recent news story or a problem that needs to be solved.

- Additionally, group discussions are increasingly being used in the job market during interviews and selection procedures. These can take a variety of formats, but the key skills remain very similar.

- Last but not least, group discussions offer an opportunity for extended speaking (and listening!) practice by all of the contributors. Group discussion practice and skill development is therefore useful for all students.

Dynamics of Group Discussion

- **Facilitator:** He is leading GD while keeping track of Group Discussion

- **Seeker of Information–** tries to gather and solicit information from others.

- **Disseminator of Information –** prefers to share information and facts.

- **Seeker of Opinion-** tries to gather some opinion from others and ask the fellow participants for their opinion.

- **Giver of Opinion –** Promptly jumps to give his opinion on the views shared by the other participant.

- **Analyst –** analyses and clarifies the ideas and opinions discussed during the group discussion

- **Community Supporter –** supports the ideas of all participants but has none of his own

- **Reliever –** presents and discusses the problem with a broader perspective and makes mountain out of a mole hill and relieves all of any tension.

- **Energy spreader –** This participant can be seen encouraging other participants to explore some new ideas during a GD.

- **Bridge creator –** creates harmony between different opinions by giving a solution with different ways of compromise.

- **Summary maker –** summarizes and concludes a GD by including all important points discussed during a GD.

Types of discussion

There are a variety of different types of discussions that occur naturally and which we can recreate in the classroom.

TRENDING GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS 2020

CURRENT AFFAIRS Knowledge of the current affairs could save you from being blank in the discussion.Develop a list of your business processes

ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORTS: Millennials who are applying for the job, somewhere or the other show interest in entertainment and sports.

SOCIAL TOPICS: The social topics cover the issues or the problems prevailing in the society.Being a resident of the country, you should know the problems and have an opinion on sensitive topics.

TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE: Since the world is progressing with technology, it is mandatory for each of them to know something or the other about technology.

ABSTRACT TOPICS: Abstract topics could bring out the creativity of a person. This could help the recruiter could help the recruiter to understand the creativity level of the candidate.

These include discussions where the participants have to:

- *Make decisions* (e.g. decide who to invite to a party and where to seat them)

- *Give and / or share their opinions on a given topic* (e.g. discussing beliefs about the effectiveness of capital punishment)

- *Create something* (e.g. plan and make a poster as a medium for feedback on a language course)

- **_Solve a problem_** (e.g. discussing the situations behind a series of logic problems)

There are a number of different sub-skills which students will need to be able to successfully and effectively participate in a group discussion. Students need to develop the ability to:

Analyse
This skill can be developed by giving students the topic individually and asking them to brainstorm or mind-map all of the possible sub-topics they could speak about. The students can then swap their notes and assess or analyse the relevance of each of the sub-topics their partner has included. Together, the students then draw up a fresh list or mind-map and discuss how the sub-topics might be linked together, along with examples or reasons for any arguments they might have.

Persuade
This skill comes in useful when students need to make decisions on how to do something (e.g. which candidate should get a job). A fun activity to develop this skill is to give groups of students this topic and ask them to decide on the profile of the perfect candidate, creating a list of 7 adjectives. The students are then re-grouped and asked to persuade the other members of the group that their selection is the best while compiling a second, negotiated list. The group members who retain the most from their original lists are the winners. Note down useful phrases that you hear the students using while doing this task and discuss these at the end for future reference.

Control emotions
This can be practiced by giving the students a fairly controversial topic, such as 'Friends are more important than family' and asking the students to decide whether they agree, disagree or have no opinion, making notes on their main arguments to support their

viewpoint. Divide the students into groups ensuring that there is a mix of views within each group. Explain that for this discussion, the aim is to keep their voices low and try to control their emotions as far as possible. Monitor and give feedback on these areas.

Support
One of the most important things for this skill is for students to learn when it is and isn't appropriate to interrupt and how to do it. Very often students will talk over each other in an effort to get their point across and forget to listen.

To practise this, you can get your students to make a list in small groups of when it is and isn't appropriate to interrupt other speakers. They should include things like 'not appropriate during the middle of a point, if the speaker has not said very much previously, or when you are feeling angry and liable to say something you'll regret'. It is appropriate when the speaker has been dominating the discussion for too long, what the speaker is saying is completely irrelevant to the topic, or you don't understand the **point he / she has made'.**

You can then give them or elicit a list of phrases which they might use to interrupt politely (e.g. 'Can i just add something here?', 'Sorry I'd just like to clarify something,' etc.) The students then write five of these on slips of paper (one per slip) and have a group discussion on a given topic. The aim is to use all of the language on their slips. When they have used a phrase, they put the slip in the middle of the table. The other students in the group judge whether the interruption was appropriate / polite. If not, they take the slip back and try again.

Use functional language
Depending on the types of group discussions that you plan to do with your class, it is useful to draw up a list of useful functional language for the students to refer to. This could include phrases for functions such as 'Giving reasons', 'Giving your opinion', 'Agreeing and disagreeing', etc. You can either make up the list yourself and distribute it or get the students to do this. For each group discussion, you can then refer them to the appropriate section of the list and give them a few moments to consider the language before beginning the discussion.

Setting up group discussions
there are several key things to consider when setting up group discussions in the classroom to ensure that they run successfully.

Use a variety of styles / types

- **Vary group size** and procedure
  some companies do selection group discussions with very large groups of people – over ten in some cases. If your students will be facing these types of group discussions in the future make sure they get some practice doing them. It can also be useful to mix classes of students so they have practice doing discussions with people they don't already know.

- Encourage **group discussions outside** class time
  Give students some extra feedback forms to use to give each other input on how they perform in group discussions outside of class.

Giving and encouraging feedback

Feedback can take several forms and it is a good idea to vary the way it is given. Students can observe each other doing group discussions and give each other feedback on the specific areas of input that you have covered (ideally using a feedback form that you have created).

- Additionally, students can do a 'Reflective group feedback exercise' where at the end of the group discussion they discuss how effective each of the participants was during the discussion. Again, giving them some focused questions to guide this stage will help them. You could also try video-taping the group discussions and playing sections of these back to the class to analyse. Some students find this extremely useful.

- Finally, monitor the groups yourself and make notes for feedback on whole groups or individual performances. Keeping a record of these will help you and the students to see where they have improved.

Conclusion

As we have seen, group discussions can take a variety of formats and are useful for all types of students. They can be done in preparation for job interviews or as extended speaking practice simply to increase fluency.

It is important to consider the different sub-skills that are involved in participating in a group discussion and ensure that you do activities that address each of these. Additionally, structuring and varying the way that feedback is given will help the students to identify areas for improvement.