

LEARNING UNIT PLAN

<b>Title</b>		<b>DIALOGUE AND ARGUMENTATION SKILLS</b>		
Learning number	unit	9	Duration	1 hour

<b>General objective</b>	Teach students how to properly engage in dialogue and build their arguments
<b>Specific objectives</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic rules of the dialogue</li> <li>2. Seven skills of dialogue</li> <li>3. Active listening</li> <li>4. Critical thinking</li> <li>5. Questioning</li> <li>6. Reflection</li> <li>7. Cooperation</li> <li>8. Global Awareness</li> <li>9. Cultural and Religious Literacy</li> </ol>
<b>Learning outcomes (at least 2 of each):</b> Knowledge, Skills, Responsibility and Autonomy	<p><b>Knowledge:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Basic understanding of dialogue skills and argumentation</li> <li>2. Introduction to active listening principles</li> </ol> <p><b>Skills:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distinguishing active and defensive responding</li> </ol>

(see Bloom's  
Taxonomy  
Action Verbs-  
Annex)

2. Awareness of global differences, religious and cultural literacy
3. Asking questions and thinking critically in order to argue one's position
4. Reflection and cooperation in order to better express personal perception and to analyse and to accept perspectives of others.

**Responsibility and Autonomy:**

1. Participants should be able to autonomously reflect upon their dialogue skills and their weaknesses.
2. Participants should identify the most useful areas and practices for themselves.
3. In order to visualise their progress, students are to evaluate their newly obtained skills verbally.

**Learning unit summary (abstract – half a page)**

This unit is to help students to improve their dialogue and argumentation skills. Different key factors, important abilities and basic rules are explained in this unit in order to deliver a clear understanding of how many-sided the art of communication is. Participants will not only learn how to talk and express their opinion but also how to identify their personal attitude towards a specific topic of the conversation. They will obtain knowledge on which crucial aspects are to bring their argumentation ability on a higher level. It is to be underlined that behind every argument there should be a transparent comprehension of the reasons behind the personal position.

## List of resources, tools and methods<sup>1</sup>

1. The Seven Skills of Dialogue: <https://youtu.be/F7qB66lZp4w>
2. Think fast, Talk Smart: Communication Techniques: <https://youtu.be/HAnw168huqA>
3. The #Science of Argumentation | Kevin Paiz-Ramirez | TEDxABQED: <https://youtu.be/-MWkN9ilo6I>
4. How To Win An Argument Without Making Enemies? <https://youtu.be/lgXqaS08ZqM>

## 9. DIALOGUE AND ARGUMENTATION SKILLS

### Introduction

In this unit participants will learn how to enhance their dialogue and argumentation skills. Apart from the basic recommendations, students will acquire knowledge about “Active Listening” and how to perform it. Critical thinking, questioning and reflection are explained in the unit as prerequisites of argumentation. Moreover, it is important to understand other side skills that are relevant for a dialogue such as cooperation, global awareness, cultural and religious literacy.

But more importantly, in case of dialogue and argumentation that are unexceptional parts of the communication, only practice will make perfect!

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<sup>1</sup> Example: videos; ppt; exercises; check list; case study; etc

## 9.1 Dialogue

Dialogue is a form of conversation where people genuinely try to access different perspectives to enable a new understanding to emerge. Unlike debate, dialogue seeks to discover a new meaning that was not previously held by any of the participants in the dialogue.



To begin with, every individual can prepare for and get the most out of dialogue already by following these basic rules:

1. **Build your vocabulary.** Ideally, you want to articulate your views and contribution in a manner that invites consideration of possible new perspectives, without putting anyone down and triggering resistance. This is hampered if we have a tendency towards certainty and a habit of sharing facts and certainties rather than exploring possibilities.

Basic things you can do in order to build your vocabulary:

- a. Read: by reading you can become more aware of words because you encounter yourself with all types of words, and many of them can be

unknown. You should read things that you find interesting, in this way you will not get easily distracted.



- b. Use a Dictionary: have your own dictionary always nearby, this way if you encounter yourself with an unknown word, you can look it up immediately, if not you might forget about it. Always try to mark the words you have looked up, in order to remind yourself you already know what it is about.

2. **Learn to listen.** The quality of our listening can determine the quality of our contribution to dialogue. It is a real challenge to listen well. It requires keeping an open mind and really hearing what the other person's experience is. It is a challenge because our minds are sense-making machines, and we tend to make sense by comparing what we see and hear to what we have seen and heard in the past.
3. **Learn to advocate.** This is about putting across one's views. There is an art to doing this constructively in a dialogue environment:
  - Acknowledge other's maps – in other words, their way of seeing things, their beliefs and values
  - Offer, rather than impose your thinking and views
  - Discriminate between fact and opinion – when you are sharing, make it clear which is which.

4. **Learn to inquire.** This is about exploring one's own and others' mental maps, of understanding more than you can see, and seeing through other's eyes. Essential tools for enquiry are questions. Ask a question and it is almost impossible for anyone listening to stop their brain thinking of an answer.
5. **Open questions.** Open questions are particularly useful in dialogue. These ask the why and what questions, and open things up for fuller exploration. Who, when and where tend to be more specific questions, so focusing on what and why is a good capability to cultivate? It is more difficult than it sounds, as open questioning requires a mind that stays a level higher than problem-solving and is more about understanding context and issues in depth.
6. **Good manners matter.**
7. **Body language.** Notice your body language as you participate. When you lose interest or find you disagree with or judge what is being said, what happens to your eye contact with the speaker and others in the group? What happens to your posture? Even if you do not realise what you are doing or if you think it inconsequential, others pick up the clues of your wandering focus and attention. Lack of eye-contact and the shifting of someone's body back and out from the group speaks volumes to others – and they can get the wrong message.

But if we go a little deeper into the topic, we can distinguish seven main skills of dialogue. They are:

1. *Deep listening*
2. *Respecting others*
3. *Inquiry*
4. *Voicing openly*
5. *Suspending assumptions & judgements*
6. *Balancing advocacy and inquiry*
7. *Reflecting*

### 9.1.1 Main Skills of Dialogue

#### **Deep listening**

In its most simple form deep listening derives from the conscious choice to listen. It involves quietening the voice in our heads so that we can hear the true story of the person to whom we are listening. As we listen to understand their whole story we literally stay quiet and just listen. In exercises that we conduct on listening, people often report that they are amazed at how much they can hear when they know that all they must do is listen. Instead of readying themselves for their turn to speak, the listener focuses on understanding the speaker. Deep listening can occur anywhere, anytime. It could be with a team member while walking down a corridor. It might be with a customer in a busy department store or on the telephone. It might even be with our own partners! Imagine the difference that enhanced listening could make in that domain! The common element in all listening examples is the genuine choice to listen. It is both powerful and important if deep listening is to occur.

#### **Respecting others**

Voltaire, a French author and humanist once said: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." This perspective lies at the heart of respecting others. Clearly this is particularly difficult to do when we interact with people who have contrasting views to our own. Practicing this dialogue skill therefore becomes imperative if we are to develop the true capacity to dialogue. While respecting others does not mean that you have to agree with them, it does mean that you will allow them the time and space to have their say and you will see it as a perspective that while you may not understand it, it is a perspective that is valid in the context that it contributes, even if only in a small way, to our understanding of the 'complete' picture of whatever is our area of focus at the time.

### **Inquiry**

This is the capacity to ask genuine questions. As such it encourages the use of open questions that enhance our understanding of different perspectives or assist in the deeply held mental models that lie behind many perspectives to come to the surface.



### **Voicing openly (advocacy)**

Many of us are quite talented in this skill, at least in part. Voicing openly is the capacity to say what you think *and* to be able to explain why you think what you think. Unfortunately, many people struggle to share their view. All views, if they exist, are important for the development of a true understanding of a situation. If those views are not shared, then a part of the picture is missing which is why voicing is so important in the context of dialogue.

### **Suspending assumptions & judgements**



The capacity to explain why we hold the views that we hold lies at the heart of suspending assumptions & judgements. Much like we hang our clothes on a line for them to dry, suspending means that we 'hang out' our reasons for our views. This allows people to look at them, question them and assist us in developing a deeper understanding of our perspectives. To suspend your assumptions & judgements illustrates a willingness to be vulnerable which is a key attribute of servant leaders. If we discover that our views are not useful, we could adopt new ones. This experience is often described as true learning.

### **Balancing advocacy and inquiry**

This is as simple and complex as balancing sharing our view and why we have it with asking genuine questions to better understand another person's view, or to allow the group to talk about issues that will enhance the whole group's collective understanding of a topic. To practice this skill involves utilizing all the skills listed above; deep listening, respecting others, inquiry, voicing openly and suspending assumptions & judgements. Even if the other people with whom you are conversing are not trying to dialogue, practicing this skill significantly enhances the quality of your contribution to the conversation. People will notice your enhanced communication skills because the quality of the conversations within which you participate will be enhanced by your contributions to them.

### **Reflecting**

Our fast-paced world offers little time to reflect. However, the capacity to reflect is a big rock and enhances our communication skills and capacity to dialogue through considering how we have just practiced our skills. In team environments it is worth



holding a reflection at the end of an attempted dialogue to recognize where the skills of dialogue were used effectively and where they could be improved.

## Summary of Dialogue

Various skills of dialogue can be practiced at any time in any form of communication, and providing they are used for the purpose of genuinely enhancing communication, practicing these skills will provide immense benefits for all involved and result in improved team/group performance.

### 9.2 Argumentation Skills

#### 9.2.1 Active Listening

It is important that we develop the skill of listening properly, that is, deeply and reflectively to one another. It is important to remember that we listen with more than our ears; we can show our attention with our eyes and bodies and in the ways that we react to one another. Are we able to ask questions to get more information or deeper understanding? When we listen properly, we are engaging with the person who is speaking, and we are valuing what they are saying. Most importantly we are showing that we value the person and their ideas, not just waiting to share our own points of view.



#### **Listen vs. Hearing – What is the difference?**

The verbs “listen” and “hear” seem identical, but there is a subtle difference between them. But in some cases, we can often use them interchangeably.

LISTEN	HEARING
<p>Is to pay attention to a sound.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Voluntary</li> <li>● With attention</li> <li>● With effort</li> </ul> <p>You make a decision to listen.</p>	<p>Is to sense a sound with your ears.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Involuntary</li> <li>● Without attention</li> <li>● Without effort</li> </ul> <p>You do not make a conscious decision to hear.</p>

### 9 Keys to Active Listening:

1. Thinking about what your body language and posture are saying to them
2. Not interrupting
3. Using silence effectively, waiting for them to say what they need to say
4. Paraphrasing or summarizing the emotion and content of what you are hearing. You are not agreeing with the person, merely reiterating what they said.
5. Reflecting an emotion – “You are feeling angry.”
6. Reflecting content – “You feel angry because these things have happened to you.”
7. Refraining from judgement or evaluation, just reflecting what the other person is saying – “If I understand what you’re saying...”
8. Asking the person to say more about their experiences or feelings in a way that shows you are interested.
9. Affirming a person when you agree with what they are saying.

Pay attention to how *Active Listening* differs from *Defensive Listening*:

Active Reply: "It sounds like **you are really frustrated** that I am so busy, and **you are missing me**. When do **you wish** I was around the most? **Let's try to find a way** to spend more time together."

Defensive Reply: "But **I am working** so that **I can make** money **to send you to school, buy your clothes and your food!**"

Active Listening demonstrates to the other person that you are really listening to them – this helps to reduce conflict. Defensive Listening does not demonstrate understanding or that you care about them.

Sometimes this is remembered by the LISTEN mnemonic.

<b>L</b>	<b>OOK</b> interested, get interested.
<b>I</b>	<b>NVOLVE</b> yourself by responding.
<b>S</b>	<b>TAY</b> on target.
<b>T</b>	<b>EST</b> your understanding
<b>E</b>	<b>VALUATE</b> what you hear.
<b>N</b>	<b>EUTRALISE</b> your feelings.

Listen carefully to what the other person is saying.

## 9.2.2 Critical thinking

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally, understanding the logical connection between ideas. Critical thinking might be described as the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking

We need to think critically and creatively. This means that we are given opportunities and challenges that help us to develop the habit of questioning and analyzing ideas that they encounter. We should be able to identify assumptions and biases, as well as to consider that some arguments are more valid and comprehensively supported than others.

Critical thinking empowers students to analyse information, to reflect upon its sources and to be able to make informed and rational judgments. We should be able to explain why we have reached their conclusions and support their points of view.

In order to think critically we need to be able to:

- Think about a topic or issue in an objective and critical way.
- Identify the different arguments there are in relation to a particular issue.
- Evaluate a point of view to determine how strong or valid it is.
- Recognize any weaknesses or negative points that there are in the evidence or argument.
- Notice what implications there might be behind a statement or argument.
- Provide structured reasoning and support for an argument that we wish to make.

It is important to ask yourself questions and not just accept information, easily, analyze it before you pass judgement.

### 9.2.3 Questioning

We need the opportunity to develop and practice the skill of asking good questions. Good questions are those that help to enrich our understanding. We want to improve our ability to ask questions that enable us to elicit full explanations, deeper meaning and a detailed explanation of significance. Good questions do not just give us more information but enable us to dive into the experience of other people and to start to appreciate and understand the way that they see the world and why that is the case. Good questions are often response questions, that is, questions that arise from what has been heard; they always help students to deepen their understanding.

### 9.2.4 Reflection

It is critical to create space and allow time, opportunities and the practise of skills so we understand better what we have learned, how we have learned and how this could be improved in the future. Reflection allows us to work alone or in groups, and to take responsibility for developing our own understanding. We should also reflect upon how we feel about what we have learned, and upon the impact that this learning has made upon our lives.

### 9.2.5 Cooperation

It is important that we move beyond 'group work' activities where we work together in such a way that some do all the work and others do very little. The best activities are the once that encourage cooperation, where all participants are empowered to engage positively with the ideas and activities of the topic and (most importantly) with each other.

## **Global Awareness**

The idea behind global awareness is to create global citizens who are open to those raised in different countries, cultures and religious settings. We should develop the ability to become more aware of the processes and outcomes of globalization. This will, in turn, help us to see ourselves as individuals within a global



community and to develop an appreciation of how we are not isolated but, in fact, valuable and valued citizens of the world. When we think about global awareness, we want to be proud of the things that make our communities unique while at the same time recognizing the things that we share with the others around the world. It is important that we can see the diversity of the world in which we

live – not only being aware of things that are similar between different people, traditions and countries, but also being confident about exploring differences between them.

## **Cultural and Religious Literacy**

We need to develop the ability to become more aware of the significance of religious belief, culture faith and traditions as a force in contemporary global society. We should understand the diversity within traditions as well as exploring and understanding a spectrum of perspectives – including both those of a range of religious believers and those with secular worldviews.

