



The best Socratic Seminars are those in which something new and unexpected is discovered. This happens when the Socratic Seminar is approached as a collective search for information or exploration of ideas through dialogue, rather than a defense of opinions through debate.

Dialogue	Debate
Dialogue is collaborative, with multiple sides working toward a shared understanding.	Debate is oppositional, with two opposing sides trying to prove each other wrong.
In dialogue, one listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground.	In debate, one listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.
Dialogue broadens, and possibly changes, a participant's point of view.	Debate affirms a participant's point of view.
Dialogue thrives on an open-minded attitude and openness to being wrong and to changing.	Debate fosters a close-minded attitude and a determination to be right and defends assumptions as truth.
In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it, rather than threaten it.	In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenges to show that it is right.
Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.	Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
In dialogue, one searches for strengths in all positions.	In debate, one searches for weaknesses in opposing positions.
Dialogue respects all of the other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend.	Debate rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.
Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to workable solutions.	Debate assumes that someone already has a single right answer.
Dialogue remains open-ended.	Debate demands a conclusion and a winner.



Before the Seminar

- Read the text or consider the artifact/prompt carefully.
- Use highlighters to mark crucial portions of the text.
- Make notes in the margins.
- Look for places where the author is stating his or her views, arguing for them, or raising questions.
- Write Level 2 or 3 questions (Costa's Levels of Thinking).
- Make connections between parts of the text by using your margin notes.
- Think about what you have read and how you understand it.
- Make connections between the ideas in the text and what you know from your life experiences.

During the Seminar

- Be prepared to participate; the quality of the seminar is diminished when participants speak without preparation, or do not participate at all.
- When appropriate, refer to the text; a seminar is not a test of memory.
- Ask for clarification when you are confused.
- Take turns speaking instead of raising hands.
- Listen carefully and actively to other participants.
- Speak clearly so all can hear you.
- Address other participants, not the seminar leader.
- Discuss the ideas of the text, not each other's opinions.
- Show respect for differing ideas, thoughts, and values.
- Give evidence and examples to support your responses.
- Help fellow participants clarify questions and responses.
- Keep your mind open to new ideas and possibilities.

After the Seminar

- Reflect on your participation as an individual and the group as a whole.
- Discuss with your group parts of the seminar you think went well and which skills you and your fellow participants still need to improve.
- Use writing to think about both the process and the content of the seminar.
- Be prepared to help set goals for improvement in the next seminar.

Custer, H., Donohue, J., Hale, L., Hall, C., Hiatt, E., Kroesch, G., Krohn, B., Malik, S., Muhammad, F., Quijano, V., Shapiro, D., & Valdez, S. (2011). *AVID postsecondary strategies for success: A guide for faculty and student affairs professionals*. San Diego, CA: AVID Press.



- Be prepared to participate and ask good questions. The quality of the Socratic Seminar is diminished when participants speak without preparation.
- Show respect for differing ideas, thoughts, and values-no put-downs or sarcasm.
- Allow each speaker enough time to begin and finish his or her thoughts-don't interrupt.
- Involve others in the discussion, and ask them to elaborate on their responses.
- Build on what others say-ask questions to probe deeper, clarify, paraphrase, add to, and synthesize a variety of different views in your own summary.
- Use your best active listening skills-nod, make eye contact, lean forward, provide feedback, and listen carefully to others.
- Participate openly and keep your mind open to new ideas and possibilities.
- Refer to the text often, and give evidence and examples to support your response. Discuss the ideas of the text, not each other's opinions or personal experiences.
- Take notes about important points that you want to remember or new questions that you want to ask.

Boldway, S., Carter, M., Compton, R., Gutierrez, S., Mullen, M., & Valdez, S. (2012). *The write path English language arts: Exploring texts with strategic reading*. San Diego, CA: AVID Press.

Clarifying

- Could you repeat that?
- Could you give us an example of that?
- I have a question about that: ... ?
- Could you please explain what _____ means?
- Would you mind repeating that?
- I'm not sure I understood that. Could you please give us another example?
- Would you mind going over the instructions for us again?
- So, do you mean... ?
- What did you mean when you said... ?
- Are you sure that...?
- I think what _____ is trying to say is....
- Let me see if I understand you. Do you mean _____ or _____?
- Thank you for your comment. Can you cite for us where in the text you found your information?

Probing for Higher Level Thinking

- What examples do you have of... ?
- Where in the text can we find...?
- I understand ..., but I wonder about....
- How does this idea connect to ... ?
- If _____ is true, then... ?
- What would happen if _____ ?
- Do you agree or disagree with his/her statement? Why?
- What is another way to look at it?
- How are _____ and _____ similar?
- Why is _____ important?

Building on What Others Say

- I agree with what _____ said because... .
- You bring up an interesting point, and I also think... .
- That's an interesting idea. I wonder... ? I think... Do you think... ?
- I thought about that also and I'm wondering why... ?
- I hadn't thought of that before. You make me wonder if ... ? Do you think... ?
- _____ said that... I agree and also think....
- Based on the ideas from _____ and _____, it seems like we all think that....

Expressing an Opinion

- I think/believe/predict/imagine that... What do you think?
- In my opinion....
- It seems to me that....
- Not everyone will agree with me, but....

Interrupting

- Excuse me, but... (I don't understand.)
- Sorry for interrupting, but... (I missed what you said.)
- May I interrupt for a moment?
- May I add something here?

Disagreeing

- I don't really agree with you because....
- I see it another way. I think....
- My idea is slightly different from yours. I believe that... I think that....
- I have a different interpretation than you....

Inviting Others into the Dialogue

- Does anyone agree/disagree?
- What gaps do you see in my reasoning?
- What different conclusions do you have?
- ___ (name), what do you think?
- I wonder what ___ thinks?
- Who has another idea/question/interpretation?
- ___ (name), what did you understand about what ___ said?
- We haven't heard from many people in the group. Could someone new offer an idea or question?

Offering a Suggestion/Redirecting the Seminar

- We can't seem to find the connection to the text. Could you point out what and where that connection is?
- We all want to remember that our goal is a flow of questions and comments and ideas to be shared, rather than a debate to be won. How could your comment be rephrased to reflect our goal?
- Maybe you/we could....
- Here's something we/you might try:
- What if we... ?
- We seem to be having a debate instead of a dialogue, can we... .
- Who has another perspective to offer that will help us re-focus the conversation?
- Let's look at page ___ and see what we think about....

