

Activity 3.3 Awareness of Context, Bias, & Assumptions

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Description

This activity will help participants to identify their own assumptions about an issue and put those assumptions in plain view of others during a discussion. This activity will demonstrate how these judgments affect how we communicate with others.

Learning Goals

- Encourage honest introspection about one's beliefs, values, and biases.
- Learn how to use the knowledge of biases and assumptions in a positive way.

Instructions (50 minutes)

Set Up	Prepare for the Activity Provide sheets of paper, colored markers, and tape. Organize participants into small groups (4-6 ppl). Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.	
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¹ **Citation for this activity:** Lori Britt (2023). Awareness of Context, Bias, & Assumptions. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-3>

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<p>Step One</p>	<p>Individually Reflect on Biases & Assumptions</p> <p>Give each small group a controversial topic to discuss. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government should provide universal basic income to all citizens. <p>Before engaging in discussion, ask each participant to write down any preconceived ideas, biases, or pre-formed opinions about the topic on a large piece of paper.</p> <p>Ask participants to tape the piece of paper to the front of their desk.</p>	<p>5 min</p>
<p>Step Two</p>	<p>Suspend Biases & Assumptions</p> <p>Participants are now, literally, “suspending” their assumptions about the topic. Take a few moments to allow the groups to review the assumptions in front of them.</p> <p>Model how to constructively ask for clarification about any assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you mean by this? • Where does this assumption come from? • Can you give me an example or context for this? <p>Instruct participants not to criticize or debate the value of the assumptions.</p>	<p>15 min</p>
<p>Step Three</p>	<p>Engage in Small Group Discussion</p> <p>Ask participants to discuss the prompt in small groups. Encourage them to explore various dimensions or elements of the prompt and examine it from multiple angles or perspectives.</p> <p>Invite participants to revise their assumptions as the discussion progresses. Invite discussants to constructively point out assumptions and biases as the discussion continues.</p>	<p>20 min</p>
<p>Step Four</p>	<p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact, if any, did “suspending” your assumptions have on your own contributions to the discussion? • How did knowing the assumptions of others affect your own communication in the group? • Did you communicate differently with any individual because of their assumptions? Because of your assumptions? 	<p>10 min</p>

Reflection Journal

- Reflect on the following quote: “It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into.”—Jonathan Swift
- How would knowing others’ assumptions benefit discussions in your respective groups? How would such knowledge obstruct a group?
- Are there certain types of topics for which it would not be helpful to know others’ assumptions?
- Do you think it is possible to know people’s assumptions up front and not essentialize or stereotype them? Do you think others would stereotype you for your assumptions?

Practice Journal

This week, reflect on how we might discuss our assumptions in a way that encourages people to look at us as individuals whose perspectives on an issue have been shaped by the context of our lives. Practice sharing your assumptions about a topic with a trusted friend or colleague.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [William Isaacs on Dialogue and Suspending Assumptions](#): Karagianis, Liz. “The Art of Dialogue.” *Spectrum*, MIT, Winter 2001, spectrum.mit.edu/winter-2001/the-art-of-dialogue/. Accessed 3 Sep. 2023.

Activity Cluster

3.3 Awareness of Context,
Bias, & Assumptions

[4.2 Listening to Understand](#)