

THE 3DS OF DISCOURSE

	DIALOGUE	DISCUSSION	DEBATE	
Purpose	Focused on building understanding of a topic; involves exploring it from many angles, active listening, and considering multiple points of view	Focused on idea exchange; participants may already have positions but are still open to hearing new information to shape their opinions on a topic	Focused on advancing a particular position, persuading, and refuting counter arguments; typically more formal with more advanced preparation	C
Student's Role	Openly explore the topic, including diverse research sources, actively listening, rephrasing, asking questions, and practicing empathy	Share what they are thinking, including research and reactions as to why one position may be the strongest	Requires advanced preparation usually on a particular outcome or position; actively responding to and refuting counter arguments against their position, and identifying holes in their logic, reasoning, or evidence of opposing positions	O
Teacher's Role	Model and explicitly teach active listening skills, empathy-building, finding common ground, and considering topics from multiple angles. Prompt students to consider the effects of the topic on multiple stakeholders	Encourage participation from all students, model and explicitly teach source analysis and reasoning skills, and prompt students to summarize each other's points and ask clarifying questions of each other's positions	Craft or guide students to craft the formal motion for debate, explicitly teaching argument and counter argument skills; often serves as the judge of who had the strongest argument based on neutral criteria such as sound logic and evidence	M
Things to Consider	Dialogue is best suited for topics where students are still learning about all of the angles and nuance is involved or for topics where emotions run high, so that there is a focus on the goal of understanding rather than identifying winning arguments and losing arguments	Discussion is best suited for conversations around policy topics where students have some background knowledge and opinions but also want to learn more and consider different ways to approach the topic	Debate is best suited for explicitly teaching persuasion skills and is best for topics where emotions do not run high and when students are assigned the sides randomly or take both positions rather than only sticking with their existing positions	P

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