

DIALOGUES@SCHOOL

# DIALOGUES CLUB TOOLKIT



# Dialogues Club Toolkit

## Your Guide to Bringing Student Dialogues to Campus

### About Dialogues @ School

Dialogues @ School is a significant civic and pedagogic initiative to stimulate **student voice** and student leadership in **collaborative discussions on complex topics** impacting students and their wider school communities. The program aims to encourage civic-mindedness and civil discourse amongst students and **provide students with ways to 'disagree better', increasing collaboration and reducing alienation.**

Dialogues @ School is an educational program that is aligned with five of the **general capabilities in the new Australian Curriculum** along with subject-specific capabilities in English and Humanities. The Dialogues @ School program can be run in a **small-group Club Format** within student leadership committees and subject offerings, or as a **standalone Annual Event** engaging the wider school as part of our Australia-wide Annual Series, or a combination of both. Importantly, all student voice from Dialogues along with acknowledgement of participating schools is collated and **shared with state parliaments through our Voice of Youth report.**

**Dialogues Clubs** are a vehicle for conducting regular, student-led Dialogues at schools. They differ from our Annual Series in being smaller, more informal, and occurring multiple times per year.

### How to Run a Dialogues Club

Running a Dialogues Club is easy, simple, and rewarding. It involves holding meetings either during lunch or outside of school hours, at which members use the tools of Dialogue to discuss important issues. Those meetings can occur as a panel, an open forum, or another format appropriate for the purpose.

### Getting Started

Starting your Dialogues Club need not be complicated. There are just a few simple steps:

- Finding supports: enthusiastic teachers or students
- Understanding how: read our guide (you are!) and other resources
- Organise your first meeting: time, place, topic, speakers and target audience
- Advertise: use Dialogues Club marketing resources to attract participants

### Format & Basic Components

A Dialogue can be as simple as two people with differing opinions, and a quiet place. However, a Dialogues Club aims to share that learning experience as broadly as possible



through a format that involves more participants and even audience members. Some ideas for your meetings depending on how many members your club has include:

- Panel discussion: 3-5 speakers and a moderator
- Open forum: a round-table with a moderator, best for smaller groups
- Interview: an interesting speaker and a moderator/interviewer, creating Dialogue with the audience

Regardless of the discussion format, every meeting should involve the following components:

- Two or more speakers
- An introduction to the speakers and topic
- An opportunity for questions
- Meeting wrap-up and summary

These components can all be easily achieved by simply following the example Agenda and Run Sheet at the end of this guide. Be sure to update it for each meeting so that the details are correct.

## **How to Moderate & Curate a Dialogue**

### **Choosing a Topic**

Selecting a topic is important for ensuring that a Dialogue event creates good discussions. Some key considerations when choosing or wording a topic are:

- Is it relevant to the audience? Will people have opinions on this issue?
- Does the wording leave room for participants to discuss different issues? Overly restrictive topics can lead to debates and less interesting discussions.

Topics should be discussed and planned in advance so that participants know what to expect. Take a look at our Calendar & Example Topics in Appendix 3 to get some ideas and help you plan ahead.

### **Moderating**

Moderating can be daunting, but it isn't hard. Dialogues Clubs provide a great opportunity to develop valuable moderating skills, for both students and teachers, e.g.:

- Establishing an atmosphere of civility, curiosity and respect
- Maintaining a neutral position
- Treating speakers fairly and equally
- Keeping the discussion moving
- Developing techniques and confidence to defuse any emotional situations
- Following arguments and identifying potential common ground as well as key points of difference

You will find useful guides and tips in Resources. Some 'rules of thumb' can be used - try following the Principles which we use for our Big Dialogues, listed below.



### The Brisbane Rule<sup>1</sup>:

"All participants agree to listen carefully, speak respectfully and concentrate on the content of discussions, not on characters - before, during and afterwards, online as well as offline."

### The Principle of Charity<sup>2</sup>:

In philosophy and rhetoric, the principle of charity or charitable interpretation requires interpreting a speaker's statements in the most rational way possible and, in the case of any argument, considering its best, strongest possible interpretation.

### Rapoport's Rules<sup>3</sup>:

- Restate your opponent's argument as well as you can ("steel man" it)
- Note anything new learnt
- Note points of agreement, if any
- Then, and only then, criticise or oppose

### Dialogue Vs Debate:

Dialogue is not debate. There are important differences:

Dialogue	Debate
Speakers aim to explore complex issues to find points of agreement and acknowledge points of disagreement	Speakers aim to defeat the arguments of their opposition
Speakers talk about their own opinion on the matter	Speakers argue for or against a position based on what they are assigned
Speakers talk to each other in a conversational format	Speakers speak in a rigid, one-way format which focuses on argumentation over discussion
Speakers can occupy "grey areas" where it isn't clear if they are in favour of something or against it	Speakers are divided into two teams and must clearly be for or against something
Speakers are allowed to acknowledge things they like about the positions of other speakers and seek to incorporate their ideas into their own perspective	Speakers cannot change their mind and must attack the arguments of others to "win".

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<sup>1</sup> Written for the launch of The Brisbane Dialogues, Mar 2020

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia article "[Principle of charity](#)"

<sup>3</sup> Various sources, [for example](#)



## Appendix 1: Agenda & Run Sheet

<b>PRE-SESSION (3-5min)</b>	<i>Chair &amp; Moderator prepare the venue and ensure there are at least 3-5 people attending as panel speakers, 3-unlimited people attending as audience, and seating clearly shows panel speakers area and audience area. A white board or screen to capture session summary is also visible and the topic and basic attendee information is recorded (see below)</i>	Completed prior to start	NA
	<b>Date &amp; Time:</b> <b>Chair:</b> <b>Moderator:</b> <b>Speakers:</b>		
	<b>Topic &amp; Focus Question:</b> <b>Key Issues:</b> <b>Areas of Agreement:</b> <b>Areas of Difference:</b>		
<b>Item 1</b>	<b>Welcome, Introduction &amp; Overview</b> <i>Acknowledgment of Country and School Mission (30sec)</i> <i>Welcome to speakers and guests (share speaker backgrounds) (1min)</i> <i>Explanation of Topic and Focus Question For Dialogue (30sec)</i> <i>Confirmation of Ground Rules, Roles &amp; Agenda for Session (1min)</i>	Chair	Total Time 3 mins
<b>Item 2</b>	<b>Opening Remarks</b> <i>Each speaker shares their initial thoughts and response to the focus question (approx. 1 min max per speaker) – optional use of whiteboard or live notes to track key points.</i>	Panel	Total time 5 min
<b>Item 3</b>	<b>Moderated Panel Discussion*</b> - Moderator directs discussion between panel members encouraging further exploration where needed. <i>*For 45-60 min dialogues this agenda item can be extended</i>	Panel	8 mins
<b>Item 4</b>	<b>Open Discussion with Audience*</b> <i>Moderator opens discussion between panel members and audience firstly seeking questions and then inviting general comments</i> <i>*For 45-60 min dialogues this agenda item can be extended</i>		7 min
<b>Item 5</b>	<b>Panel's Final Remarks</b> - Final comments from panel members specifically referencing areas where they thought there was general agreement in the discussion vs areas of difference (noted on whiteboard or live notes) (1min per person)		5 min
<b>Item 6</b>	<b>Chair's Wrap &amp; Session Evaluation (2min)</b> <b>Chair's additional commentary</b> on areas of agreement vs difference followed by thanks to panel and audience (& confirms next Dialogue date and topic) <b>Distribution of Evaluation Slips and Box to Place Them In</b> <i>Audience/ Panel Satisfaction Ratings Self-Assessment Slip (sticky notes 1-10: Overall, how satisfied are you that this Dialogues session helped you reflect and grow? 1 very dissatisfied, 10 very satisfied)</i>	All/ Chair/ Moderator	2 min
<b>POST SESSION (3-5min)</b>	<i>Chair collects evaluation slips and takes a photo of whiteboard or saves the live notes documents and completes Post Session Summary documents and sends to school principal cc Dialogues at School coordinator</i>	Completed prior to start	NA

### Ground Rules:

1. **Openness & Trust** - Chatham House Rule - Discussions 'off record' with 'on the record' documented in Live Notes
2. **Balanced Debate** - Respecting both sides of the argument and allowing diversity of views
3. **Competency Over Role** - Respecting the 'value' of the person's opinion regardless of their 'status'
4. **Issues Over Personalities** - Staying 'issues' focused and not letting personalities overpower the agenda
5. **Accountable Actions & Clear Outcomes** - Clear outcomes documented and visible to all
6. **Devices Rule** - Only if needed with Chair's Permission - On Task on Topic!

**End of Meeting Participant Satisfaction Rating** (1 - very low to 10 - very high)



## Appendix 2: Calendar & Example Topics

Meeting	Date	Topic <i>*Suggestions</i>	Organiser/Chair
Term 1, Meeting 1		<i>What's wrong with TikTok?!</i>	
Term 1, Meeting 2		<i>Could AI Improve Education For All?</i>	
Term 1, Meeting 3		<i>Does Australia Have A Youth Drinking Problem?</i>	
Term 2, Meeting 1		<i>Does School Prepare Us (Enough) For Real Life?</i>	
Term 2, Meeting 2		<i>Should 16 year-olds Be Able To Vote?</i>	
Term 2, Meeting 3		<i>What Can We Do About Mental Health in Schools?</i>	
Term 3, Meeting 1		<i>Work and Study: Are The Life Lessons Worth The Time?</i>	
Term 3, Meeting 2		<i>How Can We Make The Most of Social Media?</i>	
Term 3, Meeting 3		<i>Should Wages Be The Same For Adults &amp; Teenagers?</i>	
Term 4, Meeting 1		<i>Is The Future Bright?</i>	
Term 4, Meeting 2		<i>Do Schools Encourage or Discourage Activism Too Much?</i>	
Term 4, Meeting 3		<i>Should The Work/School Week Be Shorter?</i>	

Choosing Topics: When designing your own Dialogue topic, it's important to consider:

- Is this a topic with enough disagreement for an interesting discussion?
- Does the wording address the core issue, where discussion will be most productive?
- Is this a topic which most audience members might have an input on, or are able to easily get a better understanding of without too much research?



## Appendix 3: Post Session Summary

**NOTE:** Chairperson to complete and lodge. **Reminder** - refer to Appendix 1: Agenda for setup, and live track Key Issues, Areas of Agreement, and Areas of Difference on whiteboard or screen

<b>*Topic &amp; Focus Question:</b> <i>(example)</i> <i>Education: is University overrated?</i>	<b>Chairperson:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
	<b>Moderator:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Attendees:</b>		
<b>*What Were The Key Issues?</b>  <i>Eg, 'Most students identified either employment or experience as the most important consideration when choosing their post-secondary pathways'</i>		
<b>*What Could We Agree On?</b>  <i>Eg, 'Many agreed Uni isn't as helpful as it used to be; most still believed education itself was valuable'</i>	<b>*What were our areas of difference?</b>  <i>Eg, 'Audience and panel had strong differences of opinion on whether learning or earning was more important after school'</i>	
<b>*Participant Satisfaction - Reflection &amp; Growth:</b> <i>Overall, how satisfied are you that this Dialogues Club session helped you reflect and grow? Ask audience members to write down their satisfaction score 1-10 on a slip of paper or sticky note using the following rating:</i> <b>(1)</b> - Very Dissatisfied <b>(2)</b> - <b>(3)</b> - <b>(4)</b> - <b>(5)</b> - <b>(6)</b> - <b>(7)</b> - <b>(8)</b> - <b>(9)</b> - <b>(10)</b> - Very Satisfied. <b>Summary Statistics</b> Total Number of Outcome Slips Received: Average Rating (sum of all ratings / total number of slips): Overall Percentage Satisfaction (average rating x 10):		

**Lodging this Form:** Please ensure form is scanned and submitted to Dialogues Club coordinator (NAME: \_\_\_\_\_, EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_) and CC [schools@brisbanedialogues.org](mailto:schools@brisbanedialogues.org)