

# Principles of Cooperative Discussion

*A lesson plan for agriculture education teachers to introduce the FFA Discussion Meet*

## Lesson Objectives

- Observe and identify constructive and destructive traits of group dynamics.
- Identify individual needs for improvement.
- Apply existing and new knowledge to realistic group discussions.
- Practice critical thinking of agricultural issues.
- Introduce concepts of the FFA Discussion Meet and recruit participants for the district competition.

## Materials/Resources:

- Mock Discussion Meet Participant Cards – one card per student for half of class
- Discussion Observation Worksheet – one per student
- Community Interview Homework Assignment Handout – one per student
- FFA Discussion Meet Resources – one topic per student (may use 4-6 each of multiple topics)

## Guided Practice:

### **Activity 1 Instructions:**

- Split the class into two groups.
  - Group A: pass out the mock discussion meet stance cards. This group will participate in a discussion about an assigned topic and play the role described on their stance card. Fifteen unique cards are available, but the teacher can choose which cards to use based on the size of their classroom.
  - Group B: pass out the discussion observation worksheet. These students will observe the conversation and make notes according to the categories on the form. Group A should not know what topics are on the observation form.
  - Floater(s): Select 1-2 students to be group floaters. They will participate in the group discussion in both activity 1 and activity 2. The floater should be given the “Be Yourself” card for Activity 1.
- After everyone understands the activity, give Group A 10 minutes to discuss planning an upcoming FFA activity (FFA Week, a fundraiser, a service project, etc.).

### **Activity 1 Debrief:**

- Following the discussion, ask Group B to describe what they observed category by category.
  - Cooperation:
    - Were people considerate of each other?
    - Did everyone have the chance to speak?
    - Did anyone dominate conversation?
    - Was anyone rude?
  - Active Listening:
    - Did people truly listen to what others said?
    - Did anyone seem to have an agenda they pushed?
  - Factual Information:
    - Did people rely on factual information?
    - Did anyone question information that didn't sound right?
    - Did anyone bend facts to make their points more appealing?
  - Clear Understanding:
    - Did the conversation help everyone fully understand the issue by exploring causes, relevant information and potential solutions?
  - Solution-Based:

- Did the conversation lead to potential answers?
    - Did the group look for or agree on ideas that would be beneficial for the majority?
  - Focus:
    - Did everyone stay on topic or did they get caught in side conversations, tangents, or rants?
  - Innovation:
    - Were new solutions/ideas developed or shared by the group?
  - Delivery:
    - Could you understand everyone?
    - Did people speak so the whole group could hear and address everyone?
- Have the whole class reflect on what cooperative, productive discussion looks like. Write characteristics identified by the students on the board and ask guided questions or add additional points, if necessary. Examples of ideal characteristics:
  - Prepared
    - Understands topic of conversation
    - Open-minded and willing to learn
  - Develops Trust
    - Listens to others' opinions
    - Seeks input from all; not just the loudest
    - Respectful of all thoughts and ideas
  - Solution-Focused
    - Finds value from others' remarks whenever possible
    - Learns from past, but doesn't dwell on it
  - Compromises
    - Able to summarize conversation accurately
    - Creative in finding solutions that make everyone/majority content
  - Future-Minded
    - Seeks opportunities to improve
    - Looks for actions that can be taken from the conversation to move forward
- Discuss how students can develop these characteristics in themselves. Some examples include:
  - Listen to Understand – practice listening with family members and friends and summarize what they said back to them to see if you are hearing the message they are trying to send.
  - Confidence – prepare for solution-focused discussions (meetings, classroom activities, etc.) so your statements have validity and knowledge behind them – this may be reading information, thinking through your opinions in advance, surveying those you represent about their thoughts, etc.
  - Talking Too Much – each time you make a point, be sure to ask a question or ask someone else what they think so others know you want to hear from them too. Others may have a lot to add to the conversation but are less comfortable speaking up without someone asking them. If you really have trouble with this, set a minimum number of people to speak or points made before you offer more to the conversation.

### **Activity 2 Instructions:**

- Reverse the activity. Have Group B and the Floater(s) discuss a topic and Group A will observe and take note of what they do well and where they could improve. Do not give Group B cards – have them participate as they normally would, keeping in mind the keys to cooperative, productive conversation that were just discussed.
- Suggested topics include ag issues, such as:

- How can farmers help consumers be confident that their food choices are safe and healthy?
- How can the agriculture industry address the water issues in Kansas?
- How can older farmers and young people interested in production agriculture work together to ensure a viable and prepared workforce for the future of agriculture.

### **Activity 2 Debrief:**

- Questions for Follow Up:
  - In general, was this group's discussion more productive? Why or why not?
  - Floater: You participated in both discussions. Which conversation was a more enjoyable experience? Why?
  - Was the conversation cooperative?
  - Who did a good job of actively listening to others in the group?
  - Was the information discussed factual? How could you tell?
  - Was everyone on the same page in terms of understanding the issues involved?
  - Was the group focused on developing solutions or coming to an agreement?
  - Did the conversation identify next steps for the group?
  - Was everyone focused on the conversation at hand?
  - Did the group talk about new ideas or try to find middle ground on issues of contention?
  - Was everyone engaged in the conversation?

### Independent Practice Options:

- High quality conversations start with individuals who understand how to collect information, dissect issues, think critically, and come up with potential solutions. Have students develop these skills through the following out-of-class assignment:
  - Research 5 opinions on a topic (interview 5 people) and identify facts, incorrect information, common opinions, dissenting opinions, potential solutions for interviewees to move forward.
- Encourage students to practice skills like active listening and cooperative discussion over dinner with their family or friends. Consider having them pick one group-setting skill they want to improve and submit half- or one-page journals about how they are improving over 3-5 conversations.
- Split the class into groups of 4-6 students and give each groups' members the research materials for one of the FFA Discussion Meet topics to study. Schedule a class period for the groups to have a discussion about their issue. Consider holding mock-discussion meets. Invite other teachers, administrators, or community members to "judge" the event. Use this as an opportunity to identify students who could represent your chapter in the district competition.

DISAGREE WITH EVERYONE NO MATTER WHAT

AGREE WITH EVERY POINT MADE BUT DON'T ADD ANY  
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR IDEAS TO THE CONVERSATION

CONSTANTLY RESEARCH INFORMATION OR IDEAS ON YOUR  
PHONE AND ADD THEM TO THE CONVERSATION ANY TIME  
YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT COULD BE HELPFUL

ANYTIME YOU CAN, TELL A STORY THAT *SOMEWHAT* RELATES  
TO THE TOPIC OF CONVERSATION

(MAKE UP STORIES IF YOU HAVE TO)

CONTINUALLY STEER THE CONVERSATION BACK TO WHAT HAS  
BEEN DONE IN THE PAST - TRY NOT TO LET ANY NEW IDEAS  
GAIN TRACTION IN THE DISCUSSION

THE GROUP SHOULD NOT DO WHAT IT HAS DONE IN THE PAST  
- OFFER NEW IDEAS AND ASK OTHERS WHAT CAN BE DONE  
DIFFERENTLY SO THE GROUP CAN IMPROVE FOR THE FUTURE

TALK EXACTLY 3 TIMES - NO MORE, NO LESS

TALK AS MUCH AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN

TALK ONLY ONCE

DO NOT TALK AT ALL

DIRECT YOUR REMARKS TO ONLY ONE SIDE OF THE GROUP

AT SOME POINT TRY TO HAVE A SIDE CONVERSATION WITH  
THE PERSON SITTING NEXT TO YOU

PICK SOMEONE IN THE GROUP AND TRY TO INTERRUPT THEM AT  
LEAST 3 TIMES

ESTABLISH YOURSELF AS THE GROUP LEADER AND TAKE  
CHARGE OF THE CONVERSATION.

BE YOURSELF – PARTICIPATE AS YOU NORMALLY WOULD IN A GROUP CONVERSATION

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## Discussion Observation Worksheet

<p><b>COOPERATION</b></p> <p>Were people considerate of each other? Did everyone have the chance to speak? Did anyone dominate conversation? Was anyone rude?</p>	<p><b>ACTIVE LISTENING</b></p> <p>Did people truly listen to what others said? Did anyone seem to have an agenda they pushed?</p>
<p><b>FACTUAL INFORMATION</b></p> <p>Did people rely on factual information? Did anyone question information that didn't sound right? Did anyone bend facts to make their points more appealing?</p>	<p><b>CLEAR UNDERSTANDING</b></p> <p>Did the conversation help everyone fully understand the issue by exploring causes, relevant information and potential solutions?</p>
<p><b>SOLUTION-BASED</b></p> <p>Did the conversation lead to potential answers? Did the group look for or agree on ideas that would be beneficial for the majority?</p>	<p><b>FOCUS</b></p> <p>Did everyone stay on topic or did they get caught in side conversations, tangents, or rants?</p>
<p><b>INNOVATION</b></p> <p>Were new solutions/ideas developed or shared by the group?</p>	<p><b>DELIVERY</b></p> <p>Could you understand everyone? Did people speak so the whole group could hear and address everyone?</p>

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## Community Interview Homework Assignment

Name:

Topic:

Interview five individuals in the community about an agricultural topic of your choice. Do not choose five people you know will have the same opinion about your topic – the goal of this assignment is for you to think about how to identify similarities and differences and transform multiple opinions into one direction for future steps.

Interview	1	2	3	4	5
Name					
Job					
Additional Background Info					

You'll need to develop interview questions that will help you identify each person's opinion regarding your issue. Remember that questions should be open, without bias. Please provide your interview questions here:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Facts</b></p> <p>Identify facts that were stated during the interviews and sources used to confirm the information is accurate</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Inaccurate Information</b></p> <p>Identify inaccurate information stated during the interviews, state the factual information, and provide a source for correcting the interviewee's statement(s)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Agreement</b></p> <p>Identify points of opinion on which all interviewees agree.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Disagreement</b></p> <p>Identify points of opinion on which two or more interviewees disagree and speculate on reasons for the differences in opinions</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Solutions</b></p> <p>Develop potential solutions or next steps that would be best for the group of interviewees as a whole.</p>	

*Please use this form or provide your responses in the same order in a separate document.*