

# Conversational Roundtable Guidelines

## The Four CRT Roles

### ASKER

Your role: You *ask* questions about the topic. They should not be yes/no questions, questions whose answer is obvious or a fact. You are the fire-starter. You are extending an invitation to people to *think*. Here are some examples:

- Does \_\_\_\_\_ have a right to...?
- Is democracy the best form of government?
- Why did \_\_\_\_\_ behave as it did?

### CLARIFIER

Your role: You make comments and ask questions to help the group members better understand their ideas—and the question they are trying to answer. Your responses should extend and support the discussion. Here are some examples:

- Interesting, but is that answering the question...?
- I'm not sure I understand. Can you explain that...?
- Does that mean...?

### CONNECTOR

Your role: You connect the current discussion with other topics you've studied or books you've read. Your role is to extend the conversation into new areas that the others might not have considered. Here are some examples:

- When you said..., you reminded me of...
- \_\_\_\_\_ is a lot like \_\_\_\_\_ because...
- What is another way to look at that?

### VALIDATOR

Your role: Your job is to listen and recognize good ideas or successful participation. Here are some examples:

- That's a really interesting idea, \_\_\_\_\_. I hadn't thought of that that way before.
- Oh, that's a good connection. How did you come up with that?
- I like what you said, even though I'm not sure I agree.

## Overview

The point with these conversations is not to finish but to *begin*. The group who has the longest, most thoughtful discussion about the fewest questions wins! There are four roles that one person in each group must play (see sidebar).

1. Identify the topic (e.g., "success," "change," "the good life")
2. Formulate a question or statement about it (e.g., "What is success?" "Why do people fear change?" "What is 'the good life'?").
3. Write the question or statement at the top of the page of paper.
4. Generate questions that will help you think about and discuss this topic.
5. Define—in your own words, and using a dictionary—key terms in the statement or question. Be sure to look at the word's etymology (i.e., word history). Here's a sample entry:

### SUCCESS

SYLLABICATION: suc-cess

NOUN: **1.** The achievement of something desired, planned or attempted: *attributed their success in business to hard work.* **2a.** The gaining of fame or prosperity: *an artist spoiled by success.* **b.** The extent of such gain. **3.** One that is successful: *The plan was a success.* **4. Obsolete** A result or an outcome.

ETYMOLOGY: Latin *successus*, from past participle of *succedere*, to succeed. See *succeed*. Middle English *succeden*, from Old French *succeder*, from Latin *succedere*: *sub-*, near; see *sub-* + *cdere*, to go.

6. Generate contrasting examples that show what the subject (e.g., success) is and *is not*.
7. Use the following questions, along with your own, to support and extend your discussion of the topic:
  - Are there common traits (e.g., of success)?
  - Are there different types (e.g., of success)?
  - Are there different causes (e.g., of success)?
  - Are there different degrees (e.g., of success)?
  - What is the question we are *not* asking—but should?
  - What are three different ways to answer or respond to this question?
  - What assumptions am I making about this topic? (For example, do you assume that "success equals wealth," or that "success is always good"?)
  - What reason do I have for believing something is true or important?
  - What aspects of this topic or question concern, upset, or confuse you?
8. Synthesize your thinking and discussion by doing the following:
  - Choose the question you discussed the most.
  - Sum up your responses to this question.
  - Explain why you thought it was so important or interesting.
  - Explore what you need to keep thinking about this topic or question.
9. Turn in all notes or other evidence of your conversation and work with all group members' names on it.