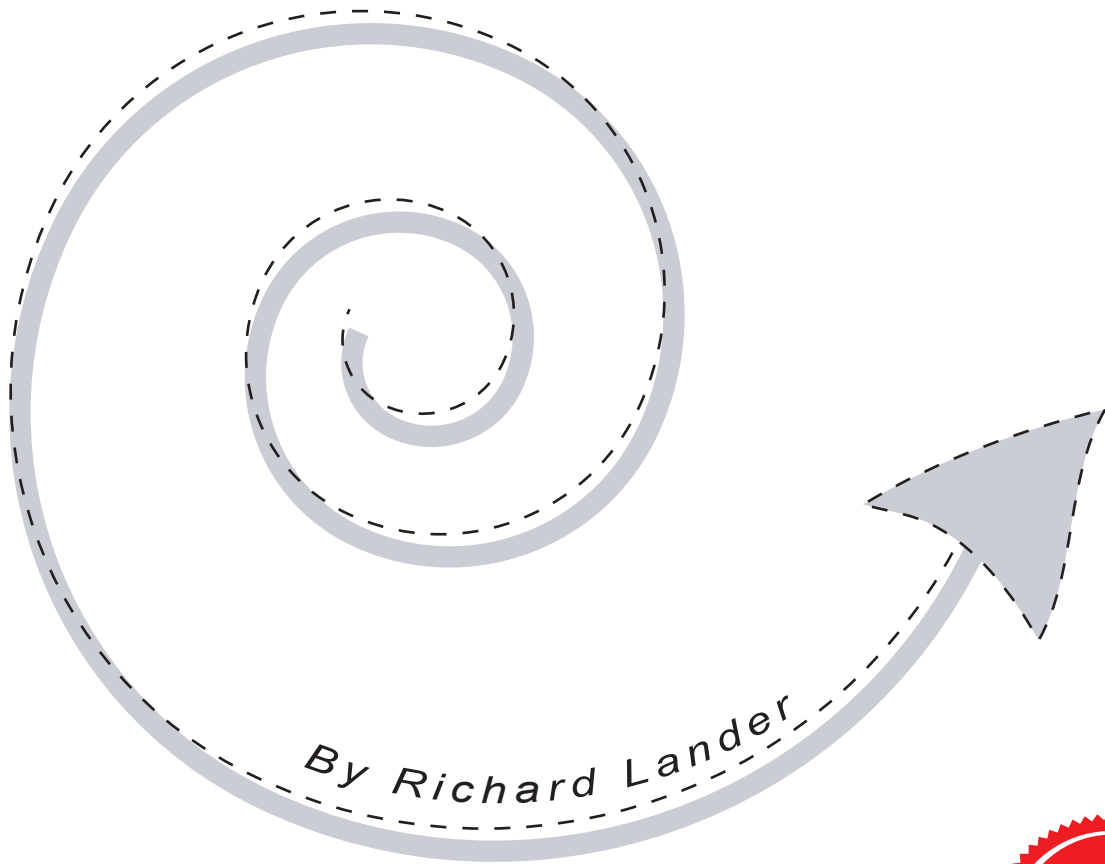


# Scored Group Discussion

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An Assessment Tool



# Scored Group Discussion: An Assessment Tool

## Introduction

Students may achieve very well in their acquisition of knowledge and skills, but lack leadership and communication skills. Some of the highest achieving students may rarely speak unless asked a direct question, and even then their responses may be limited. Often assessment strategies focus on measuring only cognitive skills. Scored Group Discussion can be used as a vehicle to encourage students to think about and to practise a wider range of skills, specifically communication and problem-solving skills that may be required in their future working life.

Throughout this process, the teacher assesses every student in groups of four or five, using the rubric provided, and debriefs them. Students see that they possess a range of skills and identify those in which they need improvement through training and practice. They are presented with the challenge of improving these vital skills.

### **Oral Communication Skills**

Oral communication skills are important because they play a central role in students' learning in all areas of the curriculum. Students listen and speak in order to understand and explore ideas and concepts, identify and solve problems, organize their experience and knowledge, express and clarify their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, and convey information. Listening and speaking skills are also essential for co-operative learning activities and for social interaction at home, at school, and in the community.

*Language, The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8*

Oral language is a fundamental means for communicating with others and the cornerstone of learning in all subjects. Students listen and speak in order to understand concepts, solve problems, provide information, and express thoughts.

*English, The Ontario Curriculum Grade 9 and 10, 11 and 12*

## Acknowledgement

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## Scored Group Discussion

Scored Group Discussion can be used by students or by teachers in any grade level or subject discipline where discussion occurs. While its primary use is to assess and improve communication skills, it can be used to evaluate and generate marks, where appropriate.

The visual impact of the Group Discussion Score Sheety (appendix 4) enhances its effectiveness. Students see their own interactions in a discussion and how much they initiated, responded to, involved others, and kept the discussion on track.

The following learning and communication skills were used to develop this tool:

- Co-operation with others
- Independent Work
- Conflict Resolution
- Goal setting
- Initiative
- Use of Information
- Problem solving
- Goal-setting to improve work
- Teamwork
- Organization
- Initiative

## Overall Understandings

*Students will understand that:*

- effective discussion requires a participant to first set a plan or agenda to guide the discussion, to be mindful of the opinions and participation of others, and to stay focused by keeping to the agenda.
- effective discussion involves listening and speaking, initiating and responding, staying on topic, and challenging discussion that is not on topic.

## Key Skills

*Students will be able to:*

- plan a discussion or set an agenda
- respond constructively to the ideas of others
- identify behaviors that promote and hinder discussion
- use the score sheet to diagram the interactions that take place in a group discussion
- involve others in a discussion
- challenge off topic discussion
- score performance in a discussion

## Questions to Guide and Focus Teaching/Learning

- What is an effective discussion?
- How do students plan the discussion or set an agenda?
- How do students respond to the ideas of others?
- How can students improve their performance in a discussion?
- How can a discussion be kept on topic?
- What evidence can be used to assess discussion and group skills?

## Teaching and Learning Strategies

### Agenda Setting - Planning the Discussion

- Inform students that the first step in a discussion is to plan it. This plan or agenda provides the framework for the discussion. The agenda or plan becomes the external tool to help students stay focused. It gives students a reason for reminding others to stay on topic.
- The following is a generic agenda or plan. For more complex topics, students may have to adjust the agenda.

List the facts that are known.	(What do we know?)
List the facts that are not known.	(What don't we know?)
Define the problem to be discussed.	(What is the problem we are trying to solve?)
List the questions that need to be answered.	(What questions have to be answered?)
Determine the criteria needed for a good solution.	(What are we looking for in a good solution?)
Propose several solutions to the problem.	(What are some possible good solutions?)
Evaluate each solution according the criteria you set.	(How does each possible solution meet what we think a good solution should 'look like?')
Pick a good answer.	(What is the best solution?)

- Provide students with copies of Appendices 1-6 to keep in their notebooks for use during group discussions.
- Brainstorm with students a list of effective group skills. Have them compare their list with those in Appendix 1.
- Use the checklist in Appendix 1 to make students aware of why and how to plan discussion. Remind students that the solution or answer is the last part of the discussion and that they should gather all their information before they begin to look for an answer. Ask students to make notes before they speak.
- Have students reflect on the first four parts of the agenda. The key element is the list of questions to be answered during the discussion. Each agenda should have its own distinct list of questions. Provide samples of questions developed in previous discussions as models of effective questions.
- Explain to the students that putting the questions in order will keep them on topic. Tell them to check off each item as it is discussed.
- The last four parts of the agenda are generated during the discussion.
- Have students assign time to each discussion item to give them a sense of how long the discussion should be and to create more urgency to stay on topic.
- Encourage students to keep a set of organized notes to help focus their discussion. The numbered agenda provides an effective organizer for the notes. Their notes also provide evidence of the quality of the discussion and can be used in evaluation.

### **Practising Group Skills**

- Have students circle the behaviors listed in Appendix 2 that they think apply to them.
- Put the following on the board.
  - Aggressive: I believe that my ideas are often better than those of others.
  - Passive: I often believe my ideas are not as good as those of others.
  - Assertive: I believe my ideas are as good but not necessarily better than those of others.
- Brainstorm what group work would look like if everyone were aggressive, or passive, or assertive.
- Ask students to determine from Appendix 1 which behaviors are assertive, which are aggressive and which are passive. Challenge them to consider how they could become more assertive in their group interactions.
- Review the Effective Group Skills described in Appendix 2 and ask students to suggest ways of practising those skills.

### **Practising Discussion Skills**

- Ask students to explain why discussion skills involve a balance of listening and speaking.
- Have students think about how they would describe the four types of speaking skills:
  - a. questioning a peer about what they have said
  - b. involving a peer in the discussion
  - c. responding to a question, and
  - d. asking a question to the group about the discussion.
- Review the Discussion Skills listed in Appendix 3.
- Have students determine which statements in Appendix 3 help and which hinder a group discussion. As a further activity, students could identify the type of discussion skill used in the statements they determined would help group discussion and record its number beside the statement.

### **Using the Group Discussion Score Sheet**

- This tool is based on the four types of speaking skills listed on page 4. Arrows moving to the outside (outside lines) are used to show every time a student addresses a question to the group or the agenda.
- There are two types of lines connecting students in the diagram. The solid line is used to show when one student asks another student a question. An arrow is drawn on the line in the direction of the question. The dotted line is used to show when a student responds to another student. An arrow is drawn showing the direction of the response.
- Whenever a student invites another student to participate, a separate line is drawn to show the direction of the invitation.

- Give students Appendix 5 to examine. Review the four types of speaking skills and how each is scored. Interpret the information on the diagram: Yin Yin has more outside lines because she talked more about the issues and the agenda than the others. Multiple arrows on the “ask line” indicates that she asked lots of questions – she asked Maria 9 questions. Maria asked Yin Yin 6 questions. Eduardo has the fewest arrows, since he didn’t contribute many ideas – he asked 4 questions and responded twice.
- When a discussion is finished, count up the arrows and enter below. The purpose of ranking is to let students see how the teacher saw the performances of the group. Asking students to rank their performance in the group has them reflect on their role in the group and how effective they were. Students are able to assess their rank, match the arrows to the rubric, and assess their performance.
- To facilitate their ranking, consider with the students the levels of performance indicated on this rubric. For example, Level 4- rating indicates that students need to work on leadership skills and sensitivity issues. They appear to have good discussion skills but tend to be aggressive in their approach.
- The Progress of the Discussion section shows if the discussion was on track.
- When students use this tool, one student scores the whole group while the others carry out the discussion.
- Use the tool to individually debrief all students. Visually, they can see how well they were able to focus on the issue or agenda, how many questions they asked, how often they responded, and if they invited other students to participate. The performances of other students provide a point of comparison. In debriefing students, identify areas of strength and suggest strategies to improve areas of weakness. Give students additional opportunities to practise these skills. Assign them to groups with students of level 4+ performance who can model good performance.

## **Appendix 1**

### **A. Effective Group Skills**

- ✓ Involving others
- ✓ Balancing your viewpoint with those of others
- ✓ Being sensitive to others
- ✓ Building consensus
- ✓ Knowing when to listen, when to speak, and how much to say
- ✓ Taking responsibility for making the group work
- ✓ Displaying confidence or expressing a lack of confidence when genuine doubt exists
- ✓ Contributing vs. Participating
- ✓ Active listening
- ✓ Taking turns
- ✓ Staying on task

### **B. Agenda Check List**

- ☐ I quietly reflected on the purpose of the discussion before speaking.
- ☐ I gathered and looked at all the resources before speaking.
- ☐ I made sure all my speaking was directed at setting the agenda and not just the discussion.
- ☐ I worked quickly to set the agenda.
- ☐ I looked for facts that I thought were significant to understanding the issue.
- ☐ I looked for facts that were missing.
- ☐ I determined why we were having the discussion.
- ☐ I identified what were trying to do - the purpose of the discussion. Were we to create something, write something, speak about something, etc.?
- ☐ I made a list of all questions to be answered.
- ☐ I put all the questions in the order that they should be discussed.
- ☐ I numbered the agenda items.
- ☐ I timed the items on the agenda to guide us through the discussion.
- ☐ I kept notes during agenda setting and discussion.

## Appendix 2

### Group Skills – Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive

Name \_\_\_\_\_

In each row circle the one behavior that best applies to your behavior in group discussions.

Descriptor	Behavior 1	Behavior 2	Behavior 3
<b>Speaking and listening</b>	I prefer to listen rather than speak or find it hard to speak.	I like to talk and often speak more than I listen.	I try to talk about as much as I listen.
<b>Sensitivity</b>	I think that everyone should speak up and if you don't talk that is your choice.	I try to get others to talk by asking them questions.	I tend to wait for someone to ask me a question or wait for a break in the discussion rather than speak out.
<b>Consensus Building</b>	If most people in the group don't like my ideas I realize that I should change them.	I don't like conflict or am too shy to speak up when I disagree with an idea.	I like my ideas and argue to get them accepted.
<b>Timing</b>	I speak whenever I have an opinion on a topic and always defend my opinions.	I know when to listen, when to speak, and how much to say.	I find it hard to speak up and get into the discussion and when I do speak I say too little.
<b>On Track</b>	I like to finish the discussion on time and so I often stop talking to finish it or remind others we are behind.	I don't think it is my job to keep a discussion on topic and hope someone else will do it.	I get off topic easily because I enjoy the discussion and supporting my opinions.
<b>Conflict Resolution</b>	I like to win an argument and don't give up easily.	Before I give up my point of view I try to find good facts to support it.	I can never think fast enough to find facts to support my opinions and prefer to listen.
<b>Reflection</b>	I tend to go very quiet when someone challenges my idea.	I always defend my ideas when someone challenges me.	I like it when someone challenges my viewpoint and consider carefully what the person is saying.
<b>Leadership</b>	I sometimes take over the group because I have good ideas.	I express my ideas and opinion confidently without trying to dominate the group.	I should express my ideas more often in the group.



## Appendix 3

### Types of Speaking Skills

- questioning peers about what they have said
- involving a peer in the discussion
- responding to a question
- asking a question to the group about the discussion

### Discussion Skills

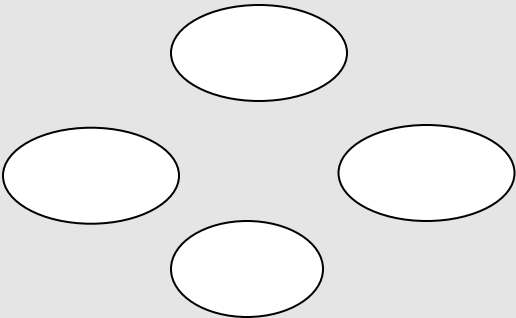
1. Summarizing discussion to date to keep everyone aware of what is being discussed
2. Challenging discussion that is not productive
3. Challenging, in a positive way, the group members' behaviour that is not facilitating discussion
4. Staying on topic and ensuring that the item being discussed is related to the agenda, not starting a new issue until the current issue is resolved
5. Initiating a new topic or moving to a new agenda item
6. Keeping discussion to agenda items
7. Keeping track of time
8. Trying to get a compromise
9. Connecting ideas together

### Statements

- But that isn't a fact. It hasn't been proven
- Does everyone agree with Todd about that?
- Donna, you keep coming back to the same point. We already said that was not an issue.
- Helen, how do you respond to that?
- We have already spent 10 minutes talking about that.
- I bet you don't think that idea is good do you, John?
- I don't care what anyone says; two colours are enough.
- I see, Anna. You agree with Tony but think they just want to add two more parts.
- I think we should finish this topic and move on to question 4.
- Just a minute, lets finish this discussion before we start on that.
- Lui, what if we took your idea and changed the word to a word Henry used.
- I think there are at least causes, Raj.
- Okay, we have to make a decision, either the red or the white flowers.
- So we have decided to use four different colours.
- That is a dumb idea. It isn't going to work.
- This is boring. Can we speed up?
- Tanya, would you be willing to compromise on that?
- We are not getting anywhere on this. Why not just do part of it?
- What do you mean I have talked too much? I am not finished!
- What do you mean by too much oxygen, Ahmed?

## Appendix 4

### Group Discussions Score Sheet

<p>The number of outside lines track questions to group.</p> <p>Existing lines connecting people track individual interactions.</p> <p>Responding:    use        .....</p> <p>Asking:         use        _____</p> <p>Inviting:       draw your own line</p> <p>Use &lt;&gt; to show the direction.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 20px;">  </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Draw outside lines as they happen.</li> <li>▪ Place student names in circles.</li> <li>▪ Draw arrows as interactions occur.</li> </ul>
Count the ► from the person	Names
Outside Line	
Responding	
Asking	
Inviting	
Total	
Rank in Group	
Level of Performance	
<p>Below measure the progress of the discussion. Above the line indicates moving towards resolution. Below the line means not progressing.</p>	
Progress of the Discussion	<div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 5px;">             1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20              (Time)           </div>

## Appendix 5

### Sample Scored Group Discussions Score Sheet

The number of outside lines track questions to group.

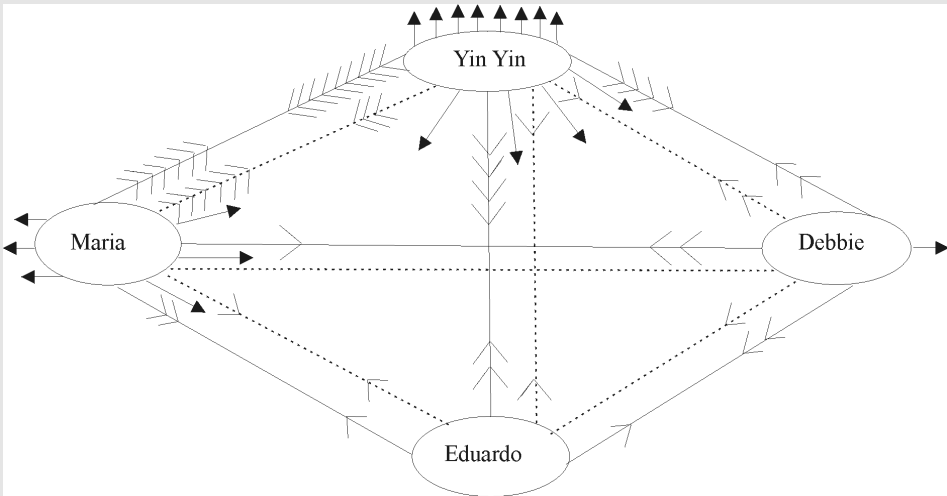
Existing lines connecting people track individual interactions.

Responding: use .....

Asking: use \_\_\_\_\_

Inviting: draw your own line

Use < > to show the direction.

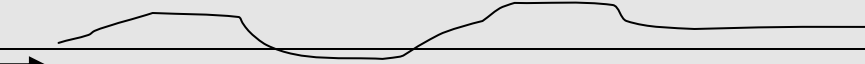


- Draw outside lines as they happen.
- Place student names in circles.
- Draw arrows as interactions occur.

Count the > from the person	Names				
	Yin Yin	Maria	Debbie	Eduardo	
Outside Line	8	3	1	0	
Responding	5	8	4	2	
Asking	17	11	7	4	
Inviting	4	3	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	
Rank in Group	1	2	3	4	
Level of Performance	4+	3-	2-	1	

Below measure the progress of the discussion. Above the line indicates moving towards resolution. Below the line means not progressing.

Progress of the Discussion



→

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 (Time)

## Appendix 6

### Rubric for Scored Group Discussions

Level	Descriptors
4+	<p>Is a proactive participant showing a balance between listening, initiating, and focusing discussion. Displays a proactive use of the whole range of discussion skills to keep discussion going and to involve everyone in the group.</p> <p>Understands the purpose of the discussion and keeps the discussion focused and on topic.</p> <p>Applies skills with confidence, showing leadership and sensitivity.</p>
4-	<p>Is an active participant showing a balance between listening, initiating, and focusing discussion. Is aggressive rather than assertive to keep the discussion going and tends to dominate the group in order to involve everyone or to keep the discussion going.</p> <p>Understands the purpose behind the discussion but is more focused on the discussion than on the people involved.</p> <p>Applies skills applied with confidence but lacks leadership and sensitivity.</p>
3+	<p>Is an active participant showing a balance between listening, initiating, and focusing discussion. Demonstrates all the elements of discussion skills but uses them less frequently and with less confidence than the above level.</p> <p>Keeps the discussion going but more as a supporter than a leader.</p> <p>Tries to involve everyone in the group.</p> <p>Demonstrates many skills but lacks the confidence to pursue them so that the group takes longer than necessary to reach consensus.</p> <p>Demonstrates a positive approach but is more focused on getting done than on having a positive discussion.</p>
3-	<p>Is an inconsistently active participant showing an imbalance between listening, initiating, and focusing discussion.</p> <p>Tends to move in and out of the discussion.</p> <p>Participates but doesn't use skills such as summarizing and clarifying often enough to show confidence.</p> <p>Keeps the discussion going but more as a supporter than a leader.</p> <p>Fails to offer enough factual information or stay on topic.</p>
2+	<p>Is an active listener but defers easily to others and lacks confidence to pursue personal point of view even when it is right.</p> <p>Participates but doesn't use skills such as summarizing and clarifying often enough to show confidence.</p> <p>Limits discussion skills to asking questions, summarizing, and staying on topic.</p> <p>Lacks balance between discussion and analytical skills. Either displays good analysis skills and poor discussion skills or good discussion skills and poor analysis skills.</p>
2-	<p>Is an active listener but defers easily to others and tends not pursue personal point of view, lacking confidence.</p> <p>Limits discussion skills to asking questions, summarizing and staying on topic.</p> <p>Rarely demonstrates analysis skills because doesn't understand the purpose of the discussion, and as a result, offers little evidence to support any point of view.</p>
1	<p>Shows effort and is willing to be involved in the discussion but lacks the skills to get involved.</p> <p>Asks clarifying questions as the main discussion skill.</p> <p>Passively tries to find resources e.g. flipping through notes.</p> <p>Lacks participation, resulting in little evidence with which to assess skills.</p>
0	<p>Demonstrates no participation or effort.</p> <p>Participates only when prompted by the teacher.</p> <p>Only responds to others and initiates nothing.</p> <p>Provides limited responses that are often off topic.</p> <p>Participates minimally so that it is impossible to assess analysis skills or understanding of the issues.</p>