Classroom discussion ground rules

Make a discussion agreement that pupils can use, not just display. Practise asking a clarifying question, representing a position fairly and challenging an idea with a reason.

TEACHER NOTES

Learning objective: use a shared discussion process to examine ideas fairly, disagree with reasons and recognise the difference between asking about an argument and demanding private disclosure.

Planning detail	Suggested use
Audience	Approximately ages 11-16; adapt the examples and language.
Duration / preparation	25 minutes / 5 minutes. These are planning estimates.
Prerequisites	Pupils can identify the difference between an idea and the person expressing it.
Materials	The agreement, practice scenarios and reflection sheet. A display copy is optional.

Before the discussion

Choose a clear learning question, a fictional example and a way for pupils to pause or contribute in writing. Explain that they do not need to identify their family's beliefs, defend a whole community or disclose a personal experience. A pupil can analyse a published or fictional position throughout.

Treat the agreement as part of your normal classroom practice. Follow the school's behaviour and safeguarding procedures if a discussion raises a concern; do not promise confidentiality to a group. This activity is not a procedure for investigating personal incidents.

Run the activity

1. Read the agreement (5 minutes). Ask what each rule makes possible.

2. Make it usable (5 minutes). Pairs suggest one practical example or wording improvement. Keep the right to avoid personal disclosure.

3. Practise (10 minutes). Use one or more fictional situations and the sentence stems. Ask pupils to improve a response, then explain why it helps.

4. Reflect (5 minutes). Record one successful reasoning move and one next step. Agreement with the topic is not the assessment target.

The respectful disagreement guide gives a longer discussion sequence. The teaching guidance helps prepare terminology and representation.

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Our discussion agreement

We can take an idea seriously without agreeing with it. Use these habits when discussing fictional examples, published views or a classroom question.

Habit	What it looks like
1. Listen for meaning	Let a contribution finish. Before responding, work out the point being made.
2. Ask before assuming	Ask what a word or example means when it is unclear. Do not invent the speaker's reasons.
3. Represent the idea fairly	Try a short summary that the speaker could recognise before you challenge it.
4. Challenge ideas with reasons	Explain the problem you see in a claim or its support. Avoid insults and labels about the person.
5. Match confidence to support	Distinguish evidence, interpretation and judgement. Say when information is missing.
6. Leave room to change	A better explanation or new information can justify revising a view. Uncertainty is allowed.
7. Respect privacy	Nobody has to reveal personal or family beliefs or speak for a whole group. Use a fictional or published view instead.
8. Pause and repair	If wording is unfair or hurtful, pause, restate it appropriately and return to the question. Ask the teacher for help when needed.

Make one habit concrete

Choose one habit. What would someone actually say or do to use it?

Respectful discussion does not require agreement. It does require fair treatment of people and an honest account of their ideas.

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Practise useful responses

Sentence stems to try

- What do you mean by ___?
- Have I understood your point: ___?
- The reason I see it differently is ___.
- Which evidence supports that part of the claim?
- That might follow if ___. Do we know that?
- Could this example have another explanation?
- I am not sure yet because ___.
- I would rather discuss the fictional example than my own beliefs.

Three fictional practice situations

A. The quiet room. One speaker says a shared room should always be silent; another wants a time for conversation. A reply is: 'Only a selfish person would want to talk.' Rewrite it as a challenge to the proposal, with a reason about other room users.

B. The overgeneralisation. A speaker reads one humanist organisation's statement and says: 'Now we know what every non-religious person thinks.' Ask a question that reveals the gap between a source's scope and that conclusion.

C. The personal question. During discussion of a fictional character, someone asks a pupil to tell the class what their family believes. Write a response that preserves participation without requiring an answer about private life.

Partner task

1. Choose one situation and write an improved response.
2. Explain which discussion habit it uses.
3. Ask your partner to suggest a stronger clarification or reason.
4. Revise your response and identify what changed.

> **A useful test**
>
> Does your response make the idea clearer or better supported? A polite phrase that still misrepresents a position needs revision.

TEACHER RESPONSE GUIDE

Facilitate and assess the practice

Possible responses

A: 'I understand that you want time to talk. I worry that readers may lose concentration. Could the room have separate quiet and discussion times?' This represents the proposal and raises a consequence. It does not prove that this compromise is best; ask whether the timetable and space make it workable.

B: 'Does that statement describe the organisation's position, every member's position, or everyone without a religion?' Follow with: 'What additional evidence would you need for the wider claim?' A group's self-description has a specific scope.

C: 'We can work with the fictional character; nobody needs to explain their family beliefs.' Invite a question about the supplied text instead. Do not ask the pupil to justify why they prefer privacy.

Facilitator prompt cards

When you notice...	A prompt to use
A vague word	What might that word mean here? Can we agree a working meaning?
An inaccurate summary	Let's restate the position before evaluating it. What did the source actually say?
A bare assertion	What reason would help someone assess that claim?
An identity-based assumption	What does the supplied information establish, and what are we adding?
Pressure to disclose	Keep the task on the fictional or published position. A personal answer is not required.
An insult or harmful generalisation	Pause. That wording targets a person or group. Restate the relevant idea fairly, or move back to the shared text.

Look for progress

Assess whether a pupil can clarify a term, give a fair summary, supply a relevant reason and notice a limit. A quiet written response can show these just as clearly as speaking first. Avoid scoring confidence, identity or agreement as if they were understanding.

For support, model one stem and allow a written rehearsal. For extension, ask pupils to improve a courteous but logically weak reply. Use smaller groups, extra thinking time or written contributions where appropriate.

PUPIL REFLECTION AND USE NOTES

Reflect on the discussion

One idea I can now state more fairly:

A question or reason that helped the discussion:

Something still uncertain, and what would help us examine it:

A discussion habit I will practise next time:

Source and use notes

The agreement, stems and examples are original teaching aids. Hwb and the RE Council give background on enquiry and diverse perspectives; their inclusion is not approval of this resource. The IPO source explains limits on reuse of third-party material.

All classroom examples and figures in this pack are original fiction, not findings from a study or accounts of real pupils. Timings are planning estimates. Teachers should adapt the material to their learners and curriculum.

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Welsh Government Hwb: Humanities, designing your curriculum
https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/areas-of-learning-and-experience/humanities/designing-your-curriculum/ - checked 3 November 2026.

RE Council: Religion and Worldviews Approach - FAQs (professional guidance)
https://religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/resource/worldviews-introduction-faqs/ - checked 3 November 2026.

Intellectual Property Office: Exceptions to copyright https://www.gov.uk/guidance/exceptions-to-copyright - checked 3 November 2026.