

# Ground rules for talking and thinking together

**Resource theme:** Dialogue in student groups

**Resource type:** Core Activity

**Time required:** 30-60 minutes

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These **'Ground rules for talking and thinking together'** activities can be used to (i) introduce the idea of Ground Rules; (ii) share ideas about relevant vocabulary; (iii) decide on a class set of Ground Rules for Talk.

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# Ground rules for talking and thinking together

Adapted from the [Thinking Together](#) resources (Dawes, 2016)

## RESOURCES

Dictionaries    Thesaurus    Sugar paper and large felt tips

*3a: Are these useful rules?*

*3b: Ground Rules for Talk (one per group)*

## AIMS

- To introduce the idea of Ground Rules
- To share ideas about relevant vocabulary
- To decide on a class set of Ground Rules for Talk.

## WHOLE CLASS 1

*Opening Activity:* Briefly introduce the concept of 'Ground Rules'. Ground rules are the rules we follow, often without making them explicit, to interact with other people. People may use the same set of ground rules without ever having talked about them. People may break the ground rules deliberately, or unintentionally if they have in mind a different set of rules. There are problems when people don't have shared Ground Rules.

Ask the class for examples of ground rules that operate, e.g. in queuing, waiting at the checkout, choosing where to sit in a classroom, talking to the Head Teacher.

Now explain that in some joint activities people can think and reason better if they discuss things. When talking, people use 'ground rules' to organise turn taking, to share information, make decisions, and so on. Problems happen when people are not using the same ground rules. This happens quite often because the rules for group talk are very rarely discussed and decided. The purpose of this lesson is to check that everyone in the class agrees on what set of rules we are using when working in a group: to ensure that Exploratory Talk can take place.

The advantages of the Ground Rules for Talk are:

- It becomes more possible to find out what other people think
- The group can do better because it can draw on everyone's ideas
- Individuals can do better because they are learning a way of thinking as well as a way of talking.

Explain the Group Work activity.

## **GROUP WORK:**

Provide each group with one copy of 3a **Are these useful rules?**

Ask the groups to talk together for five minutes to decide whether each rule would encourage effective discussion.

**Important! Please collect 3a once this activity is complete, so that the class goes on to generate original rules later.**

Collect in 3a.

Provide each group of pupils with one copy of 3b: **Our Ground Rules for Talk.**

Briefly recap on some useful vocabulary: e.g. *challenge: opinion: discussion: reason: negotiate: argument: compromise: persuade*

Ask the groups to create and decide on their own Ground Rules for Talk. Put these in order of importance from A to F. Remind the groups that the purpose of talk in groups is to explore one another's thoughts through discussion. Encourage everyone to consider and state the reasons for their suggestions.

## **WHOLE CLASS 2:**

Ask the groups to contribute a rule each in turn, starting with their 'A' rule.

(Alternative: ask the groups to cut up their Ground Rules Table. Have six sheets of sugar paper available labelled A to F. Ask groups to stick their rules on the appropriate sheet. Read out the A rules and ask the class if they agree that these are the most important. What is missing? What should be added from the B rules? etc.)

Conduct a class discussion about the rules and the reasons for choosing rules. Help the class to choose a list of six or seven key rules. The class rules will be originally worded and there may be important additional rules contributed by the groups.

Encourage the class to agree to use these, which are their own 'Ground Rules for Talk', in their group discussions. Ask the class to state the advantages of shared ground rules.

Re-state the lesson aims and discuss whether pupils feel they have been achieved.

Collect a copy of the chosen rules for display or sharing.

- a) make a wall poster and ask everyone to sign up to it
- b) provide individual copies and let the class spend ten minutes collecting everyone else's signature on their copy.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- a) The class can each take a copy of the rules to home for discussion with parents.
- b) Ask pupils to note what Ground Rules for Talk they think are being followed in other speaking and listening situations:

- friends talking
- in assembly
- in the cinema
- in class when the teacher is introducing a new topic
- in a science or maths investigation
- in an outdoor game
- in the corridors at school
- mobile phone use
- talking to a visitor to the school.

What are the differences between these rules and the class Ground Rules for Talk? Pupils can be offered the opportunity to consider the value of the class ground rules as a 'fair' means of sharing information, ideas, and opinions, and as a way of trying to find out and understand other people's reasons.

- c) Ask the pupils to collect an example of the ground rules for talk in action over the course of a week. They can write down the context and what was said, or just try to remember: for example collect
- uses of the word, 'because';
  - an example of someone giving a good reason, or a weak reason;
  - an example of someone asking someone else what they think;
  - an example of someone being persuaded to change their mind by a good argument;
  - evidence of people thinking and deciding together.

### 3a: Group Work: Are these useful rules for discussion?

Rules	Yes, No or Maybe (give your reasons!)
1. The best reader should decide.	
2. Ask everyone in turn for their opinion.	
3. Ask for reasons why.	
4. Talking takes too much time – write the first idea	
5. Be critical of the idea, not the person who put it forward.	
6. If people challenge your ideas, you can give reasons for them.	
7. Choose as quickly as you can so that you get finished.	
8. Discuss all the alternatives before deciding.	
9. If a wrong decision is made, point out who is to blame.	
10. If you hear a good reason, you can change your mind.	
11. If you know something important, keep it to yourself. Otherwise people cheat.	
12. If you want to be heard you have to speak forcefully or shout.	
13. Stick your fingers in your ears – you know your own mind!	
14. Make sure the group agrees after talking.	
15. Make up your own mind straight away and stick to it.	
16. Respect other people’s ideas.	
17. The group tries to agree before making a decision.	
18. The most naturally talkative person should speak most.	
19. The group should try to stick to the topic.	
20. The oldest person should lead the talk.	
21. There should be a leader and the group does what they say.	
22. You should always agree with your friends.	
23. All relevant information is shared among the group.	
24. Build on what the previous speaker said.	
25. Be prepared to change your mind - it shows you have listened and can accept good reasons.	
26. Look at and listen to the person who is talking.	
27. If you don’t like someone, make sure they don’t get heard.	
28. In the end it doesn’t matter what is decided. Whatever is ok.	
28. If someone gives a reason you don’ t think is good, you should question it.	

### Sheet 3b: Group Work: Our Ground Rules for Exploratory Talk

Names of our group:

**Talk together to decide on your group's suggested ground rules for talk.**

Think carefully about how you can best put your rules in written form.

When your list is ready, decide together on an order of importance for your rules.

	<b>Ground Rule for Talk</b>	<b>Order of importance</b> A B C D E F
<b>1</b>		
<b>2</b>		
<b>3</b>		
<b>4</b>		
<b>5</b>		
<b>6</b>		

**Discuss and comment on these questions:**

*Was the way your group talked:*

- Successful?
- A good example of people following the above rules?

*What suggestions would you make to improve the quality of your group's discussion?*