

Comparison of Dialogue and Debate

1. Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.
Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
2. In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.
In debate, winning is the goal.
3. In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.
In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
4. Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.
5. Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.
Debate defends assumptions as truth.
6. Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.
Debate causes critique of the other position.
7. Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.
solutions.
8. Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.
Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
9. In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.
10. Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.
Debate calls
11. In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.
In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
12. In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.
In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.
13. Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.
Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
14. Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.
Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.
15. Dialogue remains open-ended.
Debate implies a conclusion.

*Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelly Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson. For
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Differentiating Dialogue From Discussion: A Working Model (Kardia and Sevig, 1997)

Discussion

A.

Discussions are often conducted with the assumption of an equal “playing field,” with little or no acknowledgement of status and power differences in the room.

B.

Discussion can occur with social inequities and problematic power relations active and uninterrupted during the course of discussion (e.g., individuals with privileged social identities dominating the discussion).

Exploring the Differences Between Dialogue, Discussion, and Debate

In DISCUSSION we try to...	In DEBATE we try to...	In DIALOGUE we try to...
Present ideas		

Present ideas

TO SUMMARIZE:

**The goal of DIALOGUE is to listen to and understand WKH RWKHU , DVN P
FRPLQJ WR NQRZ DQG XQGHUVWDQG YRX E**