



INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS

Toolkit for Constructive Dialogue in Polarised Contexts



Give your opinion without insulting,
hold a conversation without judging,
ask a question without attacking.

This toolkit is designed to help promote constructive dialogue in societies and political systems marked by [polarisation](#). It is meant to be used among persons with opposing views on a given topic, where the conversation has escalated to the use of pejorative language and limited listening.

The toolkit does not aim to generate consensus or agreement around a given topic. Instead, it promotes viewpoint plurality – the idea that we can and should talk with those whose views are different to our own.

- The tools in this kit can be used together or separately, and in any order. Some tools are oriented towards addressing the emotional component of polarisation, while others focus on the construction of more complex and less simplistic dialogue.
- The description of each tool states the audience for which it is intended.
- Each tool can be adapted to the specific context in which it is being used.
- All the tools should be implemented by a moderator.

You can **click on the tool** that you want to use:

1 I dare you to 	2 Transform your insult 	3 Electoral therapy
4 Pat on the back 	5 If you were them 	6 Inconclusive debates

Audiences:



Citizens interested in politics



Media and opinion makers



Politicians



Students

For more information on using narrative to address conflict and [polarisation](#), see the work of [IFIT's Inclusive Narratives Practice Group](#).



1

I dare you to

Goal: To enable people with opposing views to have more in-depth conversations with each other by avoiding the use of previously identified terms that polarise or close down engagement.

Audience:



Setting: This tool can be used to set the conditions of a debate, organise classroom exercises, or conduct word-choice activities.

Steps:



1. After choosing a topic to discuss, work with the participants to identify which terms typically used to discuss that topic are polarising. This can be done beforehand (e.g., via a social media search or analysis of previous statements) or at the start of the exercise (e.g., by asking the participants directly).



2. Invite the participants to talk about the selected topic without using those polarising terms.

Example

Facilitating a group dialogue on irregular migration



1. As a group, let's talk about which polarising terms you have used or heard in discussions about migrants who crossed borders illegally or covertly (e.g., 'criminals', 'freeloaders').
2. We will now have a debate. Half of the group will defend government X's policy of expelling such migrants and the other half will oppose it. During the debate, you cannot use the polarising terms you identified.

2

Transform your insult

Goal: To identify ways to express the concerns hidden behind an insult, while avoiding the use of terms that can be unduly polarising and prevent dialogue from happening.



Audience:



Setting: This tool can be used in public debates and classroom activities.

Steps:



1. Form small groups composed of people with different views on a given topic and ask them to discuss that topic.



2. Whenever a participant uses a pejorative term, pause the conversation.



3. In a supportive manner, inquire why the participant used the term, request clarification of the worry or concern underlying the use of the term, and invite the participant to reflect on the meaning behind it.



4. Open the discussion to enable group reflection on how inflammatory language can prevent dialogue

Example

Leading a class activity on public protests



1. Break into small groups to discuss a mass protest and see if you find yourself using a pejorative term to describe the protesters.
2. A group has noted that a pejorative term came up, so let's pause and analyse why, without judgment.
 - a. **Inquiry:** Why do you think you used the term 'thugs' when describing what happened in the protest?
 - b. **Clarification:** Can you share with the group the concern or worry that led you to use this term?
 - c. **Invitation:** Please attempt to express your concern or worry in the form of a question (e.g., "Is vandalising public property a fair way for protesters to claim their rights?").
3. As a group, let's discuss how this type of question allows us to talk about the protest more constructively than when we use pejorative terms.



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Electoral therapy

Goal: To articulate the premises of our arguments when we participate in polarised conversations during election periods, breaking down assumptions, helping channel emotions and promoting dialogue.

Audience:



This tool is not for use with political candidates.

Setting: This tool can be used in debates and during classroom activities.

Steps:



1. Encourage participants with opposing views to go beyond the usual explanation for their stance on an electoral issue and identify the premises that underlie their position.



2. Start by asking a participant to describe the emotions a given issue/policy evokes and encourage the group to reflect on how this may influence their assumptions.



3. Repeat Step 2 with someone in the group who has a different view than the one expressed by the previous participant.



4. Open a path to dialogue by asking what common ground participants might find between the different premises and explanations.

Example

Moderating a debate on land reform policy



1. Invite participants to reflect on and try to express the underlying reasons for their positions on land reform policy in the election.
 - a. **Don't ask:** Can you tell us why you oppose Candidate X's policy on land redistribution?
 - b. **Do ask:** Which emotions does the subject of land reform evoke in you? (e.g., "I'm afraid that Candidate X will take away everything I've worked for").
2. Invite a participant who supports the land reform policy to reflect on the underlying reasons for their position.
3. Open a path to dialogue by asking:
 - a. What did you previously believe to be the reasons many people oppose/support the proposed land reform policy?
 - b. Can you find common ground in each other's underlying reasons?



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Pat on the back

Goal: To acknowledge something positive about an opponent's ideas or position and enable constructive engagement.



Audience:



Setting: Different types of debates.

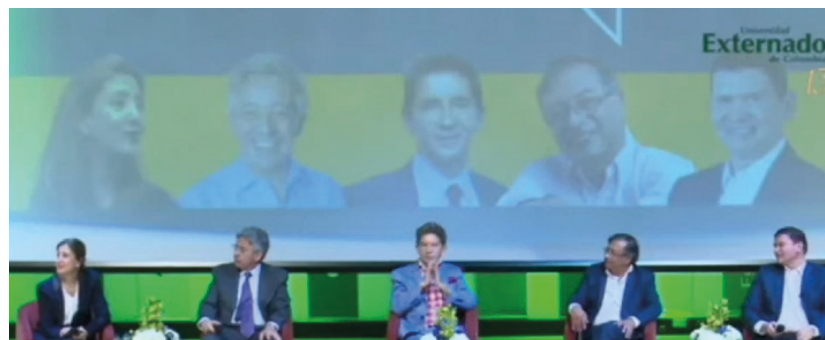
Steps:



1. Request that each participant in a debate outline one idea or proposal of their opponent that they like or appreciate, then ask them to explain why in more detail.

A moderator used this tool during a 2022 presidential debate in Colombia.

Source: [Debate presidencial 2022 - Universidad Externado de Colombia](#).



Example

Moderating a leadership debate

1. Candidate X, I invite you to name one policy or proposal of Candidate Y with which you agree.
2. What do you like about Candidate Y's idea or proposal? What aspects of it do you find most interesting?



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If you were them

Goal: To help the wider public understand the internal and external limitations opponents face when taking difficult political decisions.

Audience:



This tool is not for use with political candidates.

Setting: Media talk shows, expert roundtables.

Steps:



1. Invite a guest expert to explain the constraints that a particular official or institution might face when engaging with certain sectors or on specific issues.



2. Ask the expert how they would approach the topic and engage with different actors in a way that addresses these constraints.

Example

Organising a radio programme in an election period



1. **Host:** “Which sectors are resistant to the possible presidency of Candidate X?”
2. **Expert:** “I believe that Candidate X’s proposal on land redistribution has not gone down well with the private sector and with certain members of her own party”.
3. **Host:** “If you were Candidate X and you came to power, how would you manage these constraints and challenges?”
4. **Expert:** Provides answer.

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Inconclusive debates

Goal: To raise awareness of different viewpoints on thorny issues and promote constructive and open-ended public debates.







Audience:



Setting: Social media debates (lasting several weeks).

Steps:

1.  The organiser asks an expert to host an online debate on a trending topic or policy that has generated extreme opposing reactions among the population.
2.  The expert poses a question on his or her social media account, tags selected respondents and asks them to give their opinion within a set time.
3.  The expert reacts to the respondents' answers and then invites them, at set intervals, to share their views on different aspects of the same topic.
4.  The organiser takes all the inputs and uses them to make recommendations on the topic or policy, but without seeking to close off continued debate.

Example Organising an X/Twitter debate on drug policy



1. **Expert host:** “@Minister X is proposing a change in the government’s drug policy, shifting away from prohibition and towards legalisation. What is the evidence in support of continued prohibition, and what are the most relevant examples? We invite @X, @Y and @Z to give their opinion”.
2. The respondents give their answers and respond to each other’s comments.
3. One week later the expert host writes: “Now let’s talk about the sectors and costs involved if the policy were to shift towards legalisation”.
4. In subsequent weeks, the expert host issues a similar request that aims to delve deeper into the topic and create a shareable and informative thread.
5. All the inputs are synthesised into a set of recommendations on Minister X’s proposed drug policy.