



# Classroom Activities: Applying the Rules of Analytic Reading to Dialogue

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The activities below apply the rules for analytic reading to dialogue. Teachers can assign these activities after reading and discussing *How to Read a Book* or can assign them independent of the book discussion and book activities (having students read the book is highly recommended). Each activity described below requires students to pair up. Teachers can choose to keep the same pairs for all activities or have students work with a new partner for each activity.

## Activity 1: Come to Terms with Your Conversation Partner Inspired by chapter 8, on “Coming to Terms with an Author”

To constructively engage in dialogue and have a mutual understanding of what is being discussed, all people engaged in the dialogue must have a shared understanding of the definitions of the important words used—in other words, they need to come to terms. Pair up students, then give them a list of important words. For example, from *How to Read a Book*, some important words are: elementary, inspectional, analytic, enlightenment, disputatious, rhetoric, judgement, critical, theoretical (book), practical (book), propositions, and understand. When implementing this activity utilizing other texts or discussion topics, the words should be those that the students know but which are difficult to define, or which have contentious definitions, or they can be important words from other texts or topics students are studying as part of the class curriculum. In a text, important words are often in chapter and section titles, and/or they are words that the author spends a fair amount of time describing.

Instruct students to follow the steps below to come to terms with their conversation partner.

1. **Come to terms with your partner.** Pick five words from the list and then engage in deliberation to either come to a shared understanding of the term or come to a mutual understanding of the concept as your partner understands it. Write down the definitions you and your partner settle on. Note the terms of which you and your partner could not come to a consensus definition.
2. **Discuss the process of coming to terms.** Reconvene with your class and respond to these questions: How did your definitions of the terms differ from your partner? Was it difficult to come to a shared understanding? How can you use this activity in every-day conversations?

## Activity 2: Develop an Argument with Your Conversation Partner Inspired by chapter 9, “Determining an Author’s Message”

Propositions express a person’s judgement about something, or a declaration of their knowledge. Provide pairs of students with eight sentence strips that are either propositions you made up or propositions you copied from a text the students are reading—the propositions must connect to each other to construct an argument. Then instruct students to follow the directions below.

1. **Construct an argument.** With your partner, place the propositions the teacher provided in a sequential order to construct an argument.
2. **Persuade your classmates.** Present the argument you and your partner constructed to another pair of students or to the whole class—the teacher will make this determination.

3. **Peer-to-peer feedback.** After you and your partner present your argument, the students listening to your argument should provide civil, constructive feedback regarding whether the propositions aligned to convince them of the argument. Ask them: Did we convince you of our argument? What was convincing? What was not convincing? How can we improve our argument?

The goal of this activity is for students to persuade or convince another pair of students or the class of their argument.

### Activity 3: Present an Argument to a Conversation Partner Based on “Rules for criticizing a book as a communication of knowledge”

Have students independently construct an argument on an issue they are passionate. You can have students write their arguments as a homework assignment or in class. The argument should include facts, not beliefs or opinions, to support their claims. The goal of their argument is to persuade someone of their position on the issue. Have students pair up, then present their argument to their partner.

1. **Take on a role.** Take turns *speaking* (stating your argument) to your conversation partner and *listening* to the argument of your conversation partner.
2. **Check for understanding.** After the speaking student has finished, the listening student must restate the argument of the speaking student in their own words. The speaking student can then determine whether the listening student understood the argument. If the listening student does not understand, they can ask the speaking student clarifying questions. Based on these questions, the speaking student should then modify their argument.
3. **Agree or disagree.** Once the listening student can say “I understand” the argument, they can then state whether they agree or disagree with the argument. Reminder: Agreement or disagreement is not based on opinion (you cannot disagree because you don’t like the argument); it is based on whether the facts the speaker stated support their overall argument. After the listener states whether they agree or disagree, the listener should be charitable to the speaker and provide good reasons for their position—for example, the facts presented do not support the argument.

As a result of this assignment, students should feel more confident in their ability to present an argument, listen carefully to an argument, suspend personal opinion to focus on the facts and reasons of an argument, and provide feedback in a way that helps the speaker construct a better argument.

### Activity Extension

This activity, in conjunction with the book discussion and book activities guide, provides a starting point for conversations about controversial topics—understanding terms, understanding arguments, identifying solutions, etc. To foster relationships within the classroom that set the stage for conversations about controversial topics, implement the activity “Creating Connection” prior to this activity, which can be found [here](#).

Follow-up activity: To have students further practice applying the skills of analytic reading to discussion, and to introduce them to constructive disagreement, implement the activity “Have Students Interview Someone They Disagree With,” which can be found [here](#).

If you are interested in creating a classroom environment in which controversial topics are productively discussed and deliberated, follow “How to Create a Political Classroom: A Practical Guide for Teachers,” which can be found [here](#).