

Socratic Seminar

Overview:

This discussion protocol puts student thinking at the center of the discussion while placing much of the responsibility for leading the discussion on the students themselves. Students are expected to:

1. **Read** the selected text ahead of time.
2. **Come to the discussion** prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
3. **Engage in a self-reflection** at the conclusion of the seminar.

Purpose:

The Socratic Seminar discussion protocol encourages students to take responsibility for engaging purposefully and respectfully in an evidence-based discussion about a selected text. Within the context of the discussion, students listen closely to the comments of others, thinking critically for themselves, and articulate their own thoughts and their responses to the thoughts of others. As students become more comfortable and skilled with the protocol, the teacher releases responsibility for facilitating the discussion to the students.

Application: When and where can I use it?

The Socratic Seminar discussion protocol can be used in any content area provided students are given material to interact with that promotes open-ended thinking and discussion. The protocol lends itself to explicitly teaching and providing feedback on the qualities of respectful and meaningful dialogue, while also promoting deeper thinking and understanding about the topic at hand.

Getting Started: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Select a significant piece of text or collection of short texts related to the current focus of study. The text needs to be rich with possibilities for diverse points of view. Develop an open-ended, provocative question as the starting point for the seminar discussion. The question should be worded to elicit different perspectives and complex thinking. Students should also be responsible for generating questions to discuss.

Students prepare by reading the chosen piece of text in an active manner that helps them build background knowledge for participation in the discussion. The completion of the pre-seminar task is the student's "ticket" to participate in the seminar. The pre-seminar assignment could easily incorporate reading strategies such as text tagging, annotating the text, or jotting down noticing and wonderings about the text.

Alternatively, students could prepare for the Socratic Seminar by examining other non-text based materials such as videos, compositions, artwork, etc.

Begin the discussion with the open-ended question designed to provoke inquiry and diverse perspectives. Once the seminar begins, all students should be involved and should make sure that others are drawn into the discussion. As the teacher, you can take notes about student participation, quality of questions, directionality of discussions, use of specific text-references, evidence of active listening, etc. and then share this feedback with the students following the seminar.

Variation:

- ❖ Combine the Socratic Seminar with the Fishbowl discussion protocol. Students in the inner circle of the fishbowl participate in the discussion while those in the outer circle observe.

See this Instructional Move in action (link to video clips if available)

[Walker Middle School Socratic Seminar - Bing video](#)

Read more about this Instructional Move:

[Socratic Seminar - The Students' Guide to Learning Design and Research \(byu.edu\)](#)

[How to Use Socratic Seminars to Build a Culture of Student-Led Discussion | Edutopia](#)

[Crafting and Conducting a Successful Socratic Seminar - National Council of Teachers of English \(ncte.org\)](#)

[Using Socratic Seminars to Build SEL Skills | Edutopia](#)