

Introduction:

When you are engaged in a conversation with someone who holds differing or opposing views from you, it can be difficult to see past your own viewpoint and understand where they're coming from. This lesson challenges participants to set aside their own beliefs and attempt to truly listen to a perspective different from their own. They will first reflect on their own beliefs related to three hot-button issues of their choosing. Then, they will be paired up with someone who has opposing beliefs. They will each take turns listening to the other detail their views on the subject and then analyze how they felt and what they learned.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Reflect on their beliefs related to hot-button issues.
2. Practice active listening to understand a perspective different from their own.

Time:

1 hour

Materials:

Setting Yourself Aside Survey (in [Links](#) and [Downloads](#)), access to Zoom or other similar video conferencing platform.

For the survey, facilitators can choose one of the following options:

- Use the Setting Yourself Aside Survey Qualtrics (in [Links](#)) and have participants submit their auto-response email from the survey
- Distribute the PDF version (in [Downloads](#)) and have users fill it out digitally and return via email
- Load the items in the PDF version into a free survey tool such as Google Forms, Survey Monkey, etc.

If doing the asynchronous option, all participants will need access to a learning management system (LMS) and a device that records audio and/or video.

Group Size:

Pairs

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Openness:

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication:

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Empathy

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

Other Skills:

Friendship, Emotional Resilience

Facilitator Activity Instructions (Synchronous):

1. Before your virtual meeting, ask participants to complete the Setting Yourself Aside survey. Ensure that participants understand the dual purpose of this survey: 1. To reflect on their own beliefs and values. 2. To assign them a partner with different beliefs and values.
2. Before meeting, read through participants' responses to the survey and pair them up with someone who has an opposing view to one of their identified "hot-button" issues. Make a list of the pairs and their "hot-button" issue in a Google Doc or other type of document that can be shared with everyone.
3. For this next step, you can choose to either play Celeste Headlee's "[10 ways to have a better conversation](#)" TEDTalk over Zoom or another video conferencing platform, or you can assign participants to view it for homework. Either way, after participants have watched the video, ask them to discuss the following questions:
 - What do you think was the best piece of advice that Celeste offered about conversations?
 - What did you learn about listening from this TEDTalk?
4. Explain to participants that they will now get to practice what they learned about listening from the TEDTalk with someone who holds an opposing viewpoint to them: "I am now going to place each of you in a breakout room with your assigned partner. Once there,



you should begin by saying to each other, 'I don't aim to change your mind, but I hope you can open mine.' Then, one of you should specifically detail your views on the subject while the other listens. Switch roles and repeat."

Note: You may want to set parameters for how long pairs are in the breakout rooms, so that both individuals have ample time to speak.

5. Once all pairs have finished, debrief with the following questions:
 - How did you feel (both as you were speaking and listening)?
 - Which of Headlee's tips did you actively try to incorporate into this exercise?
 - What did you learn about your partner and their viewpoint?
 - What did you learn about yourself and your viewpoint?
 - While listening, how effective were you at setting yourself aside?
 - How could you apply what you did in this activity to real-world experiences?
 - In the future, how might you change how you approach conversations with people who disagree with you?

Facilitator Activity Instructions (Asynchronous):

1. Assign participants to view Celeste Headlee's "[10 ways to have a better conversation](#)" TEDTalk. In a class discussion board, have them discuss the following questions:
 - What do you think was the best piece of advice that Celeste offered about conversations?
 - What did you learn about listening from this TEDTalk?
2. Ask participants to complete the Setting Yourself Aside survey. Ensure that participants understand the dual purpose of this survey: 1. To reflect on their own beliefs and values. 2. To assign them a partner with different beliefs and values.
3. Read through participants responses to the survey and pair them up with someone who has an opposing view to one of their identified "hot-button" issues. Make a list of the pairs and their "hot-button" issue in a Google Doc or other type of document that can be shared with everyone. Then, create a private discussion board space for each pair.
4. Ask each participant to record themselves detailing their views on their "hot-button" issue. They should begin their recording by saying, "I don't aim to change your mind, but I hope you can open mine." They should record both video and audio, if possible, so that their partner can see their expressions and other nonverbal cues as they speak.

Note: The instructor should allow for audio only recordings if the student does not feel comfortable or does not have the proper equipment to record video. Also, the instructor should assure participants that they will not be assessed on their viewpoint. The primary purpose of recording themselves and uploading it to the discussion board is so they can hear each other's viewpoints without having to arrange a synchronous virtual meeting.

5. Then, they should upload their video to their pair's private discussion space and watch their partner's video. Following their viewing, they will write a debrief response that answers the following questions:
 - How did you feel (both as you were speaking and listening)?
 - Which of Headlee's tips did you actively try to incorporate into this exercise?
 - What did you learn about your partner and their viewpoint?



- What did you learn about yourself and your viewpoint?
- While listening, how effective were you at setting yourself aside?
- How could you apply what you did in this activity to real-world experiences?
- In the future, how might you change how you approach conversations with people who disagree you?

Related Tools:

- [Civil Discourse – Smarter Every Day](#)
- [Disagree Better: Empathy Gym](#)
- [Effective Listening Inventory](#)
- [Listening Deeply for Values](#)