

Introduction:

Invitational rhetoric was created with the goal of understanding one another rather than persuading others to believe what the rhetor believes. As an alternative to contemporary communication theory (rhetoric as persuasion to change other people), invitational rhetoric can be used to foster strong relationships. In this activity, participants will practice offering perspectives without the goal of persuasion and practice listening to other's perspectives without judgment.

Objectives:

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

1. Discuss differing perspectives with the goal of mutual understanding rather than persuasion.

Time:

1 hour.

Group Size:

Small Group.

Materials:

See Participant Instructions (in [Downloads](#)).

Invitational rhetoric [video](#).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

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.

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.

Curiosity:

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

Openness:

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

Other Skills:

Teamwork; Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion.

Activity Instructions:

Note: if you want to assign a [pre-reading](#) (Foss and Griffin's *Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric* – article cited below) for background knowledge, the instructor has the option to do so. Also, instructors are encouraged to tailor this activity to particular topics in their class, a workshop, seminar, etc.

1. Watch the first 11:47 minutes of the Invitational Rhetoric [video](#). Full hyperlink here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5JJ0gpUrXs>.
2. Small group practice (20 minutes). Participants take turns being the rhetor and an audience member:
 - The first participant (rhetor) will offer a perspective on a topic of their choice (e.g., "Violent games should be banned for teenagers," "How can a college education help you get a good job?" "Arts vs. science. Which is better?" etc.).
 - The audience members accept the offering (e.g., "I think you have a valid point because...").
 - The rhetor then responds to the audience without judgment.
3. Small group discussion (20 minutes). Ask:
 - What deep belief was challenged when you accepted the invitation?
 - How did it feel to accept the invitation despite your beliefs?
 - How would it feel to accept the opinion of someone that is discriminatory to you or a group you identify with?
 - How can you make your audience feel comfortable enough so that they feel they can accept your invitation and offer you an invitation to consider their perspective (i.e., with the language you use, etc.)?

- What are some words or attitudes that might hurt, degrade, or belittle an audience member (e.g., “What you’re saying is totally offensive and wrong,” etc.)?
 - What are some of the challenges of engaging in invitational rhetoric?
 - In what situations could it be most useful (e.g., class discussion, conversation with friends, discussing ideas with teammates on a project, etc.)?
 - In what conditions might it be less useful or effective? Why?
 - What are the differences between invitational rhetoric and traditional rhetoric? Can you think of examples from popular culture (e.g., movies, speeches, etc.)?
4. Whole group debrief (8 minutes). Ask:
- What did you learn from this activity?
 - How will you apply this in the real world?