

## Debate vs Dialogue

Debate is an important part of student and political life. However the purpose of a debate is to win an argument, and often participants express unwavering commitment to their own point of view, seeking to challenge and undermine the other 'sides' view or experience.

In debate there is often a great deal of heat but little light, and when discussing controversial, emotive or deeply personal issues where diverse views and opinions are held, having a debate of two sides can be limiting and only increase frustration and tension amongst participants.

In a dialogue the atmosphere is more exploratory, participants can express uncertainties as well as deeply held beliefs, and participants are encouraged to listen, understand and gain insight from others.

For some ways of distinguishing between debate and dialogue see below:

<b>Debate</b>	<b>Dialogue</b>
Participants tend to be leaders or persons with some authority. The behaviour of the participants tends to conform to stereotypes.	Those chosen to participate are not necessarily outspoken "leaders" Whoever they are, they speak as individuals whose own unique experiences differ in some respect from others on their "side". Their behaviour is likely to vary in some degree and among some dimensions from stereotypic images others may hold of them.
The atmosphere is threatening: attacks and interruptions are expected by participants and are usually permitted by facilitators.	The atmosphere is one of safety; facilitators propose, get agreement on, and enforce clear ground rules to enhance safety and promote respectful exchange.
Participants speak as representatives of groups.	Participants speak as individuals, from their own unique experience.
Participants speak to people with similar views to themselves.	Participants speak to each other.
Differences within "sides" are denied or minimised.	Differences among participants on the same "side" are revealed, as individual and personal foundations of beliefs and values are explored.
Participants express unswerving commitment to a point of view, approach, or idea.	Participants express uncertainties, as well as deeply held beliefs.
Participants listen in order to refute the other side's data and to expose faulty logic in their arguments. Questions are asked from a position of certainty. These questions are often rhetorical challenges or disguised statements.	Participants listen to understand and gain insight into the beliefs and concerns of the others. Questions are asked from a position of curiosity.
Statements are predictable and offer little new information.	New information surfaces.
Success requires simple impassioned statements.	Success requires exploration of the complexities of the issue being discussed.

