

Distinguishing dialogue from debate.

Debate	Dialogue
Pre-meeting communication between sponsors and participants is minimal and largely irrelevant to what follows.	Pre-meeting communication and preparation of participants are essential elements of the full process.
Participants tend to be leaders known for propounding carefully crafted positions. The personas displayed in the debate are already familiar to the public. The behaviour of the participants tends to conform to stereotypes.	Those chosen 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 to some degree and along some dimensions from stereotypical images others may hold of them.
The atmosphere is threatening: attacks and interruptions are expected by participants and are usually permitted by moderators.	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 their own constituents and, perhaps, to the undecided middle.	Participants speak to each other.
Differences within the 'sides' are denied or minimised.	Differences amongst 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 disguised as statements.	Participants listen in order to gain understanding 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 or no new information.	New information surfaces.
Success requires simple impassioned statements.	Success requires exploration of the complexities of the issue being discussed.
Debates operate within the constraints of the dominant public discourse*. (The discourse defines the problem and the options for resolution. It assumes that fundamental needs and values are already clearly understood).	Participants are encouraged to question the dominant public discourse, that is, to express fundamental needs that may or may not be reflected in the discourse, and to explore various options for problem definition and resolution. Participants may discover inadequacies in the usual language and concepts used in public debate.

*Discourse - here, the generally accepted manner in which the topic is spoken about.

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