



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SKILLS FOR DISAGREEING BETTER

A BRAVER ANGELS WORKSHOP

Workshop Goals

1. To gain a greater understanding of the values and concerns of people who differ from you politically;
2. To gain better skills for listening in a way the other person feels heard; and
3. To gain better skills for sharing your perspective in a way the other person might hear even if they disagree.

Ground Rules

1. We're here to talk about skills, not policies. So, let's not get into policy debates.
2. Let's help each other out as we work on the skills. It's not a competition.

Expectations to Abandon

1. That you will persuade other people they're wrong and you're right about issues of importance to them. Instead: hope they will see you as somewhat reasonable or at least willing to listen.
2. That people you talk with will use the skills taught in this workshop. Instead: expect that you will have to do the heavier lifting.

Four Skills: Listen, Acknowledge, Pivot, Perspective (LAPP)

1. Listen carefully

- Turn off your inner debater, and don't prepare your response yet.
- Instead, be ready to summarize/paraphrase what the person is saying.
- Focus both on the other's viewpoint and their underlying values and concerns.
- Look for something to agree with if possible.

Question to discuss: What is hard about really listening, in this way, to people who differ from you politically?

Conservative Values and Concerns

Core Values

- Individual freedom and personal responsibility
- Free market capitalism as an engine of human progress
- Patriotism: enthusiastic love of country
- Social values of religion, family, and respect for tradition
- Local initiative and local charity

Core Concerns

- Grouping people into identity categories that compromise individuality
- Government expansion (such as over-regulation and excessive taxation) that limits the freedom of individuals and businesses to make their own choices
- Skepticism about the ability of government to manage complex programs
- Suspicion of utopian promises and caution about social engineering as coming with many unintended consequences
- Being immediately labeled with an “ism” or “phobia” when expressing views on public policy and cultural issues

Note: These values and concerns vary among libertarians, social conservatives, populists, and free enterprise conservatives.

Liberal Values and Concerns

Core Values

- Inclusiveness, especially for those on the margins
- Diversity, the value of human differences
- A level playing field for people who have been denied opportunities
- An active government to help those in need, sustain a healthy environment, and ensure fairness
- Safe social environments, which includes attention to language

Core Concerns

- Abuses of free market capitalism that lead to exploitation and inequality
- Ignoring historical forces of injustice that are still present.
- Patriotism that is not balanced with criticism
- Groups who are left out of social progress
- Being immediately labeled with terms such as “woke” and “big government liberal” when presenting views on public policy and cultural issues.

Note: These values and concerns vary between left-wing progressives and moderate liberals.

2. **Acknowledge the other person's view before you share your own perspective.**

Most political conversations go this way: You say up, I say down, you say hot, I say cold, you say my candidate is terrible, and I say yours is worse.

The principle behind the Acknowledge skill is to connect first before you disagree by *making the other person feel heard*.

Acknowledging means letting the other person know that you heard their viewpoint and the strength of the feelings, values, and concerns about it. You are feeding back what you heard without just parroting back their own words.

Acknowledgement examples:

- "I hear your skepticism on climate change."
- "You believe we are running out of time on climate change, and we have to take strong measures to address it."
- "If I understand you correctly, you're saying that we should eliminate access to certain kinds of guns to prevent mass shootings."
- "You believe that most gun regulations are taking away first amendment rights."
- "I get that you have strong feelings about DEI programs causing harm."
- "You feel that DEI programs are needed and shouldn't be eliminated."

You can also add a quick **clarifying question** ("Are you referring to the last election?") and a brief agreement ("I agree that the immigration system is broken.")

Agree when you can:

- "I agree that housing seems to be a real issue for many."
- "We both have strong feelings about this topic, and I see your concern."

Conservative Prompt

I think the size and scope of government have gotten way out of control. Government has ballooned into a bloated, power-hungry force, micromanaging our lives and draining our wallets. We are drowning in taxes and regulations, and too many people have traded self-governance for reliance on handouts, expecting bureaucrats to solve their problems instead of taking personal responsibility. Now, don't get me wrong: the government has a role in maintaining infrastructure, law and order, and providing for those truly incapable of helping themselves. But we've crossed the line into full-blown nanny-state territory. And people like you seem to believe that for every challenge in life, the answer is more government. Can't you see that your obsession with government "help" is strangling the American experiment in self-governance by turning engaged citizens into lazy dependents?

Liberal Prompt

I believe the government should ensure fairness and opportunity for all, not just the privileged few. That means investing in education, healthcare, and social programs that give everyone a fighting chance. Taxes and regulations aren't punishments – they're the price we pay for a civilized society. Of course, government must be efficient and accountable, and government programs sometimes have unintended effects. But right now, the main problem is unchecked corporate power that rigs the system for the wealthy while leaving ordinary Americans behind. Yet people like you act as if any government oversight is tyranny while turning a blind eye to corporate greed. Can't you see that without a government strong enough to manage the playing field, we'd be living in a ruthless free-for-all where only the rich and powerful survive?

Practice Acknowledge Skill – Choose one of the two prompts above that's the farthest from your own viewpoint. Write down exactly what you would say to acknowledge the person who said those words to you.

3. **Pivot**

A **pivot** signals that you would like to offer your own viewpoint. Wait to get a verbal or nonverbal response indicating that the other person is ready to hear your view.

Look for a verbal “Okay, sure,” or a nonverbal nod.

When you pivot, you are not yet offering your perspective on the issue. The pivot is like signaling to make a turn in your car if the way is clear; the actual turn comes later.

- If the person seems open to listening to what you have to say, then continue.
- If the person just repeats their point, ignoring your pivot, or shows wariness about you taking your turn (verbally or nonverbally), then consider backing up and repeating LAPP.

Pivot Examples:

- “Can I offer my thoughts on this? This is something I’ve thought a lot about.”
- “Can I offer a different way of looking at it (or perspective)?”
- “I know this is a hot topic. May I share a couple ideas I have?”

Practice Pivot Skill - Write down a pivot statement word for word. Keep it brief.

4. Perspective

The best time to share your view is after you've made someone feel heard, and you've mentioned that you'd like to share your views now.

Element	Examples
I-statements rather than truth statements	<p>"This is how I see it."</p> <p>"This is why I see it this way."</p> <p><i>(As opposed to "This is how it absolutely is!")</i></p>
Name the sources for your views	<p>"I'm basing my view on data about the risk of suicide from guns in the home, which is a bigger risk to life than stranger attacks."</p> <p>"My reading has convinced me that gun ownership is deeply rooted in the U.S. Constitution."</p>
Share a life experience or personal story behind your viewpoint	<p>"I come at this as a child of immigrants...."</p> <p>"I used to live in a southern border town, and here's what I saw...."</p>
Mention something you agree with	<p>"I'm completely with you on making sure our elections are trustworthy and open to everyone who is eligible to vote. I think the approach I support will help bring that about."</p>
Avoid negative labels	<p>"While I see weather patterns changing, we have to be careful not to take away people's jobs."</p> <p>"I'm very concerned about the fires, the flooding, and more intense weather events that we've been having."</p> <p><i>(As opposed to "You crazy climate people..." or "You people who ignore science" or "You racist." "You socialist.")</i></p>
Avoid "you Democrats" or "you Republicans" type language	<p>Focus on the people in this conversation rather than lumping anyone into a larger group.</p>

Practice Perspective Skill: To write your perspective statement, focus on two of the Perspective skills: I-statements and finding something to agree with. You can use bullet points to summarize your perspective rather than writing full sentences.

What's Next?

Take another step with Braver Angels:

Attend a local or national debate -

<https://braverangels.org/what-we-do/debates/>.

Braver Angels debates use a special parliamentary format that encourages everyone to participate by speaking or asking questions. We tackle challenging topics that matter. Debate participants gain a deeper understanding of other points of view, a better sense of common ground, and a renewed confidence that we actually can talk about controversial topics respectfully.



Take another workshop -

<https://braverangels.org/what-we-do/#workshops>

There are also many other workshops in the Braver Angels catalog.

Each workshop extends your skills in depolarization. We encourage you to experience the full set.

Braver Angels videos and podcasts -

<https://braverangels.org/media/>

There is an extensive amount of Braver Angels material in video and audio/podcast form - including a YouTube channel and podcasts on Apple, Spotify and other major streaming platforms. Check these out - we are sure that you will find an interesting topic for exploration.



Join Braver Angels today -

<https://braverangels.org/support-us/>

If you are not already a member, please join us. Dues are only \$12 per year, although many give more.