

Using Skype for Classroom Videoconferences

Conversation Scenarios

One of the keys to any successful classroom conversation is encouraging students to practice working through a set of scenarios demonstrating common conversation behaviors. By doing so, teachers provide students with opportunities to develop strategies for facilitating ongoing dialogue regardless of the circumstances of a particular conversation.

The scenario cards on the following pages are designed to serve as role plays. Assign each scenario to a student group. Then, allow groups to practice and deliver performances based on their scenario cards to their classmates. As each group performs, have students fill out the *Targeting Conversation Behaviors* handout.

Follow each performance with a conversation spotlighting successful and unsuccessful interactions between participants.

Scenario 1: Don't forget about Silent Sally

Background knowledge: In many classroom conversations, you will find students who sit silently and watch the conversation go by! On the outside, they may seem lazy and uninterested, but on the inside, they're often the most active "participants." They really are listening—and if you can draw them into the conversation, you might just learn something remarkable that you hadn't considered. Silent Sallies aren't unintelligent. They're just not the kind of person who is going to elbow their way into an active conversation.

Your job is to craft a short (3-5 minute) role play that warns our class not to forget about the Silent Sallies in conversations.

Potential characters for your role play:

Teacher: The teacher's job is to start a conversation on the topic of school uniforms. Consider asking a question like, "*If our school were to consider a school uniform policy, how would you feel?*"

Rob: Rob is a confident character who feels strongly that school uniforms are a bad idea because they take away a student's right to express their personality. He speaks often, asks tons of great questions, and makes good points that other students agree with.

Rebecca: Rebecca agrees with Rob that school uniforms are a bad idea. She often extends on something that Rob says or answers one of Rob's questions, giving more detail that even he hadn't considered. Together, she and Rob are making a convincing case that school uniforms are a bad idea.

Sally: Sally sits silent for most of the conversation, but if you watch her body language, you can tell that she is interested in the conversation. She follows speakers with her eyes, sits forward, looks thoughtful, and may even try to speak every now and then, only to be cut off by Rob and Rebecca's excitement.

Key point in your presentation: Remember that you're trying to remind your peers that silent students often have information that is worth sharing in a conversation. That means that Sally has to do something unexpected and remarkable in your presentation.

Perhaps at the end of your role play, Sally finally gets a chance to speak, making an incredibly thoughtful statement about why school uniforms make sense—something like "*but wouldn't school uniforms make everyone—especially poor students—feel a little less threatened by school because they knew that they wouldn't have to compete over clothes?*"

The other students—including Rob and Rebecca—become animated, obviously wanting the conversation to continue, but the teacher steps in, moving the group on to a new activity.

Your ideas:

Remember that the ideas on this scenario card are just suggestions! Your role play can take an entirely different direction as long as it emphasizes the importance of engaging quiet group members in conversations.

Scenario 2: When Ridiculous Rob just can't keep his mouth closed

Background knowledge: In many classroom conversations, you will find students who end up completely dominating the course of a discussion. They make comments that seem like they will never end, they ignore the contributions of others, and they jump in anytime there is a moment of free space that no one else is filling with thoughts. When you watch one of these conversations from the outside, it seems like these ridiculous Robs are talking to themselves!

Your job is to craft a short (3-5 minute) role play that warns our class about the dangers of Ridiculous Robs in conversations.

Potential characters for your role play:

Teacher: The teacher's job is to start a conversation on the topic of school uniforms. Consider asking a question like, "*If our school were to consider a school uniform policy, how would you feel?*"

Rob: Rob is a loud and borderline obnoxious character who is the first to jump into the classroom conversation about school uniforms. His comments are longwinded and filled with twelve-dollar words that may or may not be used appropriately. As soon as other students finish a comment, Rob jumps right in—even if it means talking over his peers. Often, Rob completely ignores what other students have said, starting new strands of conversation on his own.

Rebecca: Rebecca is a really bright young lady who really wants to listen and to learn from Rob at the beginning of the conversation. She concentrates on what he's saying, no matter how long his comment rambles on. Then, she tries to respond—only to have Rob jump back into the conversation and talk over her. Eventually, she gets frustrated by his refusal to listen and his tendency to talk all the time.

Sally: Sally is the quiet kid in every conversation. She doesn't say much, but she seems to be interested and listening as the conversation begins. Over time, though, Rob's speeches bore her. As the conversation progresses, you can tell by her body language that she has lost interest completely.

Key point in your presentation: Remember that you're trying to remind your peers that students who talk too much and don't take time to listen end up turning off their peers. That means that Rob's group mates have to show that they eventually grow tired of him. Perhaps they start rolling their eyes whenever he starts to speak. Perhaps they start talking between themselves quietly, ignoring him completely. Perhaps they sigh or groan each time that he talks over them.

Either way, they look incredibly happy when the teacher steps in and moves their group to a new activity!

Your ideas:

Remember that the ideas on this scenario card are just suggestions! Your role play can take an entirely different direction as long

Scenario 3: The power of good questions

Background knowledge: Good conversations depend on one key ingredient: Good questions! Good questions hook participants, encouraging them to share. Good questions challenge participants to think differently about topics. Good questions lead conversations in new directions, and good questions leave room for other people to participate. Sometimes good questions are asked of the entire group. Sometimes good questions are asked of individual members. Regardless, good conversations cannot happen without someone who is willing to ask the kinds of questions that make other people think.

Your job is to craft a short (3-5 minute) role play that shows our class how good questions can improve the quality of conversations.

Potential characters for your role play:

Teacher: The teacher's job is to start a conversation on the topic of school uniforms. Consider asking a question like, "*If our school were to consider a school uniform policy, how would you feel?*"

Steve: Steve is an active participant in this conversation. From his body language, you can tell that he's interested in the topic and engaged by the thinking of his peers. He doesn't, though, ask very many questions. Instead, his comments tend to be statements. They're all connected to the topic, they may share interesting facts or different points of view, but they don't automatically encourage other students to respond.

Rebecca: Rebecca is also involved in this conversation from the beginning: listening, building on the thoughts of her peers, sharing concrete details from research. Like Steve, though, she doesn't ask many questions—and the questions that she does ask either raise points that have already been made in the conversation or have obvious answers that don't really stimulate conversation: "*Do you think school uniforms are good?*" "*Should we have school uniforms?*"

Rob: Rob is the star of this conversation. His body language sends the message that he's motivated and involved, but it is the quality of the questions that he is asking that really makes him stand out from his peers. He asks questions of the group that force them to look at the topic of school uniforms from a new point of view. He asks questions of his peers that force them to clarify their statements. In fact, almost every contribution that Rob makes comes in the form of a question that leads to new conversations: "*Steve, I really liked your point about the cost of school uniforms, but don't you think parents would save money by not buying the trendy, brand name clothes we all wear right now?*"

Key point in your presentation: Remember that you're trying to remind your peers that questions make for great conversations. To make this point clear, two characters are really important: Rebecca, whose questions are not very sophisticated and do little to make the conversation move forward, and Rob, who asks the kind of questions that get everyone talking. That means Rob is going to have to do a good job listening to the group and asking questions connected to the ideas being shared AND that Rob's group mates are going to have to seem animated and excited to answer the great questions he's asking.

Your ideas:

Remember that the ideas on this scenario card are just suggestions! Your role play can take an entirely different direction as long as it emphasizes the idea that good questions make for great conversations.

Scenario 4: What if Inaccurate Steve is just plain wrong?

Background knowledge: In many classroom conversations, you will find students who end up sharing information that is inaccurate! They might argue that bullfighting is okay because there are plenty of bulls in the deserts of Spain or that exploring Saturn would be easy because it's right next door to Earth. They're always well-intentioned—they just don't know as much about the topic of the conversation as they think they do!

Your job is to craft a short (3-5 minute) role play that shows our class how to politely correct Inaccurate Steves when they are just plain wrong!

Potential characters for your role play:

Teacher: The teacher's job is to start a conversation on the topic of school uniforms. Consider asking a question like, "If our school were to consider a school uniform policy, how would you feel?" The teacher should also remind students to use the notes that they've taken on school uniform policies when making their arguments in the class conversation.

Steve: Steve is a really motivated participant in the conversation. You can tell from his body language that he's interested and involved. He shares a few good ideas with the group and builds on the comments of his peers. At some point in the conversation, though, Steve makes a statement that is wildly inaccurate—like, "You know, parents are going to have to buy more allergy medicine if we go to school uniforms because so many kids are allergic to clothes."

Rob: Like Steve, Rob is an active participant in the conversation, making good comments and adding on to the thoughts of his peers. He asks good questions, listens appropriately, and works to get even the quiet members of his group involved. His weakness, though, is that he doesn't want to disagree with anyone—so when Steve makes inaccurate statements, Rob always agrees: "You're right, Steve, I hadn't thought of that."

Rebecca: Rebecca is the star of this conversation. She's involved from the beginning, listening, building on the thoughts of her peers, asking good questions and getting everyone involved. She seems to know just the right time to speak and she never talks over anyone. The difference between Rebecca and Rob, though, is that Rebecca is unwilling to let Steve's inaccurate statements go unchallenged. Instead, she *politely* pushes back against Steve's thinking: "Steve, where did you find that information in our research? Can you give us some examples of clothes that students are allergic to?"

Key point in your presentation: In many ways, your role play is the most important for our class to see because peers are rarely willing to challenge the thinking of their classmates even when it is wrong!

To make this point clear, Rob, Rebecca and Steve have to play their parts perfectly: Steve's inaccurate statements have to be obviously wrong—almost to the point of being comical—but he has to appear to genuinely believe that what he is saying is true. Rob shouldn't bat an eye at Steve's inaccuracies. Instead, he should agree no matter how strange Steve's assertions are. And Rebecca must challenge Steve without being challenging. She must show that she isn't critical of Steve. Instead, she just wants to help him to learn.

Your ideas:

Remember that the ideas on this scenario card are just suggestions! Your role play can take an entirely different direction as long

as it emphasizes the idea that it is okay to challenge classmates who bring inaccurate information to the conversation.

Scenario 5: Disagreeing without being disagreeable

Background knowledge: Good conversations are bound to have moments where you disagree with the thoughts and ideas of other participants. In fact, if a conversation doesn't have any disagreement, it's bound to be a pretty boring. There *are* two sides to every story, after all! While it is completely appropriate to express differing points of view in group conversations, it is also important to learn to disagree without being disagreeable.

Your job is to craft a short (3-5 minute) role play that shows our class how to act when disagreements arise in conversations.

Potential characters for your role play:

Teacher: The teacher's job is to start a conversation on the topic of school uniforms. Consider asking a question like, "If our school were to consider a school uniform policy, how would you feel?" The teacher should also remind students to use the notes that they've taken on school uniform policies when making their arguments in the class conversation.

Rob: Rob is super motivated to participate in this conversation. He's brought the notes that he made while researching and he has a strong opinion about school uniform policies: He hates them. You can almost hear the scorn in Rob's voice when he talks about school uniforms and he barely listens when Rebecca—who believes that uniforms are a good idea—tries to make a case that doesn't line up with his point of view.

Rebecca: Rebecca is equally motivated to participate in this conversation, but she doesn't think that school uniforms are a bad idea at all. As a result, she's at odds with Rob from the beginning of the conversation. She tries asking him questions and sharing facts from her research, but Rob sees her as an enemy and just won't listen to a thing that she says. Eventually, she stops trying to interact with Rob and instead ends up having a really good conversation with Steve.

Steve: Steve and Rebecca end up being the co-stars of this conversation. Like Rob, Steve tends to think that school uniforms are a bad idea. Unlike Rob, Steve is willing to consider other points of view. As a result, he and Rebecca have a great conversation together. Instead of competing with one another and trying to be right all the time—the mistake that Rob makes—Steve and Rebecca ask one another great questions, challenge the evidence presented by their partners, and see one another as co-learners who are thinking about a topic together.

Key point in your presentation: Remember that you're trying to remind your peers that everyone involved in a conversation are partners instead of adversaries. To make this point clear, Rob has to come across as the most difficult guy you've ever worked with in class. To Rob, this conversation isn't about learning—it's about winning. By making Rob super disagreeable, the interactions between Steve and Rebecca—who disagree with one another about the central issue but enjoy wrestling with ideas together—will look super positive.

Your thoughts:

Remember that the ideas on this scenario card are just suggestions! Your role play can take an entirely different direction as long as it emphasizes the importance of disagreeing without being disagreeable.

Targeting Conversation Behaviors

To track what you are learning about cooperation in classroom dialogue, complete the following handout while watching each of the groups in class perform their role play demonstrating common conversation behaviors:

| | |
|--|---|
| Scenario 1: Don't forget about Silent Sally | Scenario 2: When Ridiculous Rob can't keep his mouth closed |
| Whose behavior stands out in this scenario? What is it about their behavior that is extraordinary? | Whose behavior stands out in this scenario? What is it about their behavior that is extraordinary? |
| Have you ever seen this kind of behavior in a conversation before? Did it help or hurt the work of the group? Why? | Have you ever seen this kind of behavior in a conversation before? Did it help or hurt the work of the group? Why? |
| What strategies do you think group members can use to either encourage or discourage this kind of behavior? | What strategies do you think group members can use to either encourage or discourage this kind of behavior? |
| Scenario 3: The power of good questions | Scenario 4: What if Inaccurate Steve is just plain wrong? |
| Whose behavior stands out in this scenario? What is it about their behavior that is extraordinary? | Whose behavior stands out in this scenario? What is it about their behavior that is extraordinary? |
| Have you ever seen this kind of behavior in a conversation before? Did it help or hurt the work of the group? Why? | Have you ever seen this kind of behavior in a conversation before? Did it help or hurt the work of the group? Why? |
| What strategies do you think group members can use to either encourage or discourage this kind of behavior? | What strategies do you think group members can use to either encourage or discourage this kind of behavior? |
| Scenario 5: Disagreeing without being disagreeable | Your final thoughts |
| Whose behavior stands out in this scenario? What is it about their behavior that is extraordinary? | Which conversation behaviors do you think are the most common in conversations between students at our grade level? Why? |
| Have you ever seen this kind of behavior in a conversation before? Did it help or hurt the work of the group? Why? | Which conversation behaviors do you think are the least common in conversations between students at our grade level? Why? |
| What strategies do you think group members can use to either encourage or discourage this kind of behavior? | Which conversation behaviors do you think you will personally have the most trouble mastering? The least trouble? Why? |

