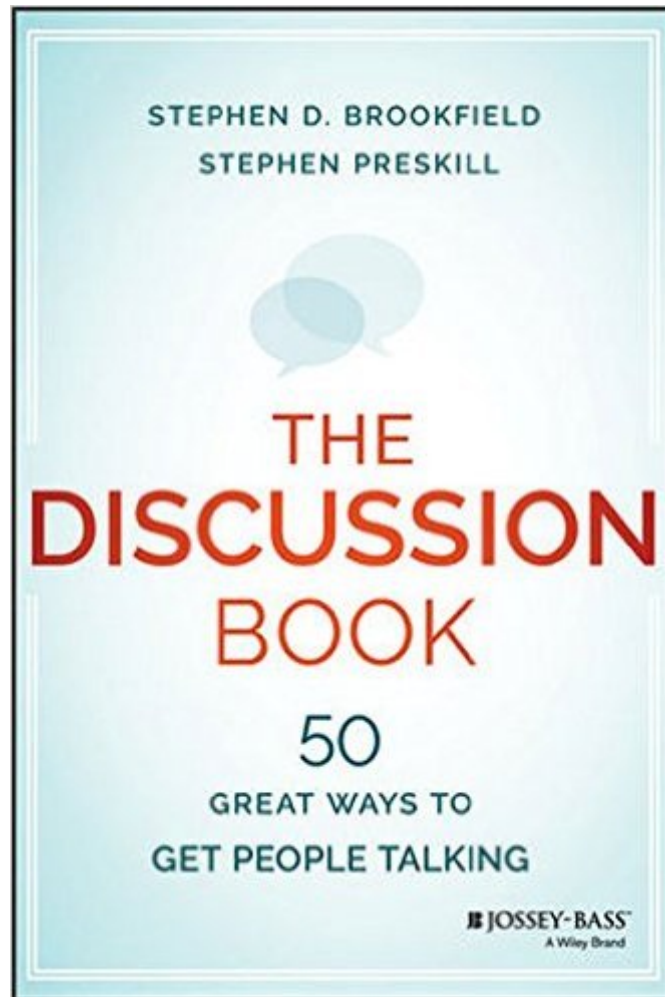


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# The Discussion Book: 50 Great Ways To Get People Talking



## Synopsis

Build teams, make better decisions, energize groups, and think out of the box Do you need a resource that you can pull out of your pocket to liven up meetings, trainings, professional development, and teaching? The fifty easily applied techniques in this timely manual spur creativity, stimulate energy, keep groups focused, and increase participation. Whether you're teaching classes, facilitating employee training, leading organizational or community meetings, furthering staff and professional development, guiding town halls, or working with congregations, The Discussion Book is your go-to guide for improving any group process. Each of the concrete techniques and exercises is clearly described with guidance on selection and implementation, as well as advice on which pitfalls to avoid. All of the techniques: Offer new ways to engage people and energize groups Get employees, students, colleagues, constituents, and community members to participate more fully in deliberative decision-making Encourage creativity and openness to new perspectives Increase collaboration and build cohesive teams Keep groups focused on important topics and hard-to-address issues Derived from the authors' decades of experience using these exercises with schools, colleges, corporations, the military, social movements, health care organizations, prisons, unions, non-profits, and elsewhere, The Discussion Book will help you guide discussions that matter.

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Jossey-Bass; 1 edition (January 19, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1119049717

ISBN-13: 978-1119049715

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars See all reviews (13 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #46,485 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #76 in Books > Business & Money > Skills > Running Meetings & Presentations #140 in Books > Reference > Words, Language & Grammar > Communication #219 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Communication & Media Studies

## Customer Reviews

Anyone in an academic setting probably needs ideas on how to change up group discussions, or

just generating ways to get students engaged in some new way. I got this book to see how it would for a freshmen college class and I think it has quite a few good ideas. The book is not organized thematically, which might have been a help. There are suggested links, but each chapter offers one specific discussion prompt. As for the prompts, they are more weighted toward business settings where group participation is a little more expected. In an academic setting, the challenge is sometimes getting the students motivated at all! But, there are a few good ideas that I can use...and many of the business-type prompts can certainly fit in the classroom with some re-configuring. I liked how simple the book is - it describes the prompt, explains what situation it will work best in, defines possible problems, and helpfully explains why the participants might like it. A lot of time with group work, it SEEMS like busy work to the students because it isn't clear what the takeaway is meant to be - because Stephen Brookfield has provided his take that I can use that to say "here's the point." Obviously, I should do that anyway, but a lot of times I forget that students can't magically read my mind. Brookfield's summary is useful in that regard. "Hatful of quotes" for instance - it would push students to respond to a specific part of a text, and would enable the whole class to respond. It's not a revolutionary idea, but I liked how Brookfield broke it all down for me. I might have wanted more of an academic focus, but that's not what the book promised to be - and like I said, I can put my own spin on these prompts. With 50 to work with, this should give me some good ideas.

Stephen D. Brookfield's *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms* is one of my most-used pedagogy books, so I was excited to be able to pick this new book up by him and Stephen Preskill as part of the Vine program. Unlike Brookfield's previous books, this one is aimed not just at college faculty, but also at those in the business world who are seeking ideas on how to keep discussions slowing. As the authors state in their introduction, the idea is to have this be a short, concise manual, one that "you could stuff into a pocket or purse as you walked to chair a meeting, teach a class, or run a professional development workshop." As such, this is a really practical book. The book is organized into ten categories, depending on what areas you'd like help with. This organization really makes good sense here since it allows you to quickly locate strategies to help with your area of concern. While many of these strategies (like Think-Pair-Share and the Jigsaw) have been covered in previous books, it's really helpful to have them gathered into a short book that makes those ideas easily accessible. For each strategy, the authors cover not only how it works, but also where/when it works well, what users appreciate about it, what you need to watch out for when using it, and questions that fit into the protocol. I'm planning on keeping this in my office at work so I can refer to it when my class discussions are lagging. I

know that the techniques in here will really help revitalize our group discussions.

This book is chock-full of ideas for generating a discussion. It is very user-friendly and straightforward, which I appreciate. I especially like that the strategies are very goal-oriented in that there are suggested techniques for what you are trying to accomplish (e.g. to enhance critical thinking, building group cohesion, decision-making). The most interesting one to me was a technique called structured silence that is designed to help the participants be more comfortable with silent lulls in the conversation, and although the authors don't mention this, it would be a great technique for introverts in the group. I will be using it in the faculty development work I do as it has great ideas, and I can also see great extensions for the activities that I think my faculty will like (e.g. reflective or reactive writing assignment for follow-up)

The best thing about "The Discussion Book" is that it doesn't get bogged down in a lot of theoretical explanation. It gets right to the heart of the matter, offering practical tips, methods, and exercises for energizing all kinds of groups and audiences to engage in meaningful, memorable discussions. The book covers 50 techniques for all kinds of leaders to apply in real-world scenarios (town hall meetings, employee training, churches, classrooms, community groups, and so on). This is an essential manual for any office collection, or any civic or community group to keep in their office libraries. I found it extremely useful and will likely apply many of the techniques I learned in my own office environment.

The authors provide easy-to-follow instructions to fifty exercises designed to promote discussion in small and large groups. The directions for each technique describe the method's purpose, how to do it, where and when to use it, what participants appreciate about the exercise, possible pitfalls, and the type of questions for which the technique is best suited. There are techniques to initiate discussions in new groups, promote good questioning, foster active listening, conduct discussions without talking, draw people out of their comfort zone, democratize participation, build group cohesion, facilitate decision making, carry on text-based discussions, and more. Teachers, trainers, managers, and anyone having to facilitate group discussions will find this a useful manual.

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