

## **Harkness Discussion Method**

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The Harkness Discussion is a student-centered method of conducting and evaluating group dialogue, which was originally developed at Phillips Exeter Academy. While the teacher acts as facilitator/observer, students dialogue about a specific topic or concept provided by the teacher. Dialogue among the group is recorded using a tracking method. Students are expected to be prepared for dialogue, listen carefully, contribute to the dialogue respectfully, ask questions of one another, and accept opinions/ideas.

### **How to implement the strategy:**

1. Create a tracking sheet where the student facilitator for each group can record student names and track the dialogue.
2. Student groups sit in a circle, which resembles the Harkness Table. (This can be used with multiple groups or as whole class, depending on class size.)
3. Choose the group facilitator. The facilitator writes names of students sitting in circle to prepare for tracking dialogue. Explain to the facilitator that his/her responsibility is to monitor group dialogue by drawing lines from group members on the group tracking sheet, beginning the line with the first person who starts the conversation. The line may go back and forth between students or all the way through the group.
4. Provide students with topic for dialogue and have them start. **\*\*NOTE\*\*** Monitor facilitators. In the beginning, they may have difficulty tracking the conversation and participating.
5. At the end of group discussion, have students reflect on the visual. Each group writes a reflection of their participation and sets dialogue goals for the next time on the back of their tracking sheet.

**\*\*NOTE\*\*** Tracking can be as simple as drawing lines to who contributes in a meaningful way to who contributes and how. A key can be made for the facilitator to use to track student contributions, such as:

- organizing, leading
- summarizing, restating, clarifying
- offering examples from the text
- asking questions
- commenting or giving an opinion
- making a suggestion
- asking for clarification
- reacting to comments
- analyzing the text, a comment, or the discussion itself
- restarting the discussion

- filling in a hole
- arguing a point
- asking for new information
- asking for comments or reactions
- making connections with other texts, situations, or discussions

**Additional resources:**

- Adapted from: Phillips Exeter Academy: The Amazing Harkness Philosophy  
[http://www.exeter.edu/admissions/109\\_1220.aspx](http://www.exeter.edu/admissions/109_1220.aspx)
- Introducing and Using the Discussion (AKA, Harkness) Table  
[http://www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ITMagazine/Pages/Introducing-and-Using-the-Discussion-\(AKA-Harkness\)-Table.aspx](http://www.nais.org/Magazines-Newsletters/ITMagazine/Pages/Introducing-and-Using-the-Discussion-(AKA-Harkness)-Table.aspx)
- The Harkness Discussion  
<http://iws.punahou.edu/user/bschauble/ct/harkness.htm>