

A COMPARISON OF DIALOGUE & DEBATE

*From Study Circles Resource Center; adapted from a paper by Shelley Berman,
based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of
Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR)*

Dialogue is collaborative. Two or more sides work together toward common understanding.

Debate is oppositional. Two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove the other wrong.

In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.

In debate, winning is the goal.

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.

In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.

Debate affirms a person's own point of view.

Dialogue reveals assumptions for re-evaluation.

Debate defends assumptions as truth.

Dialogue causes introspection of one's own position.

Debate causes critique of the other position.

Dialogue is flexible in nature.

Debate is rigid in nature.

Dialogue stresses the skill of synthesis.

Debate stresses the skill of analysis.

Dialogue opens the possibility of finding a better solution than any original ones.

Debate defends one's own position as the best solution and excludes other ones.

Dialogue strives for multiplicity in perspective.

Debate strives for singularity in perspective.

Dialogue affirms the relationship between the participants through collaboration.

Debate affirms one's own strength in opposition to the other points of view.

Dialogue remains open-ended.

Debate implies a conclusion.

Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude, an openness to change.

Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.

In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.

In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenges to show that it is right.

Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.

Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.

In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.

In debate, one searches for glaring differences.

In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other position.

In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.

Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks not to alienate or offend.

Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationships.

Dialogue assumes that many people have the answer, and that together they can put them into a workable answer.

Debate assumes that there is one answer and that someone has it.

In dialogue, everyone is part of the solution to the problem.

In debate, one person or viewpoint wins over the other.

Dialogue affirms the idea of people learning from each other.

Debate affirms the idea of people learning individually in competition with others.