## Socratic Seminars

Socratic seminars are a student-driven discussion method best suited to older students. Students are given a topic or driving question to consider before the session. They discuss the topic and reflect on this discussion with minimal teacher intervention.

To run a Socratic seminar in your own classroom:

1. Arrange students into two circles – inner and outer
2. Ensure students all have resources that enable them to take notes during the discussion.
3. Pose a question/topic to the class.
4. The inner circle of students discusses the question or topic. They can only address one other, not the teacher. The teacher only speaks if the discussion needs to be redirected.
5. The outer circle listens to the discussion and takes notes, focusing on any points they would like expanded/persistent questions they have.
6. When the comments begin to slow, ask the inner circle to end their discussion.
7. At the end of the discussion, outer circle uses their notes to comment on the discussion. Members of the outer circle offer feedback or pose further questions.
8. Steps 4 and 5 are repeated, with the inner circle basing their new discussion on the comments and questions of the outer circle.

Socratic circles can build the skills needed for respectful discussion and ensure student voices are heard in the classroom. They enable social and cooperative learning because students bounce off one another rather than relying on teacher guidance.

A detailed overview of the technique can be viewed at [this site](http://www.acsa.edu.au/pages/images/Creating%20significant%20learning%20experiences%20through%20PBL%20Socratic%20Seminar%20Protocol.pdf), or a simpler approach at [this site](https://www.weareteachers.com/how-i-learned-to-stop-being-afraid-of-socratic-seminars-try-them-in-my-classes/).

## Socratic seminars adapted for students learning from home

This strategy can be facilitated using online video conferencing tools while students are learning from home. Teachers should access the department’s [guidelines for the use of live video with students](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/learning-from-home/media/documents/guidelines-to-support-schools-using-live-video-with-students.pdf) prior to using this strategy. The following modifications will enable students to engage in Socratic seminars while learning from home.

1. Before the activity, send all students the following information:

* Their assigned group. Students should be divided into two groups:
  + Group 1 will discuss the question (the ‘inner circle’).
  + Group 2 will observe and comment on the discussion (the ‘outer circle’).
* Activity instructions for each group.
* Instructions for effective, safe and ethical use of video conferencing tools.
* Question that will drive discussion.
* Instruction for all students in Group 1 to prepare discussion points.

1. Once all students have accessed the video conference, explain the following:
   * The tasks for each group and the question to be discussed.
   * The correct use of microphones.
     1. Group 1 should have microphones and video on during the discussion and muted during the feedback phase.
     2. Group 2 should have microphones muted during the discussion and switched on during the feedback phase.
   * Discussion protocols including virtual hand-raising when ready to speak.
2. Students in Group 2 could use the chat or Q&A feature in the video conferencing room to take notes while listening to the discussion.

**Suggested digital tools**

* [Zoom](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningTool/Card/603#.Xo20PWGpMww.link)
* [Microsoft Teams](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/LearningTool/Card/117#.Xo20PY7LflA.link)