

# Making Group Discussions Come to Life in the Language Classroom

By Shivani Gupta



# Which of these statements do you identify with?

1

*“No matter how interesting the discussion topics are, my students never really get into it... the discussion dies in a few minutes... and some students don’t participate at all!”*



2

*“Some students feel that discussions are a waste of time because all they are doing is talking...it’s difficult to make learning tangible.”*



3

*“Some students always end up dominating the discussion giving very little chance to others to speak.”*



# Session Aims

In today's session, we will be looking at:

- **maximising student participation in discussions**
- **identifying areas that can be focused on in a discussion**
- **ways to deal with dominating/stronger learners**

# Maximising Student Participation

# The 'TOPS' Approach

**T -**

**O -**

**P -**

**S -**

# Activity 1: What's missing?



## Group Discussion: Does The Punishment Fit The Crime?

Punishments for crimes vary across the world. A serious crime in one country might be a petty crime in another.

### Task 1: Preparation

Look at the list of crimes. How do you think criminals should be punished for each crime? Should they go to prison or have to pay a fine?

Crime	Punishment: Fine, Community Service, Prison Sentence
Mugging	
Burglary	
Rape	
People-Trafficking	
Murder	
Adultery	
Cyber Crime	

# The *TOPS* Approach in action: adding AN ‘OUTCOME’



## Group Discussion: Who would you pick?

The local prison is over-crowded, and the authorities have decided to release some criminals who had committed petty crimes. A local committee has been set up to make this decision. You are a part of this committee and need to **decide**:

- Who should be released?
- What can be done to ensure that this person does not commit any other crimes?

### Prisoner Profile 1:

Rajesh Singh, aged 22, unmarried. A pickpocket who has been to the prison twice earlier. Clever, a skilled carpenter, but very unstable; moves quickly from job to job and girl to girl. Likes to boast about his thefts, but a likeable person.

### Prisoner Profile 2:

Lalita Sharma, aged 25, married with two children, found guilty of shoplifting. Tried to prove that she has a mental disorder (kleptomania) but medical examination did not support this. Says she loves her children, but constantly neglects them; her mother-in-law looks after them. Not on good terms with her husband.

### Prisoner Profile 3:

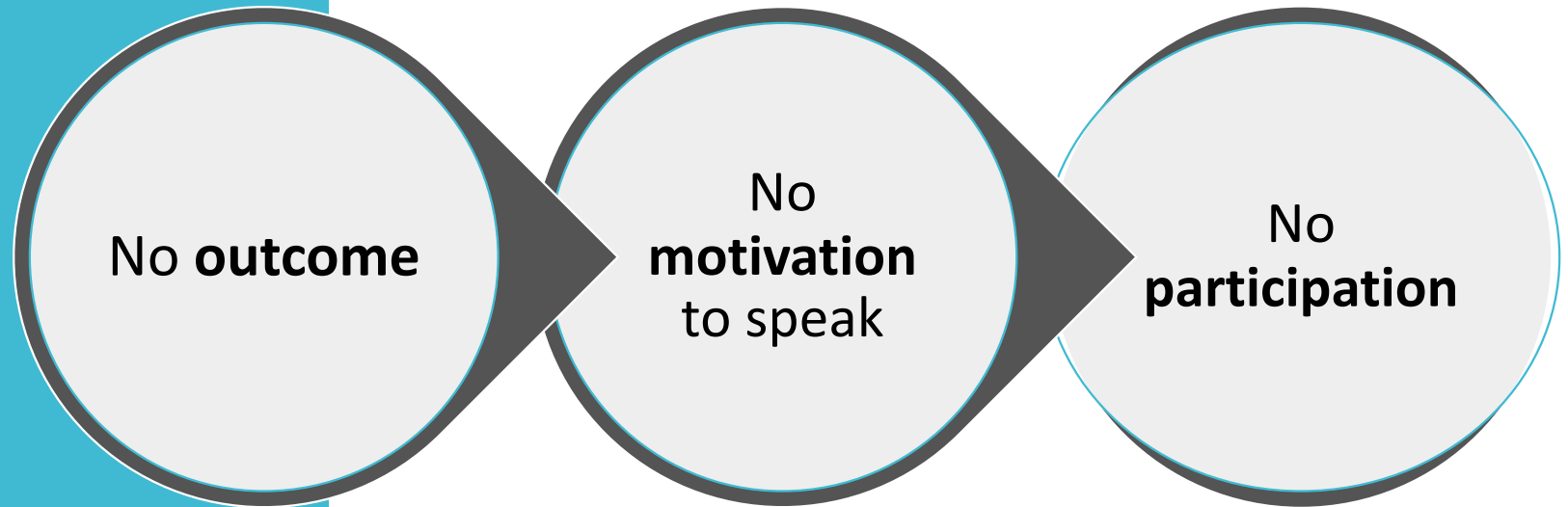
Tushar Singh, aged 20, unmarried, seriously injured a man in a drunken fight over a girl. Says he regretted it later, blames in on drink. No job, lives with his mother who has no control over him.

### Prisoner Profile 4:

Alia Sheikh, aged 21, unmarried, smuggled diamonds and watches, had been doing so for months before being caught. Comes from a rich and respected family, claims she did it for ‘fun’. Hangs out with wild, party-going, drug addicts, but doesn’t do drugs herself. Parents have disowned her.

Adapted from Discussions that work by Penny Ur

# Missing 'O' :The ripple effect





# Activity 2: What's missing?



## Group Discussion: Time Out



There are more choices than ever when it comes to choosing where to go for **a bite to eat** or something to drink.

So **making your mind up** can be **tough**? How do **you** decide where to go?

### Task 1: Ranking

a) Look at the following and rank them in importance when choosing where to go.

- a) Location
- b) Popularity
- c) Menu
- d) Price
- e) Reviews
- f) Atmosphere
- g) Somewhere new

# The *TOPS* Approach in action: adding 'PERSONALISATION'



## Group Discussion: Where to go?



There are more choices than ever when it comes to choosing where to go for **a bite to eat** or something to drink.

You are planning to go out to eat with your classmates after the class. You need to decide on a place making sure everybody is comfortable with the place you pick.


**Role Card 1:** It's the end of the month and you are broke. You just have 500 bucks on you and want to spend as less as possible.

**Role Card 2:** You have some unfinished work at home. You need to be back in time to be able to do it so you can't stay for more than 2 hours after the class.

**Role Card 3:** You are a bit picky about where you eat. Music, lighting, crowd; everything matters to you. You would like to go to a decent place to eat.

**Role Card 4:** You are sick and tired of eating at the same boring restaurants. You really want to try something new and exciting.

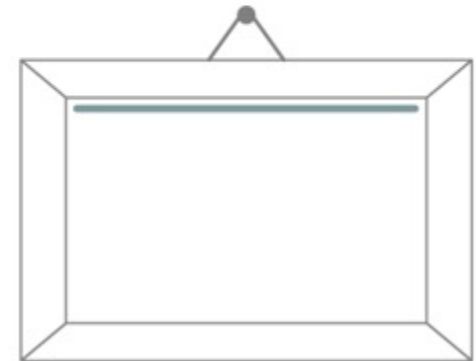
## Activity 3: What's missing?

 **Group Discussion: Whose picture deserves to be on the wall of fame?**

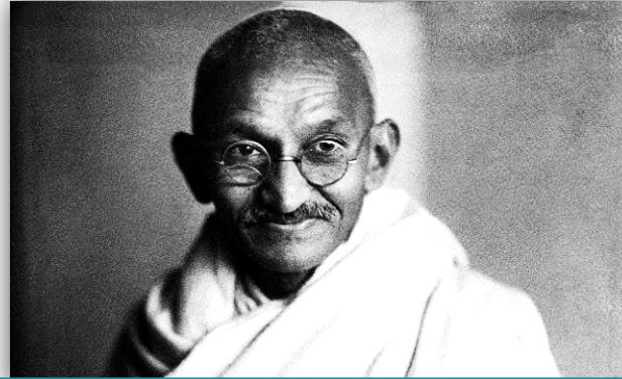
The following is a list of the most influential leaders the world has ever seen. Imagine that British Council wants to honour the most influential leader by placing their photo on the *Wall of Fame*. With your group, decide whose picture should it be. **Give reasons** to support your answer.

- i. Mahatma Gandhi
- ii. Barack Obama
- iii. Nelson Mandela
- iv. Mother Teresa
- v. Bhagat Singh

★ *Wall of fame* ★



# The *TOPS* Approach in action: Offering more 'SUPPORT'



*Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is widely recognized as one of the twentieth century's greatest political and spiritual leaders. Honoured in India as the father of the nation, he pioneered and practiced the principle of Satyagraha—resistance to tyranny through mass nonviolent civil disobedience.*

*While leading nationwide campaigns to ease poverty, expand women's rights, build religious and ethnic harmony and eliminate the injustices of the caste system, Gandhi supremely applied the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, playing a key role in freeing India from foreign domination. He was often imprisoned for his actions, sometimes for years, but he accomplished his aim in 1947, when India gained its independence from Britain.*

*Due to his stature, he is now referred to as Mahatma, meaning "great soul." World civil rights leaders—from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Nelson Mandela—have credited Gandhi as a source of inspiration in their struggles to achieve equal rights for their people.*

# The *TOPS* Approach in action: Supporting learners with idea generation



## Group Discussion: Where to go?



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**Choosing areas to focus on**

## 4 commonly focused areas

- Language for **expressing opinions**
- Language for **asking for opinions**
- Language for **agreeing/disagreeing**
- Language for **concluding**

Which **OTHER** areas could be focused on in a discussion?

# Here you Go!

- Language for **interrupting/ responding to an interruption** e.g. “If I may add something...”, “If you could let me finish what I was trying to say...”
- Language for **expressing doubt** or improbability e.g. “I’d very surprised if...”
- Language for **justifying opinions** e.g. “According to recent studies, ...”
- Language for **making /responding to suggestions** e.g. “Why don’t we...”
- Language for **acknowledging** what somebody has said e.g. “X has made a really good point about...”
- Language for **generalizing** e.g. “More often than not...”
- Language for **buying time** e.g. “How shall I put it?”
- Language for **giving examples** e.g. “To cite an example, ...”
- Language for **contrasting** e.g. “Although x, Y is...”
- Language for **comparing** e.g. “X is not even remotely comparable to Y”



# Here you Go!

- Language for **adding emphasis** e.g. "... **really** rampant, ... **unbelievably** hostile"
- Language for **sounding tentative** e.g. "Apparently..., probably..."
- **Idiomatic expressions** e.g. "It might be a long shot but..."
- **Lexical sets** (topic-related) e.g. Theme - Crime (heinous, verdict etc. )
- **Collocations** (topic-related) e.g. commit crime (topic-crime)
- **Intonation**
- **Sentence stress** e.g. "The point **I** want to stress is..."
- **Pause Fillers** "It's sort of hard ..."
- **Repair strategies** e.g. "What I meant was..."
- A **grammar point** likely to come up in the discussion e.g. The first conditional
- Aspects of **spoken grammar such as ellipsis** e.g. "Anything to add anyone?"
- **Register** – "I'm pretty sure that..." VS "I'm confident that..."

trial  
accused  
verdict  
petty  
alibi  
shoplifting  
kleptomaniac  
convict  
suspect  
heinous

# ZEROING IN ON USEFUL AREAS

- **Learners' level**
- **Demands that the activity imposes on learners**

# WHAT AREAS WOULD YOU CHOOSE TO FOCUS ON FOR THIS ACTIVITY FOR AN INTERMEDIATE CLASS?



Your family has just won 1 million in a lottery. All the family members have their own ideas about spending this money. Discuss your ideas as a family and then decide **how to spend the money?**

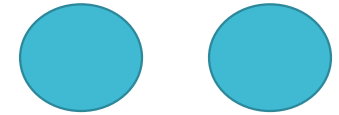
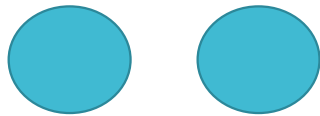
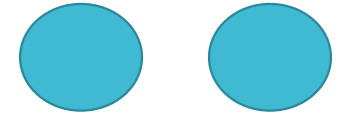
# Possible areas to focus on:

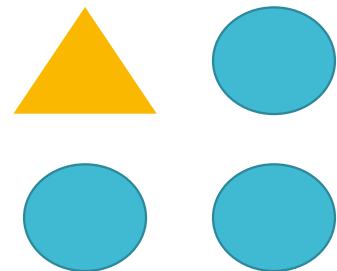
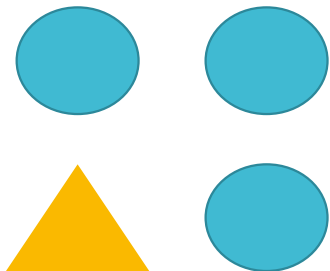
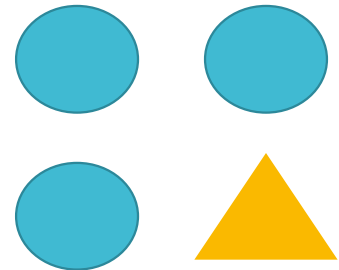
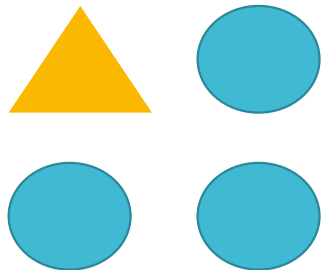
- Language for **making /responding to suggestions** e.g. *“How about buying a car...”, “I’m not sure if buying a car is a good idea because...”*
- **Repair** strategies e.g. *“What I meant was....”*
- Language for **contrasting** e.g. *“Although buying a car is important, we shouldn’t be spending too much on it...”*
- Language for **comparing** e.g. *“Buying a necklace is not even half as important as renovating the kitchen”*
- **Sentence stress** e.g. *“The point I want to stress is...”*
- **Grammar- 1<sup>st</sup> conditional** – *If we buy a car, we’ll be able to ...”*



# Dealing with stronger/dominating learners

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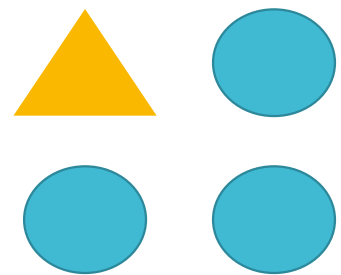
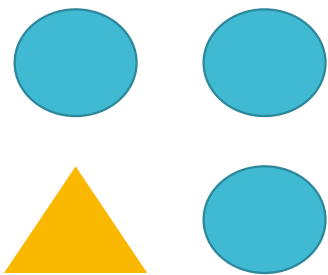
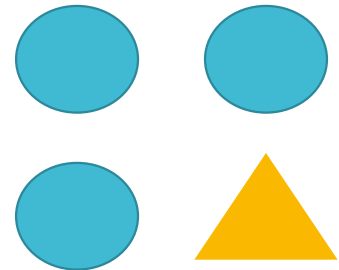
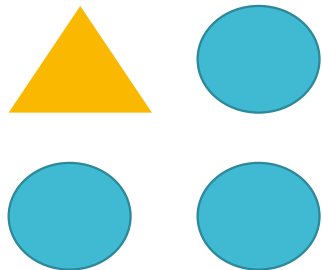




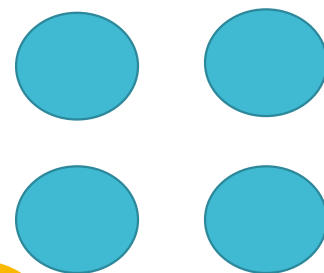
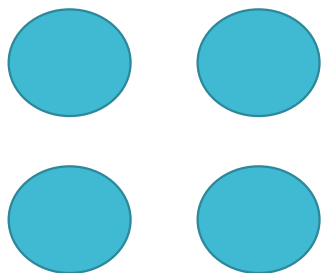
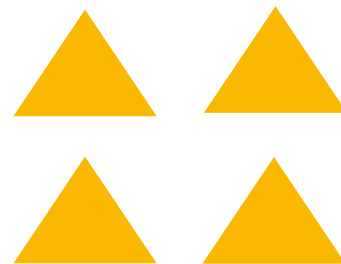
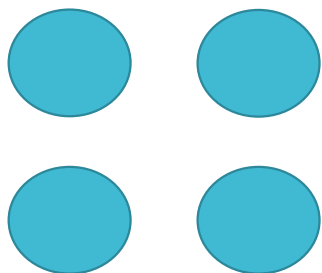
**Establishing routines using props!**







**Assigning  
them a task!**



**Regrouping!**



