

Philosophical Chairs*

Philosophical Chairs is a discussion strategy that emphasizes careful listening and mastery of diverse points of view.

- Arrange chairs in a U formation.
- Students sit facing each other across the center of the room.
- Students can sit in the neutral zone sit at one end of the center area so that they can see both sides (at the bottom of the "U" formation).
- Students must address each other by their **first names**.
- A student must **briefly summarize** the previous speaker's points to that speaker's satisfaction before he/she begins his/her own comments.
- **Think** before you speak. **Organize** your thoughts. Give verbal clues to your listeners ("I have three points; first...").
- After a student speaks, he/she must wait until two students on his/her side have spoken.
- One speaker at a time; others are listeners.
- The teacher can call time-out periodically to **clarify, reflect on the process or content, or refocus the discussion**.
- Address the ideas, **NOT** the person.
- One student from each team will provide a summary of the viewpoints presented during the discussion by his/her team.
- A student in the neutral zone must take notes on both sides of the argument, and if his/her position changes, he/she must explain why he/she came to a new conclusion.
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* Adapted from: Zachary Seech, "Philosophical Chairs: A Format for Classroom Discussion," *Teaching Philosophy* 7:1 (1984), as modified for the classroom by Dale B. Fountain, Mount Tahoma High School, Tacoma, Washington.