

Guide Distinguishing Dialogue vs. Debate

While increasingly greater value is being placed on the importance of collaboration, network building, and co-creation, too often old instincts drive our conversations toward arguing that our position is “right” and the other persons position is “wrong.” To help nurture high-level, collaborative conversations aimed at developing breakthrough solutions to the complex challenges we must address together, we offer the following CDS® Guide for Distinguishing between Dialogue and Debate.

Dialogue	Debate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In debate, winning is the goal.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue reveals assumptions for re-evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate defends assumptions as truth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate causes critique of the other position.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other positions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.