# Using the Structured Reflective Conversation Planning Tool

## AIMS: What are the desired rational goal & experiential impact of the conversation?

*Aims* describe the purpose for a focused conversation, and aims should be established prior to planning—but explained to the group *after the introduction.*

**Rational aim:** The rational aim is the practical goal—the concrete objectives—of the conversation. Examples include clarifying a misunderstanding, solving a specific problem, or gleaning lessons from past work.

**Experiential aim:** The experiential aim is the inner impact that you want the conversation to have. Examples include re-establishing a team’s confidence, addressing hurt feelings or misunderstandings, or increasing motivation about a new strategy.

## INTRODUCTION: Establish purpose, expectations, norms, & desired outcomes 2–3 minutes

**Purpose:** Establish the meeting’s purpose, expectations, norms, and desired outcomes.

**Steps:** Begin the conversation with this section.

## WHAT? Objective questions: What do you see / know? 3–5 minutes

**Purpose:** To give participants a chance to surface relevant facts about an issue or to examine data.

**Steps:**

- Select question prompts from the list below.
- Ask the first question and have several participants respond.
- Use a different question prompt after every 2 to 3 responses, to minimize redundancy.
- Make sure each participant responds to at least one of the question prompts.
- Record ideas as appropriate to the situation.

**Question prompts:**

- What is one fact you noticed?
- What is one thing that stands out / catches your attention?
- What are some successes / challenges?
- What clarification is needed?

## GUT? Reflective questions: What do you think, & how do you feel? 3–5 minutes

**Purpose:** To allow participants to share their personal responses about the issue or data.

**Steps:**

- Select question prompts from the list below.
- It is not necessary for each participant to respond to every—or even *any*—of these questions.
- Relate responses to the topic or data by restating or paraphrasing when needed.
- Record ideas as appropriate to the situation.

**Question prompts:**

- What surprises you / pleases you / gives you confidence / makes you proud?
- What concerns you / worries you?
- What seems important or unclear?

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1 This resource was adapted from content in Nelson, J. (2007). *The art of focused conversation for schools: Over 100 ways to guide clear thinking and promote learning.* Toronto, Ontario: The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA Canada).
SO WHAT? Interpretive questions: What does this mean, & what are the implications? 20 minutes

Purpose: To solicit reflection and determine the importance of the issue or data.

Steps:
- Anticipate issues that you think the group might identify.
- Select 2 to 3 question prompts from the list below.
- It is not necessary for each participant to respond to every—or even any—of these questions.
- Change questions as needed, to minimize redundancy.
- Divide participants into small groups to discuss issues raised and to enable subgroups to share thinking.
- Record ideas as appropriate to the situation.

Question prompts:
- What seems to be the central issue?
- What seems to be most challenging / most critical?
- What questions are raised?
- What insights / patterns / themes are emerging?
- What does this mean for our team / group / department?

NOW WHAT? Decisional questions: What do we do now? 10 minutes

Purpose: To identify a specific action plan that the group can implement immediately.

Steps:
- Use question prompts to facilitate a discussion in which the group selects, develops, and commits to a set of ideas from the So what? discussion above.
- Document the decisions of the group, ensuring that the following criteria are addressed:
  - Actions are specific, measurable, immediate, and directly related to the issue or data.
  - Actions describe who is responsible for what and by when.
  - A method is determined for collecting evidence of success and for monitoring progress.
  - A timeline is established, and a follow-up discussion is planned.

Question prompts:
- On what immediate actions can we all agree?
- What is an appropriate starting point?
- What supports are needed in order for us to take action?
- When will we start?
- Who will do what, and when?
- What exactly are our next steps?
- How will we know / measure progress?

CLOSING: Important points to remember & record 2–3 minutes

Purpose: To confirm actions and expectations, reiterate important ideas, and confirm a timeline for follow-up.

Steps:
- Thank group members for participation and summarize the importance of actions and their expected effects.
- Reiterate timeline, and confirm roles and responsibilities.
### Structured Reflective Conversation Planning Tool

**INTRODUCTION:** Establish purpose, expectations, norms, & desired outcomes  
2–3 minutes

**AIMS:** What are the desired rational goal & experiential impact of the conversation?  
2–3 minutes

- **Rational aim—concrete goal / objectives:**

- **Experiential aim—intended experiential impact:**

**WHAT?** Objective questions: What do you see / know?  
Surface relevant facts & information.  
3–5 minutes

**GUT?** Reflective questions: What do you think, & how do you feel?  
Elicit feelings, reactions, & associations.  
3–5 minutes

**SO WHAT?** Interpretive questions: What does this mean, & what are the implications?  
Uncover meaning, significance, & implications.  
20 minutes

**NOW WHAT?** Decisional questions: What do we do now?  
Plan future action, direction, & next steps.  
10 minutes

**CLOSING:** Important points to remember & record  
2–3 minutes