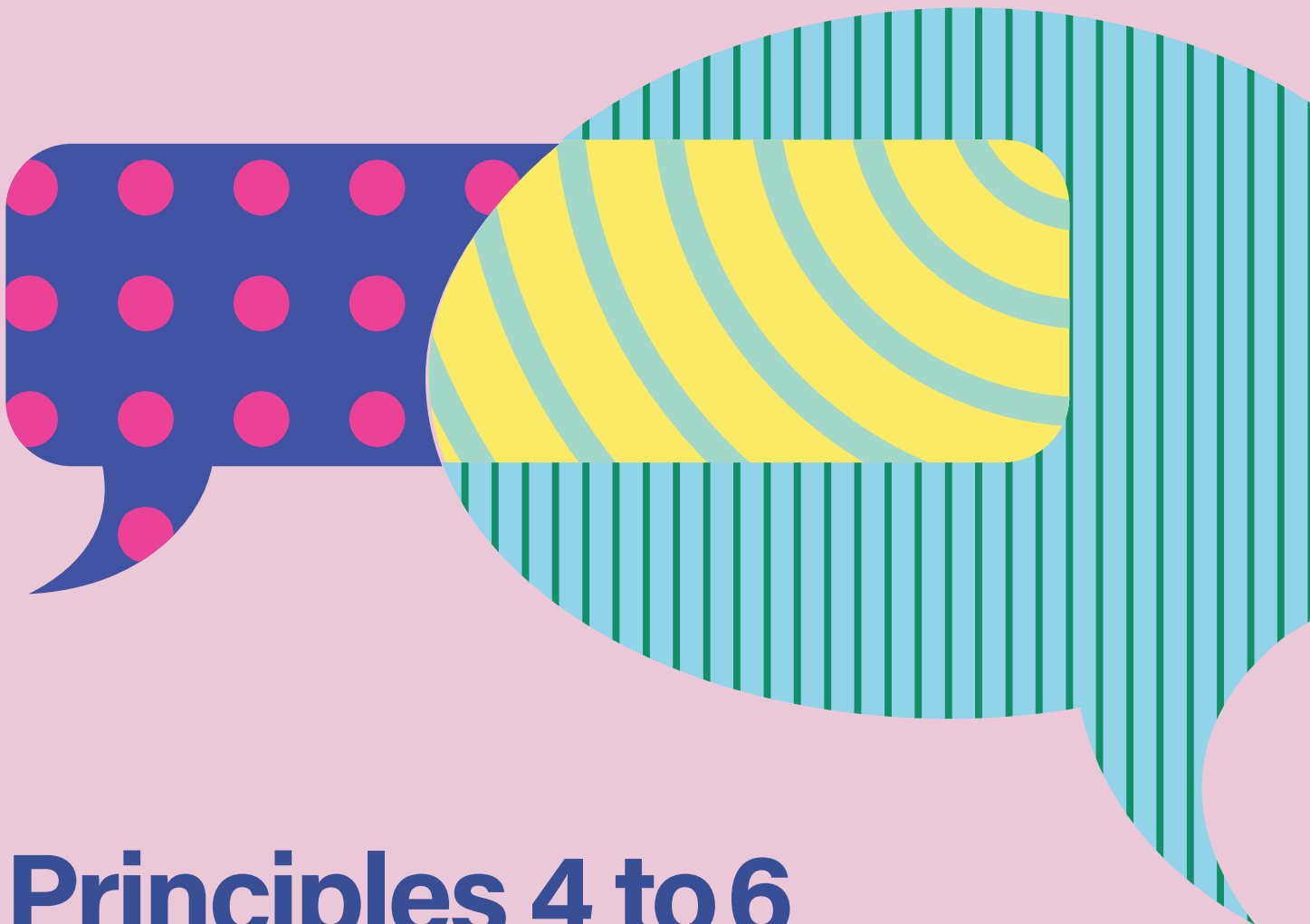


---

Responsible Debate  
Learning Resources

Worksheet 4

RSE **YOUNG  
ACADEMY**  
OF SCOTLAND



## Principles 4 to 6

How respect affects debate

---

In this worksheet, you are going to keep learning about the specific principles of the Young Academy of Scotland Charter for Responsible Debate. The next three principles are about **debating respectfully**. You will learn about:

- 1 **listening**, being **open-minded**, and having **empathy**,
- 2 the power of **language** – **word choice** and **how we say things**,
- 3 acknowledging **others people's good arguments** and even **changing our views**.

### How to use this worksheet:



This icon indicates where someone **reads the text aloud** and the others follow along.



This icon indicates a **group exercise** where you **discuss** and **write something down**.



This icon indicates a **solo exercise** where you do some **thinking** and **writing** alone.

### Remember:

- ✓ Keep connecting what you read with experiences from **your own life**.
- ✓ **Share your thoughts** with your group. This is **not** passive, individual, or silent!

## Principle 4: Listen carefully, open-mindedly, and with empathy



**READ ALOUD:** Sometimes when people say they like debates and arguments, what they really mean is **they like talking!** They forget about the other half of communication: **listening**. That's why many debates and arguments don't seem to go anywhere: both parties are only interested in expressing **their own view**. They only **listen passively** and **talk past each other**.



**GROUP EXERCISE:** **Listening actively** is a social skill that can be learned, which involves getting out of the habit of only **listening passively**.<sup>1</sup> Circle the correct answer below by choosing which type of listening is described.

- > I **listen to understand** the meaning of what I am hearing. To achieve this, I give the speaker my full attention → **ACTIVE / PASSIVE**.
- > I **listen to respond** to what I am hearing. To achieve this, I think about my own view or how to steer the conversation to my preferred topic. → **ACTIVE / PASSIVE**.



**READ ALOUD:** Active listening takes **effort**. It takes **patience** to not interrupt, zone out, or get distracted by other thoughts. And, **because it shows** in one's verbal and non-verbal behaviour, **active listening is quite hard to fake!** The speaker will almost always know.



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Mark the **verbal and nonverbal behaviours** that are the common giveaways of passive and active listening.

**X** for passive listening

**✓** for active listening

Nodding

Lining up a response

Looking away

Asking questions

Mental multitasking

Interrupting

Eye contact

Checking the time

Changing the subject



**READ ALOUD:** The behaviours in the first column – **nodding** along, asking **open-ended questions** at the right moments, maintaining **eye contact**, etc. – all indicate that someone is actively listening. Why?

→ Nodding is like a **friendly thumb's up** to the speaker to keep going.

→ Asking open-ended questions helps to **clarify understanding** while **withholding judgment**.

→ Eye contact is about **giving** the speaker your **full attention**.



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Active listening is a way to show **respect** and **care** in social relationships. It also helps you process better what you are learning from the person you are speaking with. *Read the following conversation<sup>2</sup> between two friends. Add the labels to the moments in the conversation when Jodie verbally shows that she is actively listening to Lisa.*

**Labels:** withholding judgment, asking an open-ended question, checking understanding

- **Lisa:** I just had a fight with my sister, and we haven't spoken since. I'm upset and don't know who to talk to.
- **Jodie:** Okay, tell me more. What happened? → LABEL: \_\_\_\_\_
- **Lisa:** Well, we were arguing about what to do for her 18th birthday. I'm still so angry.
- **Jodie:** Oh, that's tough. It sounds like you are mostly upset that you're not speaking, right? → LABEL: \_\_\_\_\_
- **Lisa:** Yes, she makes me so angry. She assumed I would help her plan this elaborate party – but I don't have time! And then it also makes me feel guilty, like I am a bad person.
- **Jodie:** Sounds complicated. You probably just need time to sort out how you feel about it. → LABEL: \_\_\_\_\_
- **Lisa:** Yes, I guess I do. Thanks for listening – I just needed to vent.



**READ ALOUD:** Clearly, a **listener's behaviour can have a big impact** on the way a conversation goes, either positively or negatively. It can change the way the speaker **feels** and whether **they want to continue** the conversation, debate, or argument. It can also change what the listener takes away with them.



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Think about your own experiences as a speaker.

How does it feel to be listened to passively?

---

---

How does it feel to be listened to actively?

---

---

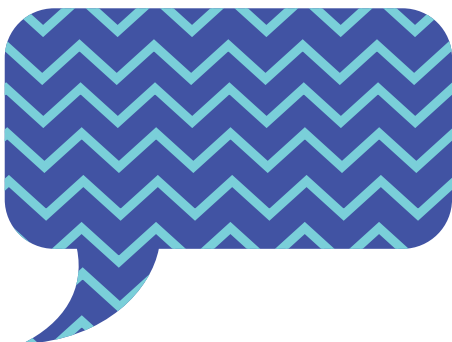


**READ ALOUD:** Being actively listened to is a **positive experience** in which we feel **respected**. But there are also **benefits for the person doing the listening**. Personal **growth**, deep interpersonal **connection**, and **learning** are some of the positive outcomes of active listening.

### How much of what we say is in words?

Active listening goes **beyond just hearing the words** someone is saying. ❖ Up to 65% of communication is nonverbal!<sup>3</sup>

So, if we want to understand the **"total meaning"** the speaker is trying to communicate, we also need to **pay attention** to their **tone and body language**. ❖ This is why being fully present and maintaining eye contact are important parts of active listening.





**GROUP EXERCISE:** Let's practise with a **slightly longer exercise** this time. Allocate one person as **Speaker**, one as **Listener**, and one as **Reporter**.

*Follow these instructions to try out active listening yourselves:*

- 1 **Speaker** talks about a topic for 1 full minute, while **Listener** and **Reporter** listen as actively as possible.  
 ❖❖❖ *No making notes! Use your ears and eyes only.*
- 2 **Listener** summarises what **Speaker** said as accurately as possible, while **Speaker** and **Reporter** listen.  
 ❖❖❖ *Listener must try to capture Speaker's meaning, not give their responses to it!*
- 3 **Reporter** comments on how **Speaker** spoke and on how **Listener** listened.
- 4 **Speaker** comments on what **Listener** and **Reporter** got right and what they missed.

*Repeat the exercise until everyone has had a chance to be at least one of the roles. Here is a list of topics to choose from (you can also pick one of your own, but make sure you can speak about it for 1 full minute). **Happy listening!***

- A Why coffee is better than tea. (Or not).
- B Why cats are better than dogs. (Or not).
- C Why football is better than rugby. (Or not).
- D Why we should all be vegetarians. (Or not).
- E Why voting is important. (Or not)
- F Why cell phones should be banned in school classrooms. (Or not).
- G Why a particular subject should be dropped from the school curriculum. (Or added).
- H Why education should be free for everyone everywhere. (Or not).

**After the exercise:** Was that challenging? Easy? Strange? Reflect together on what you learned.

-----

-----



**SOLO EXERCISE:** Which of the three roles did **you** find most challenging and why?

-----

-----



**READ ALOUD:** During the exercise, you may have heard things that you **do not fully agree with**. This is often the precise moment when we **stop listening** actively: we feel an **urgent need to respond** by **challenging** what has been said or **rephrasing** it in a way we think is better. We want to say: ❖ "See, that's where you're wrong.." ❖ "Well, in my experience.." ❖ "Um, no!"

**Note!** The exercise **forced you** to stay in silent listening mode; **in real life**, you are also able to ask **thoughtful, open-ended questions** to help you understand what the other person is trying to say. Active listening takes patience, practice, and **knowing when (and when not!) to speak**.



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Imagine telling someone something **you know they disagree with**. Describe how they will react if they have the following characteristics:

- Generally **open-minded**: .....
- Generally **closed-minded**: .....
- Generally **empathetic**: .....
- Generally **self-absorbed**: .....



**READ ALOUD:** Being **open-minded** involves trying to **understand** someone, not trying to **outsmart** or **judge** them. Being empathetic is about **using your imagination** in order to see things from someone else's perspective.

- ➔ An open-minded listener is driven by **curiosity not competitiveness** when they ask questions. They tend to say: **"Interesting, tell me more..."**
- ➔ An empathetic listener recognises that **the speaker is a human being** made up of **many experiences** that inform their views. They tend to say: **"What matters to you?"**



**GROUP EXERCISE: What's in it for the listener?** Compile a list of the benefits to being an excellent active listener (there are plenty!). The first two have been done for you.

- ✓ **Always learning** about other people's lives and experiences.
- ✓ Being able to follow arguments **accurately** (and **remembering them afterwards!**)
- ✓ .....
- ✓ .....
- ✓ .....



Principle 5: **Use emotional language judiciously, avoiding disrespectful or inflammatory language**



**READ ALOUD:** **Emotional** or **emotive language** is what we use to get listeners or readers to **feel something**. Poems, novels, song lyrics, meaningful conversations: these frequently contain emotive language. It can be a **very powerful** way to express ourselves.

**What baggage do words carry?**

Emotive language is also known as **loaded language** because of all the **extra meaning** the words are carrying. It tells the listener: **“this is how I feel about what I am saying”** or **“this is how you should feel about what I am saying”**. This has an **influence** on how the listener **interprets** what they hear and **how they feel about it**.

❖ The **influence is stronger** when the **feelings are stronger!** That’s why some of the **most persuasive** and **moving** language is **loaded** with emotions like **love, fear, or disgust**.

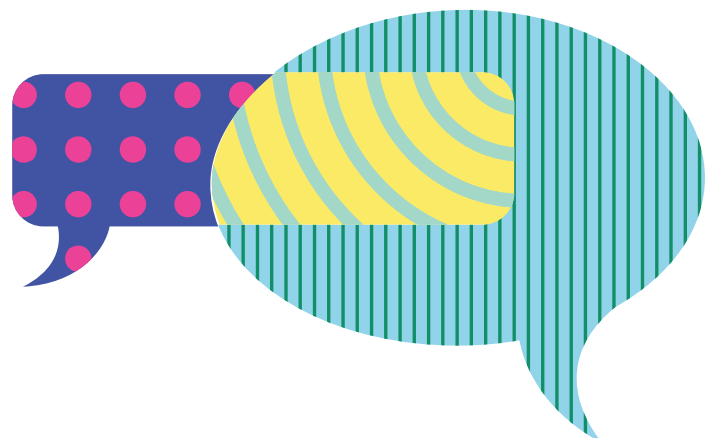


**GROUP EXERCISE:** Let’s identify some emotive language. *Of the options given, mark with an X which uses more emotive language and explain why you think so*

		Explain your choice
1	<input type="checkbox"/> “She was demonized” <input type="checkbox"/> “She was criticized”	.....
2	<input type="checkbox"/> “Economic elites” <input type="checkbox"/> “Fat cats”	.....
3	<input type="checkbox"/> “This is my hobby” <input type="checkbox"/> “This is my passion”	.....
4	<input type="checkbox"/> “This is a crisis!” <input type="checkbox"/> “This situation is serious!”	.....



**READ ALOUD:** There is **nothing wrong** with using emotive language. In fact, sometimes it captures the **most accurate description**. However, just like anything that is **powerful**, language **can be mis-used**. Words that **exaggerate the emotional dimensions** of an issue can **distort our understanding**.





**GROUP EXERCISE:** For example, some phrases **deliberately play on the emotions** of their audience. *The table below gives examples of playing on negative emotions, positive emotions, and more neutral alternatives. Fill in the blank spaces – use your imagination or examples from what you have seen.*

	Positive	Negative	More neutral alternative
1	"Social justice warriors"	-----	"Activists"
2	-----	"Hooligans are on a rampage"	"Football fans are causing disruption"
3	"Our country continues to welcome immigrants"	"The migrant invasion continues!"	-----



**READ ALOUD:** Knowing **when** to use emotional language is an important skill. In debates and arguments, if the **emotional dimension is cranked up** too high, **accuracy can get lost**. But that's not the only reason to use emotive language with **care**...



## WARNING!

Because emotive language can be very **persuasive**, it is **tempting to use it to our advantage** in debates and arguments. But emotive language can **very quickly** become outright harmful. Look again at the previous exercise: the negative phrases are **disrespectful** and even **inflammatory**.

❖ It is better to use **more neutral language** in debates and arguments.

*In worksheet 5, we will look at the importance of using language to unite rather than divide in responsible debating.*



**GROUP EXERCISE:** What is **disrespectful** and **inflammatory** language? *Read the descriptions below and write down examples – use your imagination or what you observed.*

**Disrespectful language** is a broad term for any type of language that **undermines** an individual or group. It is intended to imply that they are **not worthy of respect**.

❖ Example from previous exercise: "**hooligans on a rampage**"

❖ Your examples: -----

**Inflammatory language** goes further than disrespectful language. It is intended to cause feelings of **fear, anger, disgust, distrust, or hate** towards an individual or group.

❖ Example from previous exercise: "migrant **invasion** continues"

❖ Your examples: -----





**READ ALOUD:** There is no **simple formula** to guarantee always using language responsibly. But it helps to **be aware of its power**. **Life hack 1:** when in doubt about your choice of words, run it by people with **different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences to you** (remember worksheet 3!). **Life hack 2:** whenever you speak, prioritise the **truth**. Emotive language can distort the truth...

## Principle 6: Show appreciation for good points made by others, acknowledging when they change your mind



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Oh dear – someone you are arguing with has just made an excellent point! What should you do? *Choose the best way to finish this sentence:*

Showing appreciation for a good point made by someone you disagree with is...

- 1  ... a sign of **weakness**. Never show them weakness!
- 2  ... the same as **conceding** the entire argument. You might as well throw in the towel.
- 3  ... **disloyal** to your own side. Traitor.
- 4  ... totally **fine!** People make good points all the time and that benefits everyone.



**READ ALOUD:** If we think of debates and arguments as **fights** with one **right side** and one **wrong side**, then, sure, 1–3 in the exercise above would be correct. But **no**:

❖ **Responsible** debates and arguments **are not fights!**

❖ They are about **learning** to work together **despite disagreement**. So, 4 in the exercise is right: acknowledging good points is a **good idea!**



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Let's normalise conversations as learning opportunities, not as fights. Look at the list below. Use a ✓ for those that encourage learning something with and about the other person, and a ✗ for those that don't.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saying, "Good point!"                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping silent about the good point         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> "I hadn't thought of it that way before" | <input type="checkbox"/> "That's just nonsense"                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Your point is irrelevant"               | <input type="checkbox"/> "I can see why that matters to you"         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> "Let's just agree to disagree"           | <input type="checkbox"/> "I think we agree on this, but not on that" |



**READ ALOUD:** What about **changing your mind**? Well, our **opinions are not like switches** with an OFF (= "I do not agree!") and an ON (= "I agree!"). Instead, they lie somewhere on a **spectrum between full belief and full disbelief**. Therefore changing your view (or someone else's) is a simply matter of changing your position on the spectrum...



**SOLO EXERCISE:** Let's try this out in a two-part exercise. *Mark where you stand on the spectrum below, on the subject of animal rights, for example.*

**Spectrum 1**, position **before** discussion:



I fully **agree** that animals should have legal rights



I fully **disagree** that animals should have legal rights



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Now compare with one another to see where you differ.

- 1 *Try to explain your view and why you stand where you stand. Does someone have a very strong view – why? Is someone on the fence – why?*
- 2 *After the discussion, go back to your initial spectrum, and see if you have moved a bit.*

**Spectrum 2**, position **after** discussion:



I fully **agree** that animals should have legal rights



I fully **disagree** that animals should have legal rights



**READ ALOUD:** Being able to **acknowledge** others' strong points, or to **change** our views, requires **overcoming a strong instinct** to defend ourselves. Of course, there will be some views we hold onto **firmly for very long periods**, and others where our **understanding changes over time** (often through arguments and debates). That's just part of life!

## Wrap up principles 4-6



**GROUP EXERCISE:** Time to draw these themes together. *Fill in the missing labels in the summary paragraph below.*

**Labels:** actively, humble, open

To acknowledge strengths in someone else's viewpoints, especially someone you disagree with, you have to start by being \_\_\_\_\_ **-minded**. You've got to be **epistemically** \_\_\_\_\_ enough to recognise that your own view is not perfect. And of course, in order to actually **hear** someone else's good points, you need to be \_\_\_\_\_ **listening** to them, not just hearing the opinions in your own head.

## Conclusion

In worksheet 4, we have:

- ✓ Learned about principle 4: the difficulty and importance of listening carefully.
- ✓ Learned about principle 5: the power of language to convey emotional meaning, and how this power should be used responsibly and with consideration for others.
- ✓ Learned about principle 6: the beauty of being able to recognize good points made by others, knowing that adapting your views is a part of learning.

In the next worksheet in this series, **Inclusive Debate**, we look into the ways in which people can be structurally excluded from participating in society, and how responsible approaches to debating can help to break open those barriers.



## Resources for you to explore further

If you'd like to find out more, here are some links to explore with your team, and you can also look up any of the references in the worksheet – these are listed for you below.

The **Charter for Responsible Debate** from the Young Academy of Scotland, in which the principles discussed throughout this course are outlined: <https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/our-challenges/exchange/charter-for-responsible-debate/>

The **ChangeMyView community on Reddit**, launched by a young Scot, Kal Turnbull, in 2013 to create an online space for productive disagreement, now with over 700,000 subscribers (this is a real feel-good story!): <https://www.reddit.com/r/changemyview/>

An essay on the “art” of active listening, written by an author reflecting on **the life of Carl Rogers**, the psychologist who coined the term: <https://aeon.co/essays/the-psychologist-carl-rogers-and-the-art-of-active-listening>

**A Common Word**, an interfaith project to seek common ground and solidarity among Christian and Muslim communities around the world: <https://www.acommonword.com/>

## Bibliography

Cuncic, A. (2022, November 9). Active Listening. *Verywell Mind*.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343#citation-5>

Owen, M. (2022, May 30). The Art of Listening. *Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/the-psychologist-carl-rogers-and-the-art-of-active-listening>

Pennsylvania Department of Health (2005). Unit 6: Effective oral communication. *Effective Communication*. US Department of Homeland Security, FEMA. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Emergency%20Preparedness/Nonverbal%20Cues%20-%20FEMA%20Effective%20Communication.pdf>

Turnbull, K. (2013). *ChangeMyView*. Reddit. <https://www.reddit.com/r/changemyview/>

Young Academy of Scotland (2021). *Charter for Responsible Debate*.

<https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/our-challenges/exchange/charter-for-responsible-debate/>

## Notes

- Active listening:** Owen, M. (2022, May 30). The Art of Listening. *Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/the-psychologist-carl-rogers-and-the-art-of-active-listening>
- Listening conversation demonstration:** adapted from Cuncic, A. (2022, November 9). Active Listening. *Verywell Mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343#citation-5>
- Nonverbal communication:** Pennsylvania Department of Health (2005). Unit 6: Effective oral communication. *Effective Communication*. US Department of Homeland Security, FEMA. <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Emergency%20Preparedness/Nonverbal%20Cues%20-%20FEMA%20Effective%20Communication.pdf>
- Total meaning:** Owen, M. (2022, May 30). The Art of Listening. *Aeon*. <https://aeon.co/essays/the-psychologist-carl-rogers-and-the-art-of-active-listening>



RSE **YOUNG  
ACADEMY**  
OF SCOTLAND



<https://responsibledebate.org> | [www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk](http://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk)

 **YoungAcademySco**

 **YoungAcademySco**