

conversation

with

activities

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OVERVIEW

conversation with activities involves participants having a conversation about a specific subject while undertaking a series of distracting activities. The aim is to keep the conversation going as naturally as possible while maintaining focus on the prescribed tasks. The activities are cued by an audio track, and participants respond to the demands placed on them as best they can.

At least two players, perhaps more
Any duration, but ideally at least 10 minutes

PREPARATION

conversation topics

Prepare a set of conversation topics on cards (see below). Each card should state one topic.

activities

Choose how many activities to use from the list below.
Assemble the necessary materials to undertake the activities.

audio track

The audio tracks contain spoken cues for each activity. The cues instruct players to either start or stop an activity. For example:

‘activity 4 start’ – all participants begin activity 4
‘activity 7 stop’ – all participants stop activity 7

Cues may also refer to a specific participant, for example:

‘participant 1, activity 3 start’ – only participant 1 starts activity 3.

Alternatively, the cues may be adapted to include participant names, for example:

‘Tim, activity 9 stop’.

The cues should only refer to the cue number, not the type of activity listed below (i.e. ‘activity 5’, not ‘activity 5: drawing’). Participants may find it useful to have a list of activities available for reference.

Cues on the audio track may also instruct ‘new topic’, although it is also fine to have just one topic for the whole performance.

The audio track should be prepared in advance, ideally by someone other than the participants so the sequence of activities is not known prior to the performance.

Use text-to-speech artificial voices to create the audio track, along with any other audio required by the activities.

Any sequence and density of cues may be used. When making the track, ensure that all activities which are started by a cue also are stopped by a cue before the track ends.

SETUP

The performance area should be set up to provide a comfortable space for a conversation, such as armchairs, a sofa, or seated around a table.

The participants need the materials required for the possible activities to be within reach, perhaps on a table between them. Where necessary, this should be available as a work space where the activities can be completed (e.g. for building models, writing etc.)

There should be an audio playback setup to play the audio instructions to make them audible for the participants and audience.

The participants should be amplified where the space requires this to ensure the conversation is always audible.

PERFORMANCE

The piece begins with the participants randomly selecting one of the conversation topics. There is no preparation for this: the conversation begins as soon as the topic is selected.

The audio track is also started at the same time.

The audio cues instruct participants, either individually or as a group, to start and stop activities, or to start a new conversation topic. Participants should respond as quickly as possible to these instructions.

Participants should try to maintain the conversation throughout the performance the conversation going as naturally as possible while maintaining focus on the prescribed tasks, dealing with any distractions as best they can. Equally, participants should undertake the activities as naturally as possible, maintaining focus and trying to do the best they can.

It is likely that some activities will also interrupt and affect each other as well as disrupting the flow of the conversation. In all situations, participants should try to keep all current activities going as best they can, while continuing the conversation. This may be difficult at times. If it is impossible, such as

simultaneously building a tower, juggling, and playing the ukulele, one or more activities can take priority, but all should be attended to while active.

ACTIVITIES

In general, the activities should be non-verbal so as not to directly interrupt the conversation. Occasional spoken reference to the activities or use of speech in carrying them out is fine.

conversation

The conversation can be on any topic acceptable to participants. The topics should be simple keywords, rather than questions, to encourage multiple interpretations of context. For a suggested list of topics, see www.ted.com/topics.

activity 1: building

Build something. Any kind of construction task can be attempted. Examples include Lego, a house of cards, a tower of blocks, balancing objects etc. The task should have a clear goal, such as completing a model or building something precarious until it topples.

activity #2: competing

Compete with other participants or yourself. Participants may undertake the same competitive task, either doing so simultaneously or taking turns as appropriate, or do something which represents a personal challenge. Keeping score is optional, but the sense of competition should be evident. Examples include throwing balls of paper into a bin, holding something heavy for the longest time, playing a game, jumping as high as possible, completing an activity in the shortest time etc.

activity #3: sorting

Sort a group of disparate objects into groups or categories using some kind of clear principle, such as size, colour, function, sound, name etc. If attempted by more than one participant, multiple categorisation criteria might be used simultaneously requiring some kind of resolution, or not.

activity #4: singing

Sing along to the music. This activity requires some kind of music to be present on the backing track. The music can be anything; it may have words, or not. When not speaking as part of the conversation, participants should sing along in an appropriate way, such as humming, scatting, singing, or any other kind of vocalising which shadows the music.

activity #5: drawing

Draw something present in the space. Examples include other participants, audience members, objects used in the performance, the room etc. Regardless

of the quality of the drawing, it should be clear that participants are trying to make an image of something present in the space, rather than drawing from memory.

activity #6: eating and/or drinking

Eat and/or drink anything brought by participants to the performance. This might be informal, such as a packet of crisps, an apple or a can of drink, or more formal such as afternoon tea or a meal. It may involve food preparation if necessary, but the focus should be on consuming the food and/or drink.

activity #7: solving

Solve any kind of puzzle. Examples include jigsaws, crosswords, logic puzzles, Rubik's Cube etc. Puzzles may be tackled by all participants, such as with a jigsaw, or individually.

activity #8: exercising

Do any kind of physical exercise. Examples include running (on the spot or around the space), yoga, dancing, sport etc.

activity #9: skills

Demonstrate a personal skill. This might be something unusual that participants can do, or something more generic such as juggling or tap dancing.

activity #10: music

Play an instrument. Participants can play anything they like, on any kind of instrument. Instruments requiring breath to produce sound present more of a challenge in relation to keeping the conversation going.