Listening and Speaking

Listening and Speaking is a structured dialogue method in which participants listen attentively to one another and share their perspectives without interruption. The focus is not on debating or evaluating what is said, but on developing mutual understanding.
The method creates a safe and respectful environment in which different perspectives can be expressed openly. It is particularly suitable for sensitive topics, the early stages of conflict resolution, or situations where trust needs to be built.

Participation Depth	Inform, Participate
Project Phase	Onboarding
Goals	Understanding & Gathering Perspectives
Format	Analogue
Duration	1 - 3 Hours
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public
Group Size	Small Group up to 15, Medium Group up to 30
Characteristics	Simple, Structured

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of the method is to foster mutual understanding and respectful dialogue. By listening carefully to one another, participants gain insight into different experiences, needs, and perspectives. The method helps build trust, reduce tensions, and create conversations based on empathy rather than persuasion.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Develop guiding questions
Begin by considering:

- Which topics should be discussed?
- Which questions encourage personal reflection and dialogue?

The questions should be:

- open-ended
- easy to understand
- non-judgemental

Examples include:

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"What experiences shape your everyday life?"

- "What would you like to see for the future of your neighbourhood?"
- "Which changes are most important to you?"

2. Prepare the venue
The venue should:

- be quiet
- create a comfortable atmosphere
- allow conversations in small groups

Helpful arrangements include:

- chairs in a circle
- several small conversation areas

The groups should be positioned so they interfere with each other as little as possible.

3. Organise the facilitation
The facilitation team explains:

- the process
- the discussion guidelines
- the schedule

Facilitators may also:

- ensure the discussion guidelines are respected
- support participants if tensions arise
- manage the timing
- document the outcomes

For larger events, each small group may have its own facilitator.

Execution

1. Introduction and discussion guidelines

At the beginning of the session, the facilitation team explains:

- the purpose of the method
- the overall process
- the discussion guidelines

Key guidelines include:

- do not interrupt
- listen attentively
- avoid judging or evaluating others
- speak from your own perspective
- avoid debate or argument

Important:

The focus is on understanding rather than convincing others.

2. Form small groups
Participants are divided into small groups, usually consisting of three to four people.

Groups may be formed randomly or intentionally to bring together different perspectives.

3. Conduct the conversation rounds
One person speaks while the others listen without interruption.

The speaker may:

- describe personal experiences
- explain their perspective
- share thoughts or feelings

The listeners:

- listen attentively
- do not ask questions
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do not interrupt

- do not comment

Important:

Each participant should receive the same amount of speaking time.

4. Manage the timing
The facilitation team ensures that:

- speaking times are respected
- everyone has the opportunity to speak
- the discussion guidelines are followed

Helpful tools include:

- a visible timer
- clearly announced time limits

If it becomes apparent that the allocated speaking time is either too short or too long, it can be adjusted during the session, provided the change is communicated clearly to everyone.

5. Closing reflection
At the end of the conversation rounds, all groups come back together.

During the plenary session, participants may share:

- impressions
- key insights
- common themes

Important:

The focus remains on sharing reflections respectfully rather than evaluating or debating others' contributions.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
Record:

- key themes
- frequently shared experiences
- identified needs
- open questions

Important:

Personal statements should be treated sensitively and anonymised whenever possible.

2. Use the findings
The results can:

- inform future participation activities
- provide a foundation for workshops
- highlight conflicts or unmet needs

3. Provide feedback
Inform participants about:

- how the results will be used
- the next steps in the process

Providing feedback strengthens trust and transparency.

Source: https://mobilitaetsplanung-hessen.de/methodenkoffer-partizipative-planung/

WHEN USEFUL?

- discussing sensitive or emotional topics
- building mutual understanding
- exploring different perspectives or conflicts
- introducing participation processes
- facilitating in-depth conversations in small groups

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- concrete decisions need to be made

- rapid results are expected
- addressing purely factual or technical topics
- participants are unwilling to listen respectfully

TIPS

- Allow sufficient time for calm and thoughtful conversations.
- Apply the discussion guidelines consistently throughout the session.
- Small groups encourage openness and trust.
- Facilitators should remain sensitive, neutral, and supportive.
- Short breaks between conversation rounds can help participants process what they have heard.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- voting or rapid decision-making
- large public debates
- purely technical topics
- highly escalated conflicts without experienced facilitation

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/zuhoeren-und-sprechen