

# Options Diamond

## A routine for exploring the tensions of decision making.

1. Identify a couple of obvious options. Usually there are trade-offs or tensions between them that make the decision hard: Choose one and you get X but lose Y; choose the other and you lose X but get Y.
2. Make a diamond diagram, putting at the left and right corners the one or two main tradeoffs (the X's and Y's) pulling in opposite directions (see example in PDF).
3. Now have students brainstorm one to three solutions for each corner of the diamond.
  - Left side: Go with that trade-off
  - Right side: Go with that trade-off
  - Bottom: Compromise between them
  - Top: Clever solutions that combine the seeming opposites and get the best of both
4. Ask: What have we learned about the situation from finding these options? This is a way of understanding the situation better.

### PURPOSE

#### What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine fosters creative thinking. It helps to explore decision making situations where a trade-off makes it hard to find a really good option. It focuses on resolving opposites. Sometimes, but not always, there are options that partly bring the opposites somewhat together. All this is also relevant to understanding. It helps in understanding situations even when you are not the real decision maker.

### APPLICATION

#### When and where can I use it?

The options diamond helps with personal or classroom decision making when different factors pull strongly in opposite directions. It's also a useful way of exploring and understanding such situations in the news, history, or literature or science or medical policy, etc. For example, US President Harry Truman in deciding to drop the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima struggled with this trade-off: Kill many thousands of Japanese but shorten the war versus Let the war and its casualties continue. He chose to use the bomb. But what compromise options were there? And were there any options that might combine the opposites and end the war quickly without killing thousands of Japanese?

## LAUNCH

### **What are some tips for starting and using this routine?**

Remember, the left and right points of the diamond are not options themselves. They are the gains and losses that pull in opposite directions. You then write options near the left and right corners that go with one pull or the other; then the lower corner gets compromise options and the top corner gets any options that partly combine the opposites.

In many classroom situations the point is to use creative thinking to understand the situation better. Step 3 is the payoff and a final choice among the options may not matter. You can decide whether to go on to another routine for choosing among the options. Or you can just take a quick vote on some of the likely options. If you want, you can do this before step 3, to give students a little more to discuss in step 3.

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This thinking routine was developed as part of the Visible Thinking project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Explore the full PZ Thinking Routine Toolbox at [pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines](https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines).