

Sticking Points

A routine for mapping messy controversies.

Choose a big issue and look at these four facets...

Facts: What facts do people differ on? What facts do they agree on?

Values: What values do people differ on? What values do they agree on?

Interests: What practical interests (e.g., investments, land, group loyalty) do people differ on? What practical interests do they share?

Policies: What policies (i.e., general actions to take) do people differ on? What policies do they agree on?

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

It's to help learners understand today's complicated world by digging into the big controversies so common today. Straightforward agreement is often difficult, but learners can get a grip on complicated issues through appreciating the sources of different viewpoints. Over time, students can come to some insights about controversies in general.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

Lead a class discussion. Students might get ready with small group discussions beforehand. As students talk, make their thinking visible with a concept map on the whiteboard, or have your students post Post-its. Facts-Values-Interests-Policies is a good order but use any order for your purposes. Expect to spend 20 minutes to an hour or more, depending on how deep you want the class to go. Sticking Points can apply to interpersonal conflicts and local community and school controversies. The routine can be used on past controversies and issues as well as those that are current. And, the routine can be used in many disciplines including history, social studies, science and the arts.

LAUNCH

What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

- *What if my students don't know that much about the issue?* You could have an initial conversation size that up, and make an assignment to investigate different viewpoints.
- *Controversies are about disagreement. Why does the routine also ask where people agree?* Because advocates tend to foreground the disagreements, often it seems there is disagreement on everything! It's good for learners to appreciate where the agreements are, because they are a starting point for resolving, or at least reducing, the controversy.
- *What about investigating how different groups have different viewpoints?* You could ask students to form clusters and chart the Facts-Values-Interests-Policies for different groups. A question prompt could be: How does the pattern of Facts-Values- Interests-Policies differ by different groups (e.g. scientists, people from different political parties, business people, workers, different nationalities, etc.)?
- *Does the class or group have to agree on a resolution of a controversy?* No, that would be asking too much. The main idea of using this routine is to help learners understand the controversy and appreciate different sides. However, ways forward can be explored using these prompts for follow-up conversations: How could progress be made without necessarily completely agreeing (e.g. people might try to settle some facts, find some common interests, arrive at a compromise policy)?

This thinking routine was developed as part of the PZ Connect project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Explore the full PZ Thinking Routine Toolbox at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.