

Structured *Academic Controversy*

Overview: SAC is a type of group learning activity that involves students in exploring multiple perspectives on a dilemma or controversial issue. Students work in groups of four and divide into two pairs. Each pair must:

1. Research and prepare a position on a given dilemma or controversial question
2. Present and advocate their position
3. Engage in open discussion, refuting the opposing position and rebutting attacks on their own position
4. Reverse perspectives and then present the opposing view as their own, including any arguments they believe the 'opposition' has failed to incorporate
5. Then the group of four works together to synthesize and integrate the best evidence and reasoning into an agreed joint position.

SAC is another way to structure group interactions to promote critical thinking among students.

Practitioners advocate using some general guidelines to promote effective discourse in groups:

1. Be critical of ideas, not people. Challenge and refute the ideas of the opposing pair, but do not indicate that you personally reject them.
2. Remember that we are all in this together, sink or swim. Focus on coming to the best decision possible, not on winning.
3. Encourage everyone to participate and to master all the relevant information.
4. Listen to everyone's ideas, even if you don't agree.
5. Restate what someone has said if it is not clear.
6. First bring out all ideas and facts supporting both sides, and then try to put them together in a way that makes sense.
7. Try to understand both sides of the issue.
8. Be ready to change your mind when evidence clearly indicates that you should do so.

See this site for examples of SAC, <http://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/sac/examples.html>.