

Facilitation Difficulty: 

 40 min.

 Any size group

 No preconference

Purpose – To listen deeply to others' thoughts and beliefs around a text and to share one's own beliefs and thoughts. This protocol requires participants to use critical thinking skills to tease out the author's assumptions followed by the sharing of their own opinions and aspirations related to the text material.

Group size – Any size group. In a group of 10 or fewer, you may choose to skip subdividing into quads.

Facilitation tips – The Four A's is slightly trickier to facilitate than other text protocols. If the groups begin actively discussing when they should be silently listening, or discussing content randomly, remind everyone of the protocol structure and the value of working within the protocol rather than having an everyday conversation.

Preparation – Instruct participants to read the text ahead of time highlighting it and writing notes in the margins in answer to the following four "A" questions:

- *What Assumptions does the author of the text hold?*
- *What do you Agree with in the text?*
- *What do you want to Argue with in the text?*
- *What parts of the text do you Aspire to?*

Modifications – See next page.

Steps:

1. **Setup** – (2 min.) Give the group some time to skim the article, reviewing their marked sections.
2. **Divide** – (2 min.) Count off or otherwise divide the large group into groups of four (quads). Review Steps 2-4 with everyone. Instruct each quad to choose a facilitator/time keeper who will also be a full participant.
3. **Begin rounds** – (4 min. per round) The facilitator/time keeper instructs a volunteer to identify one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence. The participant will briefly talk about why they chose that passage (up to 1 min.). The other participants should actively listen, but not respond. If they would like to comment on what others in their group say, they should make a note to do so during Step 5, the discussion round. Go around the quad until each has had their turn to discuss an assumption they believe the author holds.
4. **Continue rounds** – (Up to 4 min. per round for 3 rounds = up to 12 min.) Repeat, starting with a new participant for each question. Learn what members of your quad "want to argue with," "agree with," and "aspire to." Move seamlessly from one "A" to the next.
5. **Discuss** – (20 min. or longer, depending on time available) End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: *What does what we've learned in this protocol mean for our work with students?*
6. **Debrief and reflect** – (5 min.)

© 2015, NSRF®. Permission is granted to copy for use in classrooms or in meetings including Critical Friends Group® meetings. For other use, please call the NSRF office at 812-330-2702 or email nsrf@nsrfharmony.org. Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community facilitated by an NSRF-certified CFG® coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and trainings for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty® website at www.nsrffharmony.org.

- *How did you feel about the requirement to quote a particular passage rather than simply express your opinions related to the text?*
- *What important points came out in the discussion in each quad?*
- *How would this discussion have been different without going through each of the 4 A's first?*
- *How do you feel about using this particular protocol compared with other text protocols?*
- *Which quotes or ideas in the text did not strike you as important in your first reading that feel much more important now that you've discussed them?*

Modification I:

Time – 45 minutes

Steps:

1. Follow the instructions in Step 3, but add up to three minutes at the end of each round so the quads may briefly discuss any points of interest from the “assumptions” round, the “arguing” round, the “agreeing” round, and the “aspiring” round.
2. Then shorten the overall group time for open, free-flowing discussion in Step 5 to about 10 min.

Modification II:

Play with the “4 A's” aspect of this protocol. We've found that many people equate “Assumptions” with something they want to “Argue” about, which can lead to what feels like duplicate conversations. You might frontload that the “Assumptions” round does not necessarily need to be something you disagree with, and in fact might be more important to uncover assumptions that you share with the text or speaker. Alternately, you may replace “Assumptions” with “Arise” and discuss in the first round any thoughts that arose in the individual reader/listener.

Another possible modification is to replace “Aspire to” with “Application” or “Action,” as this prompt encourages people to make a more direct connection to something they intend or commit to do in their practice as a result of reading and discussing a given text.

Or you can move away from the letter “A” entirely. For a class who's just read a short story, you might present a “3 C's Protocol,” for example, asking students to answer these questions:

- *“Where did the characters **Cooperate** with one another?”*
- *“Where was there a failure to **Communicate**?”*
- *“What created **Chaos** in the story?”*

A “[Protocols in the Classroom](#)” column in the May 2014 issue of *Connections* offers a number of modifications to this protocol for use within a variety of Common Core subject matters in middle school. You may download and read that article at www.nsrffharmony.org.

© 2015, NSRF®. Permission is granted to copy for use in classrooms or in meetings including Critical Friends Group® meetings. For other use, please call the NSRF office at 812-330-2702 or email nsrf@nsrffharmony.org. **Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community facilitated by an NSRF-certified CFG® coach.** To learn more about professional learning communities and trainings for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty® website at www.nsrffharmony.org.