



Connections

Developed by Gene Thompson-Grove.

What is *Connections*?

Connections is a way for people to build a bridge from where they are or have been (mentally, physically, etc.) to where they will be going and what they will be doing. It is a time for individuals to reflect — within the context of a group — upon a thought, a story, an insight, a question, or a feeling that they are carrying with them into the session, and then connect it to the work they are about to do. Most people engage in *Connections* at the beginning of a meeting, class, or gathering.

There are a few things to emphasize about *Connections* for it to go well...

- It is about connecting people's thoughts to the work they are doing or are about to do.
- Silence is OK, as is using the time to write, to just sit and think. Assure people that they will spend a specific amount of time in *Connections*, whether or not anyone speaks out loud. Some groups — and people within groups — value the quiet, reflective time above all else.
- If an issue the group clearly wants to respond to comes up in *Connections*, the group can decide to make time for a discussion about the issue after *Connections* is over.

The “rules” for *Connections* are quite simple

- Speak if you want to.
- Don't speak if you don't want to.
- Speak only once until everyone who wants to has had a chance to speak.
- Listen and note what people say, but do not respond. *Connections* is not the time to engage in a discussion.

Facilitating the process is also straightforward. Begin by saying “*Connections* is open,” and let people know how long it will last. A few minutes before the time is up, let people know that there are a few minutes remaining, so that anyone who hasn't yet spoken might speak. With a minute or so to go, let the group know that you will be drawing *Connections* to a close, and again ask if anyone who hasn't spoken would like to speak. Before ending, ask if anyone who has spoken would like to speak again. Then end.

Ten minutes is usually enough time for groups of 10 people or fewer, fifteen minutes for groups of 11-20 people and twenty minutes for any groups larger than 20 people. *Connections* generally shouldn't last more than twenty minutes. People can't sustain it. The one exception is when there is a group that has been together for a period of time doing intensive work, and it is the last or next to the last day of their gathering.

Some people will say that *Connections* is misnamed, since people don't connect to (or build on) what other people have said. However, the *process* is a connecting one; and powerful connections can still occur, even though they are not necessarily the result of back and forth conversation.