

Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

# Unstructured debate

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## Characteristics

**An unstructured debate** is based on an exchange of arguments about a specific topic. It takes place in a group and the participants have great latitude in their participation because they are not assigned specific functions nor are they required to present their positions in a specific manner.

The topic of discussion or the problem to be solved is provided by the moderator in advance. The course of an unstructured debate is influenced by the ideas, suggestions or solutions that appear during the discussion.

All candidates participate as equals in the debate and have the freedom to speak. In contrast to a [structured debate](#), there is no division of roles nor a specific scenario. However, with some techniques (e.g. brainstorming), certain guidelines apply. Sometimes participation in the debate (e.g. a plenary debate) requires prior preparation, both by the participants as well as the moderator.

The assignment of the debate participants may be, for example, to develop a creative solution to a problem or to evaluate facts and phenomena.

The moderator usually ensures that the rules of discussing are observed (e.g. he/she gives the floor to the participants) and does not interfere with its course.

The assessor and his/her ability to objectively interpret participants' behaviour during the discussion play a key role in the unstructured debate as a method used in validation.

This method allows the behaviour of candidates to be examined in various situations (e.g. coping with stress when faced with a problem and under time pressure). A participant of an unstructured debate should demonstrate, among others: in-depth knowledge about a given subject, the ability to comprehensively interpret phenomena, events and facts, the ability to communicate (including the ability to present their own position and make consistent statements), and the ability to assess the position of other participants.

Some techniques (e.g. brainstorming) allow candidates to demonstrate, among others, creativity in solving problems, the ability to analyse and select the best/most advantageous solutions in a given situation, and effective cooperation in relatively small teams.

This type of debate does not require large organisational and material resources and the standardisation of tools. However, its results may be different each time it is used.

It should be remembered that when assessing the statements made by a candidate during the debate, any interruptions to the discussion (e.g. change of the topic by the moderator) may affect the final result. This is particularly harmful when the new thread relates to learning outcomes that are not included in the validation scenario. An assessor who acts in this way is not performing his/her duties properly. However, even in the case of less significant disturbances, the effect of such behaviour can, for example, change the atmosphere of the assessment process. As a result, the candidate may limit his/her involvement in the discussion, stop responding in detail or honestly. This also causes stress for the person being assessed, who may consequently achieve a worse result.

Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

One of the factors helping to maintain the neutrality and objectivity of assessment is ensuring that all participants observe the standards and guidelines of their roles – the assessor, candidate and any supplementary personnel (required by the given method and technique). The moderator plays a crucial role in the unstructured debate, this is the person who is responsible for ensuring that all participants are able to speak freely and whose statements are treated equally, and that all the required topics are discussed within the prescribed time.

## The validation stages in which the use of the method is recommended

The unstructured debate is most often used to identify and assess a person's learning outcomes.

A study by Cedefop (an agency supporting the development and promotion of vocational education and lifelong learning in the European Union) shows that the debate ([structured](#) and unstructured) is used in 13 European countries. In nine countries, it is used both in the stages of the identification and assessment of learning outcomes, but only in two countries in the documentation stage.

## Scope of the learning outcomes that may be confirmed using the method

Information on the scope of the learning outcomes that can be confirmed by the unstructured debate is for guidance only.

It should be remembered that the choice of a given method must always be based on an analysis of the learning outcomes for a given qualification.

The unstructured debate can be held on any topic. This allows learning outcomes relating to knowledge and the level of its understanding from every level of the Polish Qualifications Framework to be confirmed.

In addition, this method enables the assessment of a range of skills and social competences relating to communication and the ability to comprehensively analyse various issues. Among them are:

- critical thinking,
- analysing and evaluating, for example, facts, phenomena, methods and the dependencies between them,
- formulating thoughts and stating them in public,
- correct argumentation and counter argumentation,
- looking at problems from different perspectives,
- understanding other people and using their experiences,
- critically reviewing one's own ideas and their assessment,
- the ability to participate in a team to solve problems.

Some techniques of the unstructured debate (e.g. brainstorming) allow candidates to exhibit their creativity.

This method can also be used to assess the skills needed to plan various activities, organise work and adhere to rules.

Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

[The suggested learning outcomes that can be confirmed using the Unstructured Debate method](#)

## Strengths and weaknesses of the unstructured debate

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the candidate's learning outcomes can be identified with relative precision</li> <li>• can be effective in confirming the candidate's knowledge and a range of skills relating to critical and creative thinking, associating facts, and communicating with others</li> <li>• a group of people can be assessed at the same time</li> <li>• can be used in small groups (up to 20 persons)</li> <li>• is easy to organise depending on the technique used,</li> <li>• requires small or insignificant financial expenditure</li> <li>• gives participants great latitude in speaking, which is particularly helpful when confirming learning outcomes, especially in the area of social competences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using this method for validation can be time-consuming</li> <li>• the results may be influenced by such factors as the individual characteristics of the candidates, their communication style and subjective assessments by the assessors (this method is quite susceptible to the <b>“examiner effect”</b>)</li> </ul>

## Limitations of using the method

Participants must be well informed about the purpose and course of the unstructured debate before validation, otherwise they may have difficulty participating in the debate or seeking a solution to the assigned task.

The use of this method may be difficult for candidates with hearing and speaking disabilities. People who do not like public speaking and participating in discussions may not agree to the use of this assessment method.

The use of this method by awarding bodies may be limited by the need to organise a group of people. This applies to both candidates (e.g. discussion 635 requires the participation of at least six people, and preferably six teams), and to the appropriate number of assessors. This translates into costs (e.g. HR) and may affect the scheduling of validation (depending on the group of candidates and staff availability).

## Required human, organisational and material resources

When conducting an unstructured debate, a properly trained moderator must be used, otherwise the debate may not lead to the expected results (e.g. participants will digress from the topic, time will run out) or difficulties with the

Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

assessment may occur (e.g. some persons may not speak). The moderator should have knowledge, skills and social competences relating to:

- the purpose, course and manner of conducting an unstructured debate;
- managing the group process;
- activating participants (e.g. encouraging people who are quiet or shy);
- summarising events and statements and formulating conclusions;
- maintaining impartiality.

Depending on the technique used and the number of candidates in the group, an unstructured debate may require the participation of more than one assessor. These persons should have knowledge, skills and social competences relating to:

- the nature of the learning outcomes that are to be assessed;
- observing several persons at the same time;
- drawing conclusions about the achievement of specific learning outcomes based on participants' statements and behaviours;
- the use of assessment tools (e.g. the assessment sheet);
- the sector in which the validation is being performed.

In order to conduct an unstructured debate, one needs to:

- properly prepare the debate (which includes choosing the technique, deciding on the topic, assigning roles, providing participants with the information needed to prepare for the discussion, preparing the assessment sheets),
- properly arrange the room - its size and the required equipment to be set up depend on the technique used (for example, a large room is needed for a plenary debate, whereas conditions for working in small groups should be provided for brainstorming); all participants of the discussion should be able to hear each other well and maintain eye contact,
- provide the required supplies and equipment, for example, to present the discussion rules (flipchart, whiteboard, multimedia projector, etc.) and, depending on the technique, the resources needed by the participants to work (e.g. markers, pens, pencils, post-its, work cards), microphones and sound equipment, recording equipment (camera, voice recorder) only after obtaining the consent of the candidates to record the debate).

## Possibilities of combining the unstructured debate with other methods

Due to the broad possibilities of this method to assess the depth of understanding issues, the ability to creatively solve problems, communication skills and social competences, the unstructured debate can be used to complement other validation methods. These include observation in [real](#) and [simulated conditions](#).

Some techniques of the unstructured debate (e.g. brainstorming) enable an assessor to confirm a candidate's ability to analyse, synthesise and evaluate facts. This allows it to be combined with the [theoretical test](#) method.

Cedefop data show that the debate is sometimes used to complement the [analysis of evidence and statements](#) (e.g. in Norway and Liechtenstein).

## Example techniques

Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

A technique is a way of doing a particular task in a given method, used to collect and analyse data proving that a person has achieved the learning outcomes.

## Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a discussion technique that combines individual work with group discussion. The task of the participants is to generate many different, often innovative or complementary proposals to solve a given problem within a short time period. Thus, it requires creative thinking and teamwork skills.

Brainstorming is considered an unstructured debate because the participants are not having assigned roles and each of them has the same right to express themselves.

This technique is also known as: thought shower, masterminding, generating creative ideas, a technique of independent and creative group thinking.

Brainstorming makes it possible to especially assess the skills of solving problems, making decisions and thinking creatively. It also allows a fairly objective assessment to be made of communication and teamwork skills.

Brainstorming takes place in four stages. To begin, the problem (issue) to be discussed is defined. The lead person should inform the participants about the rules of work (see Box 1).

### Box 1. Rules that apply when working with the brainstorming technique

- The ideas reported are not valued – it is assumed that every idea is equally good;
- Participants cannot judge or criticise reported ideas;
- Ideas should be formulated clearly and briefly;
- All participants have an equal right to submit ideas;
- Each participant can submit only one idea at a time;
- Participants submit their ideas in no specific order;
- Participants submit their ideas after the moderator gives them the floor;
- Each idea should be written exactly the way it was stated by the participant;
- The principle of unlimited creativity of participants applies – they should be encouraged to submit any idea, even one that seems to be poorly connected with the subject or even absurd;
- Participants are not allowed to add their own ideas to proposals submitted earlier or to repeat ideas that have already been given during the discussion;
- The submitted ideas should to some extent inspire successive ones;
- Submitting ideas lasts until the time set by the moderator.

Next, the participants submit ideas about the problem/issue that are recorded and collected (e.g. with the help of sticky notes tacked to the wall).

The next stage is the analysis and selection of collected ideas – ideas that are completely impossible to implement are rejected, while similar ideas are grouped.

In the last stage, participants develop one coherent solution to the problem on the basis of the submitted proposals. It should combine the best elements from all the proposed solutions. Participants also have the option of choosing the best solution by voting.

The detailed course of the discussion using the brainstorming technique is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The course of the "brainstorming" discussion

Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

Phase I – defining the problem	Phase II – reporting ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introduction to the subject of the debate, preliminary definition of the problem</li> <li>• discussion of the method of working with the brainstorming technique</li> <li>• presenting the rules to be followed in the course of the work</li> <li>• formulation of the problem by the moderator (assessor)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reporting and saving ideas</li> <li>• reading the saved ideas</li> <li>• participants ask questions about the submitted ideas</li> <li>• authors of the ideas explain, clarify and justify their proposals</li> </ul>
Phase III – selecting ideas	Phase IV – choosing a solution to the problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussion of ideas (plenary or in a group of "experts")</li> <li>• analysis and evaluation of ideas</li> <li>• selecting the most useful, best idea(s) that will be chosen as the solution to the analysed problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presentation and discussion of selected solutions in the group</li> <li>• justification of the choice</li> <li>• determination of how to use the ideas in practice summary</li> </ul>

The task of the assessor is to assess participants' learning outcomes during the debate. The moderator gives the floor to individuals and keeps track of the time limits of the discussion.

To conduct brainstorming, an appropriately sized room is needed for the number of participants, a blackboard or a flipchart for saving ideas or a surface suitable for hanging sticky notes. Information should be placed in a prominent place about the rules and guidelines for brainstorming (e.g. on a poster or slide).

The advantages of this technique include the engagement of all participants and providing everyone with the opportunity to speak freely. This reduces the risk that the discussion will be dominated by individual participants.

However, please note that such a discussion can be difficult to conduct in a less active group. If participants need to be encouraged to participate in brainstorming, the time allowed for the debate may increase unexpectedly.

Discussion 635 is a variation of brainstorming. Information on this technique is presented in Box 2.

#### Box 2. Discussion 635

Discussion 635 is a type of brainstorming. Its main goal is to solve problems in a creative way or to search for innovative solutions.

The name of the technique comes from the rules to be followed during the work. Participants are divided into six groups. Each group is given a worksheet in which they write three ideas on how to solve a given problem. The sheets are then exchanged between the groups for five rounds. Each transition requires the group to find three new ideas that differ from those previously recorded.

It is possible to conduct a session with six participants instead of six groups of participants. In this case, each candidate gives three solutions, then passes his/her sheet to another participant, and in return he/she gets another sheet on which to write additional ideas.

Discussion 635 combines independent work with group work and discussion as well as with plenary debate.

Like brainstorming, it has four stages. To begin, the problem (issue) to be discussed is defined. Then the participants submit ideas (individual work or in small groups). According to the rules, each new idea should inspire the creation of another. This stage lasts 30 minutes. During this time, each participant (or group of participants) should submit 18 solutions to a given problem – as a result, up to 108 unique ideas can be generated. In the next phase, the proposed

Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

ideas are selected (work in groups). At the end, all participants in the discussion choose a joint solution or solutions (plenary debate).

The functions of the assessor and moderator are the same as in the case of brainstorming. Both techniques require similar resources, except:

- more assessors need to be involved in the validation if the discussion takes place in six groups,
- worksheets are needed (sheets of paper on which each participant (or group) writes down his/her ideas that are then passed to the next person or group).

## Plenary debate

The plenary debate is a technique based on an unstructured discussion of a group of participants on a specific topic.

It is characterised by a great deal of freedom – there are no rules restricting the statements of the discussants, except for the general rules and limited duration of the debate. The time limitation should be imposed in advance and should not exceed 60 minutes.

In order for the debate to run smoothly, the participants (including the moderator) should familiarise themselves with the topic of discussion and available materials.

The plenary debate may take the form of a discussion with an invited guest. In this situation, the person initiating the debate is an expert who presents his/her position on a specific topic. This is the starting point for other participants in the debate to ask questions and comment.

In debates that are not focused on validation, the group of participants can include up to several dozen people. However, it is recommended that this technique should not be used for more than 20 persons at one time. In a larger group, some candidates may have difficulty presenting their abilities. Additionally, this would require the participation of a larger number of assessors, and the chances of reaching a consensus are reduced.

This type of debate enables participants to present their knowledge, experiences and ideas on a given topic. It allows an assessment to be made of, among others, the ability to infer and communicate, including argumentation, and the manner of responding to opposing opinions.

The task of the moderator is to open the discussion, present the plan of the debate, manage the transition to the next stages, and summarise what has been said. The moderator should also encourage participants to speak, ensure that an appropriate culture of discussion is being maintained and to keep track of the time spent on responses. It is important that this function is performed by a person who is comfortable in this role and knows the topic of the discussion.

A less experienced moderator may have difficulty in controlling the course of the discussion, including participants' digressions, the domination of individual participants, or their prolonging the stages of the debate.

## Bibliography

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Materiał pobrany ze strony [walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody](http://walidacja.ibe.edu.pl/metody)

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### **Websites:**

Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej: <https://glowna.ceo.org.pl/>