

Keep on Topic

Purpose: Hear and record ideas that people share on a topic.

This game can be used to encourage players to answer a question, solve a problem, plan an event, learn about each other, or explore an issue.

Keep on Topic is a sequel to [Keep on Track](#). Players in Keep on Track score points by rolling balls together. Players in Keep on Topic score points by sharing and recording ideas together.

Requirements

- 1) **Time:** variable depending on the objectives -- at least 30 minutes
- 2) **Number of Players:** 2 or more
- 3) **Age range:** old enough to discuss an issue or answer an open-ended question
- 4) **Space:** Online or in-person
- 5) **Equipment:** Space to discuss with a partner, writing supplies or online devices, topic prompt
- 6) **Prerequisites:** None

How to Play

- 1) Facilitator breaks the class/group into teams of 3 players or other small groups.
- 2) Review the standards for respectful discussion.
- 3) Facilitator provides a topic: an open-ended question or issue that is relevant to the class/group
- 4) Facilitator sets a time limit for each discussion game.
 - a) 3 minutes is enough for a simple topic.
 - b) A short time limit makes it easier to fit in a series of games.
 - c) Allow more time for the debriefing after each game.
- 5) Facilitator selects the scoring method -- see options below.
- 6) Before the clock starts, allow time to think together about the topic and prepare for the game.
 - a) Depending on the scoring method - players will be brainstorming for quantity or quality of ideas shared.
 - b) Each idea shared is scored depending on the scoring method facilitators chose (look below for scoring options).
- 7) After each game, use the debrief questions below to discuss what happened, what was learned, and how to improve the score in the next games

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Standards for healthy discussion

1. Listen respectfully, without interrupting.
2. Allow everyone the chance to speak.
3. Listen actively and with an ear to understanding others' views.
4. Commit to learning, not debating.
5. Criticize ideas, not individuals.
6. Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.

Scoring Methods

The scores are useful if they inform the players about their progress toward the objective. Each of the 3 scoring methods described below serve different types of objectives:

Scoring the quality of the dialogue

If the objective is simply to have a constructive conversation, let the participants evaluate the conversation with a checklist for evaluating the exchange of ideas:

- Did everyone speak?
- Did everyone get feedback after they spoke? The feedback could be in the form of questions or comments about what the person said.
- Did the conversation go in a productive direction?
- Did people feel that they were heard and understood?

Scoring quantity of ideas

If the objective is to brainstorm, then the more ideas the better. Therefore, score the quantity of ideas generated.

- **Count** 1 point for each idea shared and recorded as a complete thought during the game time and that is on topic with the question.
- A brainstorm is not a time to make judgments about the answers that people suggest.
- The goal of brainstorming is to generate many ideas.
- Withhold judgment or criticism of ideas.
- The time for evaluating ideas comes later – not during the brainstorm.

Scoring quality of ideas

If the objective is to generate ideas that meet specific standards, score the ideas with a rubric. Select a rubric that aligns with the objectives for the group. Of course, your rubric should align with your learning objectives.

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For example, here is a rubric for players from different schools interviewing each other to get to know each other and learn about their different school cultures:

- The rubric ranks the quality of the questions and the answers.
- Each question can earn up to 5 points.
- Each answer can earn up to 5 points.

Criteria	Oops = 0	Objective = 1	Subjective = 2 to 5
Does the Reporter's* question get the Speaker* to tell about the culture of the school or about the Speaker?	The Reporter did not ask a question about the school or Speaker.	The Reporter asked a question about facts: an objective question about the school or Speaker.	The Reporter asked about feelings, values, and attitudes of culture of the school or about the Speaker.
Does the Speaker's answer tell you about the school culture or about the Speaker?	The Speaker did not answer about the school or Speaker.	The Speaker's answer was factual but did not reveal much about the Speaker or the culture.	The Speaker's answer revealed information about feelings, values, and attitudes at the school or about the Speaker.

* Reporter = interviewer; Speaker=interviewee

Of course, your rubric should align with your learning objectives.

Variation in approach

- Nurture creativity by reversing the process. Rather than interviewing each other for ways to solve a problem, ask for ways to make the problem worse.
 - Sometimes, this negative approach sparks humor and fresh approaches to solving thorny problems.
- If the group is large, use a “fishbowl” with a few people talking and the others observing. If scoring is useful, use one of the scoring methods described above.

Variations in scoring methods

Score the input as works best for your objectives:

- Written: Score one point for each idea that is written on paper that has a written contribution from each person in the group. (See chart below.)
- Oral: Score one point for each idea that is voiced out loud and contributed.
- Scribe: Score one point for each idea that is voiced out loud and contributed to by each person in the group and written by the scribe.
- Online: Score one point for each idea that is voiced out loud and contributed to by each person in the group and written in an online document where everyone can input.

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Scoring can be based on each individual's contribution. The input may take any of the following forms:

- Propose an idea that is related to the topic.
- Ask a question about the idea that someone has proposed.
- Make a prediction about the idea.
- Suggest an authority or source related to the idea.
- Identify a flaw or potential weakness to the idea.
- Identify a strength or benefit from the idea.
- Describe how the idea could solve a problem or create a benefit.

Debriefing Keep on Topic

The purpose of debriefing is to learn from each game and to develop better strategies that will improve the group performance and apply lessons learned to everyday life.

What happened?		
What did you see? What did you hear? What was the score?	What worked? What didn't work?	How did people feel? What issue(s) came up? What issue(s) remain?
So what?		
What did we learn?	How does this experience relate to other experiences?	Why are we doing this? How is it relevant to us?
Now what?		
How could we improve our score in this activity?	How can we work together better?	How could we apply these ideas elsewhere?

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Game Rules for Players

Objective: Hear and record ideas that people share on a topic.

- A. Players may only write an idea from someone else. Players may not write their own ideas.
- B. Ideas must be written as sentences – complete thoughts – to count in the score.
- C. Sentences count in the score only if they are written during the time of the game. (If you are writing when time is up, you may finish that idea but not start another.)

Between games, answer three questions:

- 1. What happened?
- 2. So, what did we learn?
- 3. Now, what can we do with what we learned?

Before the next game starts, summarize the strategy that you are going to use and predict your next score.