

The Postgrad Critical Discussion Toolbox

Techniques to have more interesting discussions, tutorials and debates

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**THE POSTGRAD
CRITICAL
DISCUSSION
TOOLBOX**

**Be that student in class who
always has something
interesting to say!**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Griffith University acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pays respect to the Elders, past and present, and extends that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Diversity & Inclusion



English language use
Ethnicity
Age
Religion
Politics
Culture
Gender
Diff-Abilities
GPA results
Physical attributes
Emotional state
Identity/Orientation
Family Structure
Employment status

Race
Nationality
Neuro diverse
SES status
Personality
Experiences
Living conditions
Historical biography
Skills and Competencies
Educational background
Thinking and learning styles
Personal perspectives/beliefs
How well you ride a bike
Amount of imaginary friends



All are
welcome, safe
and valued in
my sessions

PPT available at

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Discussing Concepts

What is a concept?

Briefly discuss with a partner ...

What do you think is 'a concept'?

How do you discuss 'a concept'?

Why can concepts be challenging to discuss?

What are some examples of 'a concept'?

Concepts:

Concepts are a very important part of thinking

Identifying a concept allows us to 'breed' other ideas

Concepts are the 'parents' of practical ideas

For example: A small Australian town has a problem with commuters driving into town in the morning and leaving the cars parked in the street all day. This meant that local shoppers could not find anywhere to park.

What is the operating 'concept' of parking meter?

1. A concept could be *to get revenue from peoples need to park* (That may happen but is probably not the main purpose)
2. Another concept might be *to get as many people as possible to use the same parking space in day.* (This seems more likely).

Now if #2 is the concept – then we can practically 'carry out' that concept in another way. No parking meters = save capital costs. You can park anyway you like **but you must leave your headlights on.**

- Of course there are some practical flaws with this idea (forgetful people), but it shows that a concept can be practically implemented in different ways

You always eat 'food'. But do you ever actually eat 'food' as such? You do not.

You eat steak, you eat pizza, you eat strawberries. You always eat some specific type of food and not 'food' in general.

Food is a concept.

A hamburger is the practical idea.

Concepts: pick out the concept

1. Domestic dogs and cats and rabbits come under the concept of 'pets'. That could also include canaries and white mice. How would you define the concept of 'a pet'?

- *a living creature kept at home for no practical purpose other than to be loved*
 - Cats catch mice, dogs maybe watchdogs
- *a living creature kept at home for the main purpose of being loved as well as for companionship and security*

3. What is the concept of 'education'?

- (OLD) *To develop a curious mind that is cultured and can then learn about anything a lot of subject matter is talk to develop this 'mind'*
- (NEW) *To equip people to function in society and to contribute to society*

TAKE AWAY: *When you believe you have extracted the concept from what is being said, you can check on this by asking 'it seems to me that the concept here is Is that correct?'*

Concepts: Vagueness

Concepts always seemed rather vague

Most people don't consider what concepts are

But if you want to generate new ideas, design next steps or understand complexity then you need to develop some skill with concepts

When you are dealing with things with which you are familiar you do not seem to meet concepts. When you were dealing with less familiar matters, then concepts become very useful

‘Don't tell me to buy ‘food’. Tell me exactly what you want me to buy!’

TAKE AWAY: Concepts are like underwear. You do not go to school in your underwear, although usually you **ARE** wearing underwear. The underwear is not visible, **but is there all the time.** It is the same with concepts. They underline the practical things we do – even if we are not conscious of them

Concepts: Levels of concepts

Another difficulty of concepts is **what level to use?**

'Food' is a concept. But so is 'protein'. You could even say 'steak' was a concept because there are many types of steak.

- Now we have three levels of concept: the very broad to the more specific. How do you know which level to use?

There is no magic rule for choosing the level of concept to use

Sometimes the very broad is appropriate – but be careful!

People need food and shelter = This might suggest that **any sort of food** would do. In the Irish Potato Famine, the British government sent over wheat, which was useless because the Irish did not know how to use, cook or eat it!

TAKE AWAY: On the whole, very broad concepts and not much use – except a contrast different concepts, such as: 'Should we want education on the basis of 'reward' or on the basis of 'punishment'? Here, a very broad concept do serve a purpose.

Concepts: Levels of concepts

At the other extreme - concepts that are **so specific** they are almost practical ideas

'Achievement' is a broad concept. Youngsters need achievement. If we narrowed the concept to '**success in sports**' and we might build more sports facilities (practical). But there are many youngsters who are **not** interested in sport. There may also be cheaper ways of providing 'achievement'.

TAKE AWAY: A general rule for concepts is: not too broad and not too specific

Try out different levels of concept to find the level that seems to work best. You come to get a 'feel' for the right level

Discussing levels of a concept in itself can be interesting!

Concepts: Types of concepts

Just as there are very **different levels** of concept, there can be **different types** of concept

Pete comes up with the new business idea: to create 'fast food' with no premises. So a central kitchen produces 'Pete's Food'. This is food of the standard type, quality and price. Any eating place can have a notice in the window saying; 'We serve Pete's food at Pete's prices'.

What other concepts are involved here?

- Business concept
 - No need to own real estate – use other people's places
 - Range is limited = product is standard = less wastage = economy of scale
- Branding concept
 - \$ into a brand = not a single restaurant/location
 - More widely available = develop brand loyalty
- Customer value concept
 - Reassurance of a brand = quality & predictability (regardless of location, know what food costs)
 - Ambiance may not be guaranteed = remedy with inspections & standards to ensure places are suitable
- Delivery concept
 - key part of a business idea = without delivery the idea is useless
 - Make use of other people's property
 - Delivery might be daily, or less often if the product can be stored

Then maybe **business concepts**: why would this be profitable business?

There are **mechanism or delivery concepts**: how does this actually get done?

There are **value concepts**: what are the real and perceived values to the buyer, client or customer?

There are a **information concepts**: how do people find out about this?

There are **acceptance concepts**: what shall people accept this idea?

There are **competition concepts**: what might competitors do and how will this affect us?

Concepts - Exercise

Concepts are tricky

Getting the concept habit is not easy

It is worth putting in some effort into developing the concept habit

Make an effort to **pick up the concept or concepts** in one of the following situations. Try to pick up **the major operating concept**. You can also pick up **different types of concepts** in each case.

Hotels

Holidays

Internet

Banks

Mobile phones

Advertising

Concepts: Completeness

Concepts are rarely complete

Concepts capture the main 'essence' **but may not cover all aspects**

What is the concept of a tree?

- *A way of centralising energy reception(from the sun) and water and nutrients (from the soil)*
- *A way of putting together a volume of photosensitive material (leaves) in a more efficient way than spread out on the ground (grass)*
- *A way of raising photosensitive material above the ground in a competitive environment (bushes and other trees block the sunlight)*
- *Biological organism with long-term viability. Some trees live for 800 years (compare to the life of grass)*

Each of these is a valid concept. Not one covers the whole situation completely.

Concepts: Completeness

What is the concept of a **Dalmatian**?

- *A dog with the coat of black spots on a white background*
- *A striking dog that is friendly and easy to train*

Of course there is far more to a Dalmatian than this.

In fact Dalmatians produced a special chemical in the urine which other dogs do not.

Concept vs definition

The **definition** of an **election** might be: *the expression of choice by a group of people*

The **concept** of an **election** might be: **a mechanism whereby those with the right to choose express their choice in an objective manner – and a readiness to accept the result of that choice**

the 'readiness to accept' might seem unnecessary but is in fact a key component

Concepts vs Definitions

A **concept** is a label (a word or a phrase) that captures the essence possessed by a class of objects. It is an abstracted essence of a class of objects that is shared by all the members of the class.

A **definition** details the abstracted essence in terms of the genus the objects belong to and specifying the principle or element that differentiates the given class of objects (the species) from the genus.

The concept of man - an generally understood idea that corresponds to an (group of) 'things' = refers to the **essence that is common to all human beings** amidst the great many individual differences that humans possess.

The definition of a man –the exact meaning or what is a 'man'= a **list of different descriptions, characteristics and iterations** of what constitutes 'an adult male human'

A definition of the concept of man - elaborates the concept by identifying **the genus (animal) and specifying rationality as the differentiating element**

Concepts: Compare & Contrast

Once you are comfortable dealing with concepts and extracting concepts from what is being said, **you can start to compare and contrast concepts.**

Some ideas to explore are:

- How different is this concept from that one?
- Are the two apparently different concepts actually similar, and just expressions of one broader concept?
- Has the concept really changed or is this just a variation?
- Does this concept actually include the other concept (at a different level)?

Working with concepts provides a different perspective and perception.

Example

What is the concept of 'public transport'?

Is the 'public' part important?

Does this apply the concept of 'use without having to own'?

Is the key component of public transport the fact *that many people are moving in the comparatively small travelling space?* (High-density travel? Space saving?)

Is the concept 'pay for use only as required'? You do not have to own the bus, garage or maintain it. 'Transport' is now *purchasable in small quantities.*

There are **negative concepts**, too.

- Public transport is NOT valuable on demand both as to time and to starting point.
- There is limited flexibility with regard to choice of destination.
- There is less privacy.

Concepts: Summary

- Concepts are **very challenging but very important** part of thinking and discussion
- Concepts are like ‘parents’ that breed children (ideas)
- You need to **pick out the concepts** behind what is being said – what is the concept here?
- There are **different levels and types** of concepts
- Concepts can seem **vague**
- Concepts are **not always complete**
- Once you pick out concepts **you can compare and contrast** them
- **Concepts, definitions and descriptions do overlap.** Descriptions need to be complete, to define and separate. Concepts seek to distil the essence
- Thinking about concepts is **a skill that needs time and practice**

References

De Bono, E. (2004). *How to have a beautiful mind*. Sydney, Australia: Random House Australia.