

DIALOGUE DESIGN AUDIT

A practical checklist for evaluating whether dialogue in your training is doing real cognitive work — or just filling time.

The research is clear: dialogue isn't a supplement to learning — it's one of the primary mechanisms through which learning happens. Yet most training treats conversation as decoration: a discussion board nobody uses, a Q&A nobody attends, a breakout room that goes silent.

This audit helps you evaluate dialogue at every level of your design — where it's placed, how it's prompted, who it actually reaches, and whether it's doing any real cognitive work.

How to use this audit

Work through each section for a specific training program or module. Check each item that is currently present and intentionally designed. Unchecked items are your redesign priorities.

SECTION 1 · Dialogue Placement

- Dialogue appears BEFORE content delivery.**

At least one dialogue element activates prior knowledge or surfaces existing assumptions before learners receive new information.

Try: "What do you already know about this — and where does your current approach break down?"
- Dialogue appears DURING practice sequences.**

Learners have an opportunity to discuss, question, or compare approaches mid-task — not just after completion.

Try: "What's your reasoning here? What would you do differently if this went wrong?"
- Dialogue appears AFTER practice as a structured debrief.**

There is a specific prompt that asks learners to extract a lesson or name a strategy — not just "share your thoughts."

Try: "What signal told you to adjust your approach? What would you do differently next time?"
- Dialogue appears BEFORE the next practice opportunity.**

Learners are asked to plan or anticipate before attempting a new challenge, using insights from the previous one.

Try: "Based on what you just learned, what's your strategy going into this next scenario?"
- Dialogue is NOT concentrated only at the end of the sequence.**

When you map your design, dialogue blocks are distributed throughout — not stacked after all content is delivered.

SECTION 2 · Prompt Quality

- Prompts require reasoning, not recall.**
 Questions ask learners to analyze, apply, connect, or evaluate — not simply report back what they just read or watched.
Try: "Where does this principle break down in your actual work context — and why?"
- Prompts create productive tension.**
 At least one prompt asks learners to reconcile competing ideas, challenge an assumption, or test a principle against their experience.
Try: "What would have to be true for this approach NOT to work? What's the counterargument?"
- Prompts are role-specific, not generic.**
 "What did you learn?" is not a prompt. Questions are tied to the learner's actual job context, real problems, and specific decisions they face.
Try: "Which part of this would be hardest to apply in your specific role — and what would get in the way?"
- Prompts build transferable mental models.**
 Questions help learners articulate a strategy or principle they can carry forward, not just react to the current scenario.
Try: "What's the rule you'd give someone facing this situation for the first time?"
- Instructors/facilitators ask questions rather than explain answers.**
 The default facilitation move is a follow-up question that keeps learners doing cognitive work —not a correction that stops it.

SECTION 3 · Dialogue Modes (Self · One-to-One · Group)

- SELF-DIALOGUE is designed in.**
 Learners have structured moments to articulate their own thinking — through reflection prompts, written think-alouds, or planning activities — before or after key learning moments.
- ONE-TO-ONE DIALOGUE is designed in.**
 There is at least one paired exchange — peer feedback, coaching conversation, or Socratic pair discussion — where learners must explain their thinking to another person.
- GROUP DIALOGUE is designed in.**
 There is at least one structured group discussion where learners encounter multiple perspectives and must reconcile or respond to them — not just share sequentially.
- Each mode serves a distinct function in the sequence.**
 Self-dialogue builds internal clarity. One-to-one creates productive friction. Group dialogue generates divergence and reconciliation. These are not interchangeable — each is placed where it will do the most cognitive work.

SECTION 4 - Modality & Voice

- Oral dialogue is protected in the learning sequence.**
At least one synchronous verbal exchange exists where possible. Research consistently shows oral explaining activates stronger cognitive and social processing than written dialogue alone.
- Asynchronous dialogue prompts are designed to compensate for reduced social presence.**
Written discussion prompts require learners to take a specific position, respond to a peer's argument, or explain their reasoning in detail — not just post a reflection.
- Introverts and asynchronous learners have a genuine pathway to participate.**
The design doesn't rely solely on live, spontaneous verbal contribution. Structured think time, written pre-work, or asynchronous options exist alongside synchronous formats.
- High-power-distance contexts are accounted for.**
In organizational cultures where hierarchy shapes who speaks, there are structural supports (anonymous input, small groups, written-first protocols) that give all learners a real voice.

SECTION 5 - Visibility in LEM

- Dialogue blocks appear in your LEM blueprint.**
When you map the learning environment, Dialogue blocks are explicitly placed — not implied or assumed.
- Dialogue blocks are distributed across contexts.**
Dialogue appears across classroom, online synchronous, online asynchronous, and/or experiential contexts as appropriate — not siloed in one mode.
- Dialogue blocks are placed relative to Practice and Feedback blocks intentionally.**
The sequence of Dialogue → Practice → Feedback (or variations) is deliberate. You can explain why each Dialogue block is where it is.
- You can identify where Dialogue is MISSING in the current design.**
After mapping, you can point to specific sequences where dialogue was assumed but not designed — and name what cognitive work is missing as a result.

