

Step 1

Engaging with other Perspectives

This is the first of two warm-up activities designed to give students practice using their perspective as they preview the social science research method they will be undertaking in the coming weeks.

“What annoys you?” is an exercise that illustrates how our backgrounds inform our perspectives and how a perspective, can in turn, shape what one sees as a problem. For example, Bill’s Duke students often spoke about “first world problems” to refer to difficulties that were very real to them, but insignificant in a world where tens of millions of people were hungry. Not having the brand of toothpaste one prefers at the campus store is a first world problem. Thus, their relatively privileged perspective is decidedly not on a level with people around the world who do not know where the next meal is coming from.

The exercise gives students the chance to both see how their experiences inform their perspective and engage with another’s perspective to challenge or refine their way of seeing. In addition, when all the students answer the question, “What annoys you?” the class will have data that they can analyze. Students can look for patterns across the responses—i.e. what most annoys the students in this class are things they think they should control, but can’t. They can also engage with the perspective of a classmate by picking one of the responses they have heard and altering the fact pattern so it annoys them too.

Here is our “What annoys you?” activity:

Timeframe: 10 minutes. Give each student at least 20 seconds to respond.

1. Model a short narrative about an annoyance that everyone in the class can relate to. Example: People speaking loudly on a cell phone in a closed space.
2. Now, go around the class and ask everyone to share one annoyance. Have a student keep a list of annoyances that are identified. It is best if the list is public – the best option is on an electronic board that everyone can see. Otherwise, a large paper or easel works.

De-brief:

The annoyances students mentioned are related to their backgrounds and perspectives; how they see the world. Young people are attentive enough to acknowledge that what may annoy them, may not annoy others. Together, the annoyances identified can reflect the perspectives that each student in the class brings to this work. In listening to what others share, one might want to tweak one’s thoughts about what is most annoying. Tweaking one’s own thinking is a first step toward developing empathy and engagement with another’s perspective. It is as if one is attempting—and, of course, we can “only” attempt—to try a different perspective on so that one can begin see what others might see.

The annoyances that students in the class express are also useful when they are identified as data that may be manipulated and analyzed for patterns. Valerie has found it helpful to use the “What annoys you?” exercise to demonstrate a mini-research model at the start of the research process to help students to understand:

- a) how data organically evolves from questions.

- b) that patterns are clues to contextual information and shared group values.
- c) that “fresh” data provides a means for a situational analysis that provides information that cannot be found online.

Valerie likes to point out that the question, “What annoys you?” is the research question, the data are the answers that students give and the analysis of those answers leads to suggestions about how to mitigate annoyance; which are a model of policy recommendations

This warm up is also a great reference point to use as a research process unfolds in a classroom. All that can be derived from “What annoys you?” can be correlated, later, to steps 5, 6, and 7 of the *TfC* research method.

“What annoys you?”

ORIENTATIONS	TEACHER’S STRATEGIES	STUDENT ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES
<p>The teacher shares something that annoys him or her. Then asks students to each share something that annoys them.</p>	<p>Model the activity/tone: “There are some things that get me mad. I get annoyed when somebody tells me not to give money to people in the subway.”</p>	<p>Identify purpose and goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about each other • Find common ground • Collect a data set • Listen for patterns
<p>Questions that probe and clarify: Pick a response from one of your classmates and:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. change some of details so that the situation would annoy you as well. 2. share the first thing the class might do to try to fix the underlying issue. 3. What do the answers you have heard tell you about the people in this room? 4. What kinds of patterns can you identify? 5. What do these patterns tell you about this group? 	<p>Guide student responses:</p> <p>Probing questions should be quick with short answers. Students who start to share a narrative should be interrupted (hand up or reminder) “Don’t forget we are sharing short answers.”</p>	<p>Identify how personal experiences inform perspectives and can serve as data.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify individual experiences and how beliefs and values are expressed within them. 2. Ask students how race, class, language, and culture give clues to the patterns that are evident in the group’s responses 3. Question the meanings and understandings that students derive from analyzing the data

