

My News

a structure for processing current events

What it is

My News is a multi-step activity from social comprehension educator Sara K. Ahmed, designed to help participants **identify** their reactions to current events; **understand** the relationship between their reactions + their identities & experiences; and craft a personalized plan to **respond**.

Why to do it

- Meaningfully addresses the burdens that people are carrying with them into a space, without assuming/prescribing what they are
- Allows for holistic (emotional, cognitive, social/relational) processing in community
- Relieves helplessness + provides care in moments of collective high stress

How to do it

- You could do this anytime, but it's especially valuable when there has been a major event that you know many are affected by. (Or when you sense pervasive tension but aren't sure of the source.)
- Be clear about what it is **not** (i.e. not an invitation to debate; not an obligatory exercise in intense public vulnerability where people will be coerced into a lot of intimate sharing).
- Allow people to opt out in full or in part. Do not require this activity or attach it to a grade.
- Think about your own responses in advance. Model at each stage.
- Begin and/or end the activity with a wellness exercise (e.g. 1 minute of triangle breathing).
- Invite feedback. Follow up at a later point to check back in, if possible.

STEP 1: List your news + identify your feelings

- Divide a piece of paper into 4 quadrants. (Fold in half lengthwise and in half again widthwise.)
- In quadrant 1, list out all the items on your personal news feed: any events, topics, or pieces of information on your mind that you are likely to carry with you all day. These can be major or minor, personal or political, positive or negative: a fight with a friend, an upcoming party, a natural disaster, a house fire, war abroad, election results, a favorite artist's album release, etc. It's okay if there's a big mix.
- In quadrant 2, record your reactions to your news: feelings, thoughts, questions, opinions, fears, etc.

Dialogue: Share 1-2 of your news items + reactions. Listen to others. No response allowed except thanks.

STEP 2: Reflect on your reactions

- In quadrant 3, journal for 2-3 minutes: How are your reactions linked to experiences you've had and/or identities you hold?

Dialogue: Share any insights that this reflection yielded for you. You can speak in broad and abstract terms (without naming your identities or experiences) or more directly.

STEP 3: Determine how to respond

- In quadrant 4, journal for 2-3 minutes: What do you think you need or might help you? This could be: further inquiry + research into the issue or event; mobilizing to help in some way (e.g. a donation or direct action); or seeking help, care, or comfort in some specified way (e.g. journal, meditate, talk with a friend; go to therapy)

Dialogue: Share one thing you plan to do in response to how you're feeling about your news. Finally, reflect and share about this activity: how did it feel? How did it help, or not?



Collective Freewriting

a structure for processing current events

What it is

Collective Freewriting is an activity from Professor of Sociology Dr. Gloria González-López designed to help participants **identify** and **express** their ideas and emotions in response to major collective events, then **synthesize** those thoughts into a representative community statement.

Why to do it

- Honors individual responses + creates belonging despite conflicts or differences
- Anonymous-but-public statement integrates all voices + validates a range of responses without demanding excessive vulnerability
- Low-stakes, unscary creative expression provides psychic relief + aesthetic pleasure

How to do it

- Do this activity right before or after a **big event**: class, campus, community, or (inter)national.
- Be clear about what it is **not** (i.e. not an invitation to debate; not an obligatory exercise in intense public vulnerability where people will be coerced into a lot of intimate sharing).
- Allow people to **opt out** in full or in part. Do not require this activity or attach it to a grade.
- Think about your own responses in advance. **Model** at each stage.
- Begin and/or end the activity with a **wellness exercise** (e.g. 1 minute of triangle breathing).

PART 1: Freewrite thoughts + feelings

- Open a digital file (e.g. Google docs)
- For a designated amount of time (e.g. 3 min; 5 min; 10 min), freewrite in response to a prompt. "Freewriting" means unstructured, free-flowing stream of consciousness: don't worry about punctuation, spelling, or format.
- Prompt can be targeted ("How are you feeling about yesterday's election results?") or more indirect ("What anxieties are you carrying? How do they manifest in your body?").

PART 2: Create a public statement

- Submit your freewrite to a central repository (e.g. email to the facilitator or copy-paste to a communal document). You can submit in whole or in part, anonymously or not.
- Select 1-2 lines from each participant's freewrite and organize them into a paragraph or poem. A facilitator or assistant can choose lines, or participants can each submit the lines they wish to include. The facilitator should order them (randomly or purposefully).

PART 3: Dialogue

- Frame the statement as a collection of voices + perspectives: not the unified, singular voice of the group but rather a pluralistic representation of the group's complexity. Emphasize that it is okay if there is no discernible coherence or consonance, but encourage them to find points of resonance with and between the language chosen as well as the ideas and feelings expressed.
- Read the collective statement/poem out loud.
- Discuss: How did this process feel? What was challenging and what was rewarding about it? What are your responses to our statement/poem? What are lines that you find particularly beautiful, intriguing, or resonant (even if you don't fully understand what they mean)? What opportunities for care (for others or yourself) or other forms of action do these lines inspire you to consider?