



Interactivating a Speaker Event

CREATE DEEPER ENGAGEMENT + CONNECTION

WHAT IT IS

Bringing more dialogic, reflective, and interactive elements into a traditional speaker event or panel discussion (beyond the typical Q&A segment)

HOW TO DO IT

Define purpose. What are you most hoping participants will come away from this event with? What are key moments or major ideas you'd like to encourage processing + reflection around?

Consider audience. What do you know or guess about this group (demographically, ideologically)? What reactions (intellectual, emotional, physical) do you anticipate they may have to the event's content and format? What kinds of interactions between them might be valuable, given your purpose?

Consult the speaker(s) to get their input before finalizing your plan (if you are not the speaker!).

Prepare the space + materials. Arrange seating, print handouts, make signs, script prompts, etc.

WHY WE DO IT

- Creates more focus + deeper engagement
- Helps people identify, regulate reactions
- Enhances a sense of connection with both the ideas + the other people present
- Supports long-term learning + memory

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

BEFORE THE EVENT

Send a survey. Ask registrants to contribute questions, name what topics they most hope will be addressed, or share their learning needs/goals for the event. You can also use surveys to assess their current understanding of the topic. Use this information to inform the event (and reference it during!).

Assign pre-work. Ask audience members to prepare questions or complete a short reading or exercise to orient them to what they will be hearing. (This works best for invited speakers in a classroom or smaller group setting.)

DURING THE EVENT

Introductions. e.g. "Turn to a neighbor and share your name and what brought you to tonight's event."

Turn and talk. At key moments throughout the panel or presentation, have audience members turn to one another and share their thoughts, reactions, and questions for a few minutes.

Role play. Ask audience members to inhabit a certain viewpoint or stakeholder identity in conversation with a partner to apply and internalize key ideas and skills from the speaker/panel presentation.

Prepare for Q&A. Rather than opening immediately to questions, give the audience several minutes of think time to jot down questions. Pass out sticky notes or use a digital app (e.g. Mentimeter, Padlet, Mural) to collect questions.

Dialogue with the self. Build in moments of mindfulness (e.g. 1-minute breathing exercise), guided reflection, and/or journaling to help participants focus, regulate, and process privately.

Small group debrief. Structure in 15-20 minutes at the end for small-group response. Provide prompt(s) & norms.

Check-out. At the event's close, participants each share a final takeaway (in the whole group or small groups).

AFTER THE EVENT

Invite further meaning-making. Create a shared document for participants to keep sharing ideas, resources, reactions.