

Cross the Line

Purpose

“Cross the line” is an exercise that taps into bodily-kinesthetic learning. It engages the students by having them respond to statements about their past experiences. It also allows the students to discover information about one another. Through an interactive process of statements and responses, the students gain an awareness and openness to the experiences of their classmates. Discussion immediately follows some of the responses, allowing the students to go into greater depth about their experiences. It is common to have students spontaneously ask questions of their peers after hearing one another share, creating a sense of community and respect.

The exercise can be used for a variety of purposes. For example, it can be used to introduce a lesson plan and stimulate thinking about a topic, to gain awareness and encourage understanding of other people’s experiences and perspectives, or to break the ice with a group as a “getting to know you” exercise.

Drafting Experience Statements for the Exercise

First, you will need to draft a list of twenty to twenty-five statements about various experiences that the students may have had with regard to a certain topic. How the statements are written is critical to the success of this exercise. Start by identifying the goal of the exercise. Then generate the list of statements related to that goal. All the statements need to be in the format of “Cross the line if you . . .” For example, in a unit on the Rosary, you might have statements like “Cross the line if you have prayed the Rosary in a language other than English” or “Cross the line if you pray the Rosary with your family.”

Organize the list of statements so that the easiest statements, or those that most people would have in common, are first on the list. In fact, starting with some “just for fun” or warm-up statements is a great approach. These warm-up statements can be anything that will get participation started, such as “Cross the line if you like chocolate” or “Cross the line if you have traveled out of state.” Then statements related to the goal should build and deepen as the list goes on. Save the most in-depth statements for the end of the list.

Anticipate how much discussion might transpire after each statement to determine the number of statements you will want to include. Typically, twenty to twenty-five questions is about right. After making the list, mark the “essential” statements that you absolutely do not want to miss. That way, if time becomes limited, you can be sure to touch on the most important ones.

Method

To conduct the exercise, use masking tape or chalk to mark a line on the floor in a large, open space. Have all the students stand next to each other, side-by-side, on one side of the line, with a comfortable amount of space in between each person.

Next, read the list of experience statements one at a time. Pause after each statement to allow time for the students to determine if they have ever had that experience. Have the students indicate that they have had the experience by stepping over the line on the floor: “crossing the line.” Everyone is able to see who has had the experience. It is common for chatting and side conversations to occur when someone crosses the line. This shows engagement and success.



Then choose a few people to share more details about their experience. Often the students will want to ask one another about their experiences. Sharing these experiences can create an atmosphere of respect and community, so you may want to encourage it. However, this also requires flexibility to manage the teachable moments and move on when necessary.

Following the exercise allow the students time for private reflection on what they learned and how it applies to the lesson or topic at hand, as well as to their own experiences. If you are using the exercise as an introduction to a lesson, starting the unit after the time of sharing typically works well.

Summary of Steps

1. Determine the goal of the exercise.
2. Create a list of questions that will explore a variety of student experiences related to the goal. Write the statements with the intention of learning more about the students and entering into the content you will explore in the lesson. Scaffold the statements so that they begin with easy, broad situations that are applicable to most students. As the statements progress, make them more direct and targeted to the point of the lesson.
3. Identify a space for the exercise. You will need a space large enough for the students to stand in one line, all facing the same direction. A gym is ideal because it already has lines on the floor. However, a long hallway, cafeteria, or even an outdoor location works well. Discussing answers to the student responses is critical to this exercise, so be sure to choose a space that will allow the students to hear one another.
4. If there are no lines already on the floor (like in the gym), use masking tape or chalk to make a straight line across the floor.
5. Bring the students to the space and instruct them to stand in a row, side-by-side, behind the line.
6. Instruct the students to cross over the line if you read a statement that applies to them.
7. After the students have crossed the line, ask follow-up questions about their experience.
8. For an optional conclusion to the exercise, prepare reflection questions for the students to respond to in writing on their own.

