



# SPECTRUM STREET EPISTEMOLOGY

---

Epistemology (n)

/ɪˌpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi/

The theory of knowledge, especially regarding its methods, validity, and scope. The philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge.

Spectrum (n)

/'spɛktərəm/

Used to classify something in terms of its position on a scale between two extreme points.

Epistemology (n)

/ɪˌpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi/

The theory of knowledge, especially regarding its methods, validity, and scope. The philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge.

Spectrum (n)

/'spɛktrəm/

Used to classify something in terms of its position on a scale between two extreme points.

### **What is Spectrum Street Epistemology (SSE)?**

Spectrum Street Epistemology (SSE) is a conversational tool designed to help students explore and reflect on the reasons behind their beliefs in a non-confrontational way. SSE is rooted in the Socratic method. It encourages asking open-ended questions and practicing active listening to understand why someone holds a particular belief and how confident they are that their belief is true. Unlike debates aimed at winning an argument, SSE focuses on fostering mutual understanding, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue—making it especially valuable in educational settings.

### **Training Session: Introducing SSE to Educators (2.5 Hours)**

This 150-minute training is designed for teachers. It will help educators learn about SSE, understand its core principles, and gain practical strategies for using it in their classrooms. Below is the schedule with time allocations and key activities.

#### *1. Introduction to SSE (7 minutes)*

##### What It Covers

- SSE video examples.
- Socratic roots: SSE is a method to explore beliefs through open-ended, Socratic questioning.
- Its purpose in education: SSE helps students develop critical thinking, articulate reasoning, and engage in respectful discussions.
- Why it matters for grades 7-12: Adolescents are forming beliefs about the world, and SSE can guide them to examine these thoughtfully.

## Key Points

- Non-confrontational approach creates a safe space for dialogue and wonder.
- Applicable across subjects like history, soft sciences, and English.

## 2. *The Socratic Method and SSE (7 minutes)*

### What It Covers

- The Socratic method uses questions to stimulate reflection and uncover reasoning. It has five stages: 1) Wonder, 2) Hypothesis, 3) Elenchus, 4) Accept or reject the hypothesis, 5) Act accordingly
- SSE adapts the Socratic method by focusing on belief exploration (“Why do you think that?” or “How did you arrive at that conclusion?”) and falsification (“What would cause you to change your mind?”).
- Emphasis is placed on active listening to understand, *not* to win.

## Key Points

- Example questions: “What reason or evidence supports your view?”, “How confident are you in this belief?”, “What would you have to learn to change your mind?”, “Someone just stated what it would take to change their mind. Is that reasonable? Why or why not?”

## 3. *Activity: Practicing Open-Ended Questions (7 minutes)*

### What Teachers Do

- Pair up and explore one or more of the following claims: “Cell phones should not be allowed in classrooms”, “Talking in the corridor be prohibited during the school day,” “Students who are assigned detention should have to do a set number of pushups.”
- Ask how confident your partner is in their claims, and ask them to put their confidence on a scale: Absolutely Agree, Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Neutral, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Absolutely Disagree.
- Ask why they believe what they believe. How do they know their confidence is justified? (Evidence? Reason? Feeling? Convention?)
- Ask what it would take to change their minds to move one position over, for example, from Slightly agree to Neutral or Agree.
- Explore about whether or not what it would take to change their mind is reasonable? Why or why not?

Goal: Build comfort with SSE's questioning style.

#### 4. *Debrief and Discussion* (7 minutes)

What It Covers

- Teachers share experiences from the activity.
- Discuss, explore, explain justification and falsification—and why it matters.
- Reinforce the value of patience, curiosity, and avoiding leading questions.

#### 5. *Using SSE in the Classroom* (7 minutes)

What It Covers

- Practical applications:
  - History: Discuss differing views on an event.
  - Science: Explore reasoning behind scientific claims.
  - English: Analyze a character's actions in a story.

Adapting for grades 7-12: Simpler questions for younger students, deeper discussions for older ones.

Key Points

- SSE can tackle controversial topics by focusing on reasoning, not persuasion.

#### 6. *Activity: Creating SSE Scenarios* (7 minutes)

What Teachers Do

- In small groups, design three SSE discussion prompts (claims) for their subject (e.g., Ecology: "Is it good to live in harmony with the land?").
- Refine claims.

Goal: Connect SSE to their teaching context.

#### **7. Break** (7 minutes)

#### 8. *Sharing and Feedback* (7 minutes)

What Teachers Do

- Groups present their claims.
- Peers offer feedback or suggestions to tweak the claims.

Goal: Refine claims through collaboration.

9. Play SSE With The Claims! (30 minutes)

10. Addressing Challenges and Adaptations (7 minutes)

What It Covers

- Challenges: Students getting defensive, time constraints, diverse learners.
- Solutions: Set ground rules, start with low-stakes topics, model behavior.
- Adapting for age or ability: Adjust question complexity.

11. Activity: Role-Playing Challenges (7 minutes)

What Teachers Do

- Role-play a scenario (e.g., a student shuts down during discussion).
- One teacher facilitates, others act as students.

Goal: Practice managing tricky situations.

12. Assessing SSE's Effectiveness (7 minutes)

What It Covers

- Look for: Improved reasoning skills, higher engagement, better articulation of thoughts.
- Methods: Observe discussions, use "exit tickets" (e.g., "What did you learn about your thinking today?").

Key Point: Focus on process, not changing beliefs.

13. Bonus Techniques and Suggestions (7 minutes)

Bonus Techniques

- Boards
- Swapping sides
- Student facilitation
- Community participation

Suggestions

- Fridays
- Increasingly led by students

- One full period
- Adjunct pedagogy

14. Your Turn: Play SSE With The Claims! (30 minutes)

15. Q&A and Wrap-Up (7 minutes)

#### What It Covers

- Answer questions about SSE implementation.
- Share resources (e.g., SSE guides, videos).
- Start small: “Try one SSE game next week.”

**Why SSE Matters for Teachers** Based on Peter Boghossian’s book, *How to Have Impossible Conversations*, SSE encourages participants to critically examine their beliefs and consider opposing views. SSE equips teachers to foster critical thinking and dialogue. Its non-confrontational nature suits diverse students, helping them explore beliefs safely. By the end of this 2.5-hour training, teachers will understand SSE, have practiced it, and feel ready to use it in their lessons.

We are here for you. As you practice SSE in the classroom, if you have any questions please reach out to *both* Reid [reid.nicewonder@nationalprogressalliance.org](mailto:reid.nicewonder@nationalprogressalliance.org) and Erin [erin.herrick@nationalprogressalliance.org](mailto:erin.herrick@nationalprogressalliance.org) and Reid will be happy to answer any questions you may have. [URL]

Please complete our Teacher Evaluation Form by scanning the QR Code:



**Teacher Evaluation Form!**