



# Exploring Leadership

## PROBLEM SOLVING: DIVERGENT THINKING

In school, we're often taught to focus on finding the "right answer." Divergent thinking takes a different approach—it encourages creative risk-taking. Each time you see an object differently or connect unrelated ideas, you practice divergent thinking. You're not just thinking outside the box—you're rethinking the box itself. Sometimes, the limits of the box unlock creativity and innovation. (Remember how a simple cardboard box can transform into endless possibilities for an imaginative child?)

### CONVERSATION STARTER:

Show this [YouTube Video](#) (1:33 minutes). What do you think inspired the filmmaker to create this short movie? How does it show a different way of thinking?

Divergent thinking isn't just about creativity—it's a vital skill for solving problems and challenges. From brainstorming essay ideas to tackling tough debates or adapting to changes, divergent thinking helps you see beyond obvious solutions. It's especially valuable when obstacles can't be removed and need creative navigation. People with this skill are better prepared to thrive in careers, relationships, and leadership.

### KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Recognize how divergent thinking differs from finding "the right answer."
- Recognize the value of adaptability and creative thinking in problem-solving.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Computer/projector for showing the [YouTube video](#) (1:33 minutes)
- Whiteboard or paper to display the starting word
- Timer for the game (optional)
- Paper and pens (optional, for players to jot down words)

## EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES:

**Change One Letter Game** - This activity challenges your creativity and quick thinking as you turn one word into many. It's a fun way to practice divergent thinking and explore how far your creativity can take you!

- Form a large circle or divide into smaller groups. The person whose birthday is closest to today goes first.
- Show a starting word for everyone to see.
- Explain the rules:
  - Players take turns changing one letter to create a new word, moving clockwise around the circle.
  - Each player has 15–30 seconds to come up with a new word (you decide the time limit).
  - No repeating words—once a word is used, it's off-limits.
- Play until no more new words can be made or time is up.
- Example words: Start with 'Star' → Stab → Slab → Slat → Slit → Slim → Slid → Slip → Flip.
- If stuck, restart with a new word to keep the game moving.
- Adjust the time limit or provide hints to keep the activity fun.

### FACILITATOR TIP:

- Emphasize that this activity is about exploring possibilities, not solving problems. Let participants know there are 'right' answers to reduce potential frustration.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How is divergent thinking required in this game different from solving a math problem?
- What rules or limitations did you face during the game, and how did they impact your creativity?
- Did you notice moments when you thought of a different word than the one used? What made you think differently?

## APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- When in real life have you needed to use divergent thinking to think creatively to solve a problem?
- How does following specific rules or expectations push you to be more inventive?
- Why is divergent thinking important for leadership, school, and everyday life?



## CONCLUSION:

Life isn't always about finding a single "right answer." More often, it's about discovering multiple ways to solve a problem. Divergent thinking opens your mind to new possibilities and fuels your ability to create unique solutions. By learning to embrace creativity and think differently, you'll unlock your potential to face challenges with confidence and innovation. Practice this skill—it's a game-changer for success.

Utah State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution and is committed to a learning and working environment free from discrimination. For USU's non-discrimination notice, see [equity.usu.edu/non-discrimination](https://equity.usu.edu/non-discrimination).

## REFERENCES

- 7 Ways to Inspire Divergent Thinking in the Classroom: <https://spencerauthor.com/divergent-thinking/>
- Fuel Creativity in the Classroom With Divergent Thinking: <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/fueling-creativity-through-divergent-thinking-classroom-stacey-goodman>
- Strategies and tools for divergent thinking: <https://instructionaldesignfusions.wordpress.com/2010/10/23/strategies-and-tools-for-divergent-thinking/>
- The Deep by PES: [https://youtu.be/AK18bdUEWSs?si=vLO\\_8p0JimNYkU70](https://youtu.be/AK18bdUEWSs?si=vLO_8p0JimNYkU70) (1:33 minutes)