

Messy Talk

The Messy Talk is a format developed by Whistle as we continually attempt to promote de-stigmatizing difficult conversations in dance, or more simply, to promote speaking (up) in dance students and professionals. The Score is a series of actions/containers/directions that can be taken, ignored, chopped up, revised, remixed, or launched from. Its parts offer the group potential constellations to discuss themes or specific topics, there is no expectation for all the rounds to be linearly completed or even acknowledged. Time spent discussing how to approach the conversation can be done before or during the Messy Talk. If it feels like it's not taking off at any given point, any participant can interject and pivot towards a related or unrelated trajectory. Once momentum is established, go with it as long as it maintains respect to all.

Passion, anger, complaint, and personal experiences have a place in the Messy Talk.

Devil's Advocates do not.

Whistle tries to work in a collaborative, non-hierarchical, and non-perfectionist way, so in our discussions, the facilitator is also a participant and the participants can also facilitate and help move the Messy Talk along. It can get “messy” or “disorganized” and uncomfortable and that’s part of the purpose of the Messy Talk. Topics can be derailed, criticized, avoided, deeply doveen into, said the wrong way, etc. The only purpose is to practice vocalizing ideas and beliefs and for a unique exchange amongst the people who are present.

The “Messy Talk” is an avenue for dancers to practice speaking, brainstorm without judgment, and make any mistakes that are natural for growth through conversation.

**There's no need to adhere firmly to this score, there's no need to be perfect.
Be creative, mess it up.**

Score

Items needed:

Paper or device handy to take notes, scribble, scratch thoughts throughout
Timer/Time keeper

Rounds are composed of four elements:

- 1) 12-13 minutes (set max time limit for each person)
- 2) The people involved
- 3) A topic/question/statement
- 4) A speaking container/activity

The first two elements are (more or less) fixed. The last two are open to mix and match. Want to “Respond not React” about boundaries? Great! Want to throw down “Hot Takes” about funding? Great! Want to “In my _____, I would _____” about centering QTIBPOC leadership? Great! Want to check in for 45 minutes? Great!

In a 50-60 minute discussion, there is space for an intro (5 minutes), 2 rounds (12-15 minutes each), a check-in (2 minutes), the closing activity/OR a last round/ OR a closing discussion (12-13 minutes), and a short goodbye.

There is no right or wrong way to hold a Messy Talk.

Example Structure for a 50-60 Minute Messy Talk

Short Intro: (5 mins)

- Facilitator performs a “Welcome” and sets the purpose/intention
- Introductions - Names, pronouns, location (native land + colonialist name, if in North America), little bit about who they are/what they find important/ what their priorities right now are (adjust as desired)
- Facilitator introduces the general structure
- Facilitator Explains Ante-Care
- Facilitator states predetermined Theme of conversation or First question or statement to launch discussion (See the Topics page)

Round 1: Reflect/ Alternative Round (For 6 people, 15 minutes)

1. Take 2 mins *offline* (muted/no video if on video call) to reflect and organize your stance/ thoughts *on the theme/opening statement/questions*
2. Each participant takes 2 minutes (be firm about this) to vocalize anything resulting from their own self-reflection time

3. OR use an alternative round

(Roughly halfway) Check in: How are people feeling in their bodies, in the conversation? What do people need/want? (2 minutes)

Round 2: “Respond not React”/ Alternative Round (12-13 minutes)

1. Assuming you reacted privately to hearing the others’ reflections, take 2 mins tops each to respond vocally to something that triggered you in either a positive or not positive way (it can be something said in the previous round, it could be a new idea you had)
2. OR do an alternative round

Round 3: Closing Round/ Alternative Round

1. 2 min each to respond to something that triggered you in either positive or not positive way, to another thing you heard at any point until now
2. OR 12 mins to general conversation
3. OR alternative last round
4. OR Closing Round

CLOSING Round (12-13 mins)

This is each participant offering one or two sentences per round.

Take 2 minutes alone to reflect on everything from the Talk. Think about your desires for dance and how you can achieve them. Then:

Round 1: “I want...” - State your desires in what you’d like to see in the future the dance landscape

Round 2: “yes, and...” - Respond to one desire you heard

Round 3: “I will...” - State one small thing you will do in daily practice/work/life to help realize one of those things you said or heard

Thank yous and Goodbye (2 minutes)

Facilitator goes over Aftercare with the group

END

Possible Alternative Rounds:

1. Pass the Ball/Shift the Spotlight: practice advocacy through listening, repeating with credit, asking, and seeking answers outside ourselves from our community

1. Advocate for others either present or not
 1. This isn't speaking for someone else, but underlining, highlighting, emphasizing what someone else has said that you find valuable to the topic. It's noticing who is/isn't in the group and acknowledging that there is more conversation/more locations for discussion. This can pertain to a thing you heard at any time or place or context in your life experiences or it can pertain to the present conversation.
 1. Ex. Are there any immigrants, non-native speakers, disabled dancers, neurodivergent dancers, trans or non-binary dancers, etc present or missing from this conversation? **How does who is involved in a conversation impact what gets said/doesn't get said?**
2. Give space to another person to talk or explain
 1. Ex. *"X, what you said about ____ really resonates with me, could you tell us more about that?"*

2. "Yes, And" instead of "Yeah, But":

1. Practice avoiding "devil's advocate-ing" (arguing for the sake of arguing), just stick to making additions (repeating and adding)
2. This can be done in different ways (about complaints, about future possibilities)
 1. Each person says a statement/feeling and the next person says "Yes, And" and says a statement that is either connected or not. It's a conversation that doesn't negate, only adds. (I was informed about this by one of the Dance Union recordings with J Bouey, so they might feel practiced with this)
 1. Ex. Person A: Boundaries on what teachers say to students about their weight don't exist. Person B: Yes, and choreographers often feel like they own your time - even if they aren't paying you! Person C: Yes, and I can't even afford rent if I work two jobs and try to take classes. Person A: Yes, and I have to deal with comments about my sexuality. Person C: Yes, and I hate being touched on my inner thighs and stomach, Person...

3. A Three-Part Round:

Round A: Ask a Question - a round of only questions related to the theme, no answers

Round B: 3 - 5 minutes to think about the questions

Round C: Respond to a Question - doesn't have to be in any particular order and doesn't have to be concrete answers. Tough questions can (and in our opinion should) be collaboratively answered, often over time.

4. Hot Takes: Rounds of complaint about crossed boundaries, lack of consent, unwanted touch. No one answers to a hot take, this is a space for complaints. 3-5 minutes.

5. In my _____, I would _____: Imagination is a powerful tool for transformation. We have to know what we want before we can either demand it or create it. (I think Creating New Futures did something like this)

1. Ex. In my company, I would pay everyone a living wage. In my company, I would make childcare free for the dancers/ technicians/ etc. In my company, I would not have donors dictate our programming. In my company/studio/collective/work, I would _____

6. A regular, old-fashioned conversation. People talk, people listen, people ask questions, people answer questions. It starts with a topic and the group takes it from there. Free-for-all using practices like “shifting the spotlight”, and “yes, and”.

7. 1 - 2 - All:

This is a technique we learned from Abdul Dube and his background in anarchist community speaking practices. First, there is a topic and everyone gets 3 minutes to think about it for themselves. Second, they turn to one other person and discuss it as a duo. Third, the conversation either goes to 4 people or in this case it goes to the group.

1. On Zoom, this might mean recording breakout rooms **or** it could be two people discussing it, then two more discussing it, until everyone has discussed it. Then the whole group could discuss it together.