

Tuning Protocol

Overview: This is the classic protocol upon which most of the others are based. It is also the most frequently used protocol for examining student work. The Tuning Protocol features time for the presenter to talk while participants are silent, and time for the participants to talk while the presenter is silent. It provides three levels of depth: presentation, participant discussion, and presenter reflection, finalized by a general debriefing that can extend the conversation.

Other Uses: This protocol can be used for examining teacher/educator practice; classroom, school, district, and other policies and practice; and plans, proposals, or ideas that are fairly well thought out and represented in written form.

Number of Participants: 8–10 participants, a presenter, and a facilitator

Time Required: Typically 1 hour; can range from 30 minutes to 2 hours

Steps (suggested times based on a 60-minute session):

Step 1: Introduction (first time only, 5 minutes)

- If participants don't usually work together, they briefly introduce themselves.
- Facilitator briefly introduces information about and guidelines for protocols, and establishes time limits for steps.
- Participants explore the assumptions that are important to making protocols work.

Step 2: Presentation (15 minutes)

- Presenter sets the context, describing the teaching/learning situation, while participants remain quiet and take notes.
- Presenter shares materials related to the teaching/learning situation described, including student work. The presenter should be prepared to use part of the presentation time to let participants examine what is being presented.
- Presenter poses one or two key questions about the teaching/learning situation.

Step 3: Clarifying Questions (5 minutes)

- Participants ask non-evaluative questions about the presentation (e.g., "What happened before X? What did you do next? What did Y say?").
- Facilitator guards against questions that approach evaluation (e.g., "Why didn't you try X?"). Participants who ask evaluative questions may be invited to rephrase the questions as clarifying, or to save the questions for the participant discussion step.
- It is entirely possible that the group will not get all its questions answered—there is never enough time!—but participants will have enough information at this stage for the protocol to be productive.

Step 4: Individual Writing (5 minutes). Both the presenter and the participants write about the presentation, addressing the key question(s). This step helps each participant focus and have something to say during the participant discussion.

Step 5: Participant Discussion (15 minutes)

- Participants discuss issues raised during the presentation among themselves, striving to deepen their understanding of the situation, and seeking answers to the question(s) posed by the presenter.

- The presenter is silent, taking notes on what the participants say. The presenter should avoid eye contact with the participants, even turning away from them, so that they focus on what is to be tuned rather than on the presenter.
- Participants should strive for a balance of warm and cool feedback unless instructed differently by the presenter.
- Participants should strive for substantive discourse. They should not engage in a round-robin discussion, but rather focus on and develop one idea at a time.
- The facilitator should keep an eye on the individual airtime of participants and ensure that their focus is on the work being discussed rather than on the presenter and that their comments remain true to the assumptions about protocols.
- Participants “own” the situation discussed during this step; it is theirs to improve, with the presenter listening in silently and taking notes, perhaps while turned away from the group to avoid eye contact.

Step 6: Presenter Reflection (15 minutes)

- The presenter reflects aloud on the participants’ discussion, using the issues the participants raised to deepen understanding and reflecting on possible answers to questions posed. The presenter can also suggest future actions, questions, dilemmas, and so forth, and may correct any misunderstandings.
- Participants silently take notes on the presenter reflection.

Step 7: Debriefing (5 minutes)

- The presenter discusses how well the protocol worked and thanks the participants for their work.
- Participants discuss how well they think the protocol worked and thank the presenter for bringing the work to them to be tuned.
- The presenter and participants engage in more general discussion of both the situation examined and the protocol process itself.

Note: Ultimately, the person/group in charge of a particular step in the protocol is in charge of moving the process along, as well. When that person/group has no more to say, then that person/group can announce that it’s all right to move to the next step.

Critical Elements:

- A balance of warm and cool feedback (unless the presenter has declared a need for more of one than the other)
- Attention to the presenter’s key questions
- Thoughtful, provocative, and substantive discourse

Tips for the Facilitator: It might be helpful for participants to address the protocol process midway through the participant discussion. At that point, the facilitator may ask participants to assess how they are doing on the following:

- Balancing warm and cool feedback
- Addressing the presenter’s key questions
- Ensuring that everyone has equal airtime