

SPECTRUMS

<https://www.beautifultrouble.org/training/for-trainers>

snapshot:

An activity that helps individuals reflect on their own positions and recognize diversity within a group by literally putting their bodies on a line (as you might in a direct action.)

time: 15-45 mins

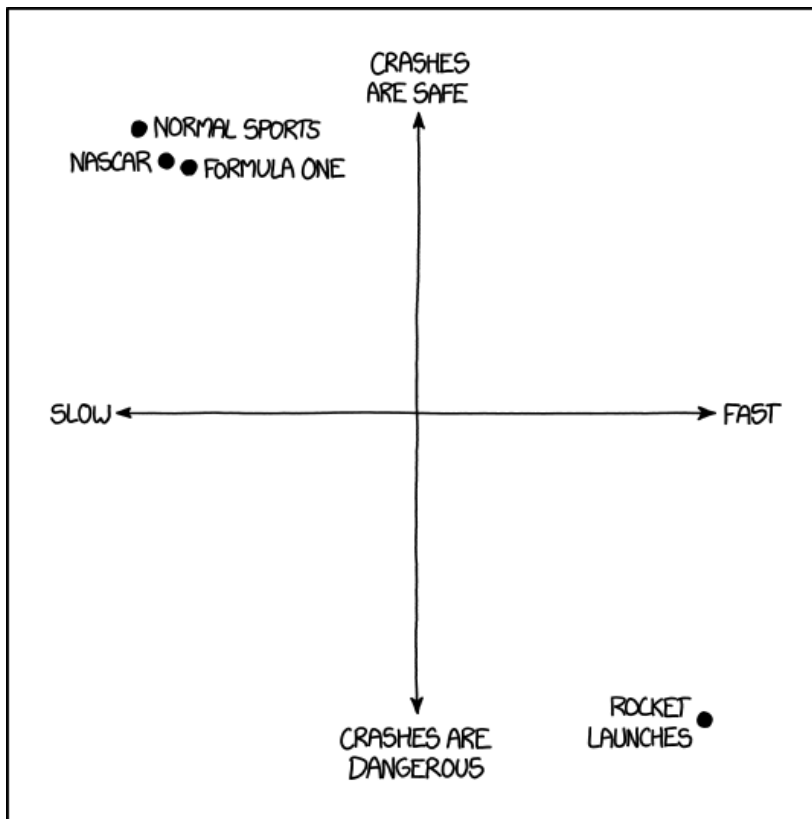
energy level: moderate

materials: none required, though big paper, markers and tape to make signs can be helpful

STEPS

1. Tell participants that you will be **exploring** how the group feels about a specific issue by placing yourselves on a line or spectrum that represents different sides of a discussion.
2. **Describe the two ends of the line**, and then ask people to go to the place along it that represents their thoughts. For example, one end of the line could represent *In favor of direct action for the campaign now* and the other end could be *Against using direct action in this moment*. Those who feel strongly one way or the other will be at or near one of the ends of the line, while those who feel less strongly will be somewhere in the middle.
3. The facilitator should then walk around and **interview** a diversity of people on the line, to stimulate discussion.
4. **For more complex discussions**, use two intersecting lines aligned with the four cardinal directions. For example, you might begin with setting up the first line with the ends representing *I think property destruction is part of a nonviolent activist's toolbox* and *Property destruction doesn't belong in a nonviolent activist's toolbox*. Then, once participants have found their place, add a second intersecting line through the middle that integrates another statement related to the discussion you want to have in the group. For example, *Property destruction is effective* versus *Property destruction is ineffective*. Then ask people to position themselves in relation to both sets of statements. The use of two lines and four statements creates four distinct quadrants. In this example, you could have people who think:
 - a. *Property destruction is **effective** but **doesn't** belong in a nonviolent activist's toolbox*

- b. People who think property destruction is **ineffective** and **doesn't** belong in nonviolent activist's toolbox
 - c. Property destruction is **effective** and **DOES** belong, and
 - d. It's **ineffective** and **does** belong
5. Again, the facilitator can do interviews, and participants can move if they feel what they hear persuades them to shift their position. If helpful, debrief can happen in pairs or small groups with those who are in different positions, to help the group explore **deeper issues**.



caption: Simple example of a two-axis spectrum (see step 4) about "[Speed and Danger](#)," xkcd, July 1, 2016

OPTIONS

- If time and space limit the potential for a full Spectrum, consider using a **Fishbowl** set up, with a small number of people in the center who can be observed by a larger circle of participants around them (the way you would watch fish in a fishbowl!). This is a conversation tool that creates room for participants to simultaneously discuss, observe and actively listen to a particular topic and is well suited for facilitating large group discussions,

working on controversial topics, and promoting active participation. Members of the outer observing circle can be invited to 'tap out' those in the center to replace them, expanding the number of participants who get to be active in the center.

- **State Your Position:** If limited space prevents you from using a line for a spectrum, you can instead just designate areas in the space you are using to get a visual representation of who is in what group. See [TAKE A POSITION](#).

TIPS

- **ADD LABELS:** If you have time to prepare written statements for the ends of the lines, you can post them to help people find their place easily.
- **ONLINE:** Spectrums as well as charts of all kinds, can be done easily by setting up a document, whiteboard, or slide that all can write into. Google docs, Jamboards, Mural, Miro, and more have programs to support this kind of activity.
- **ONLINE: Fishbowls** can be supported by having those in the "center" have their cameras on, and the rest of the participants turn off their cameras. Alternatively, keep all cameras on and PIN the speakers to the screen so they remain visible. Use the Chat or Hand Raise feature to TAG people out of the center.

RESOURCES

- See this write up about using [Sociograms and Spectrums](#) in training.
- See this video for [10 Ways to Use A Spectrogram Online](#).

author: Nadine Bloch

origins: *widely used*
