



Verbal Stretching® for Beginners

Just as in the martial dojo, in the *verbal dojo* we warm up before practice. Indeed, in Verbal Aikido we warm up our minds and our spirits with *Verbal Stretching*. This practice enables us to get reflexive posture training on two of the key aspects of communication: **centered expression** and **neutral listening**. The exercise may seem esoteric at first, but has immediate real-world effects as a concrete means to practice empathy and develop self-knowledge.

Generally, there are two roles in *Verbal Stretching*. First, we will look at the Participant, who focuses on maintaining a centered expression. If you carried out the exercise in the last chapter, you will have noticed that the questions are not geared at a specific response, rather at enabling you to express your truth. This is the case if you are the Participant in any stretch; it is an opportunity for you to align with your truth of the moment, your inner wisdom. Your role as participant is to:

- Express yourself as freely and openly as you feel you can
- Focus on expressing yourself from a centered state
- Recognize any moment you lose center (approval, doubt, etc.)

The Facilitator, on the other hand, initiates the stretch by proposing a selection of words. A Facilitator might ask, “What would you like to stretch: ‘serene confidence’, ‘centered’ or ‘personal peace’?”. The Facilitator practices an enhanced style of listening: without judgment, interruption or reformulation. Simply receive the Participant’s expression with open, silent curiosity. Observe how neutral you can be with this.

The role of the Facilitator is to

- follow the set of questions on the *Stretchcard*¹
- Focus on listening as neutrally as possible
- Recognize any moment neutrality was lost (anticipation, interruption, judgment, etc.)

KEY POINTS

- 🌀 *Work to develop two key aspects of communication: centered expression and neutral listening.*
- 🌀 *As Participant, focus on maintaining a centered expression, simply expressing your truth.*
- 🌀 *As Facilitator, practice an enhanced style of listening, fully receiving the Participant’s expression with a focus on neutrality.*
- 🌀 *“Stepping out of posture” (focus on “Me” or “You” respectively) is inevitable. However, noticing when this happens, and how you return to the intended posture, is a key aspect of practice.*
- 🌀 *Continuously develop your capacity to stretch, aim to feel the stretch each time you practice.*

¹ A selection of Stretchcards is available in the Verbal Aikido Resource Center.