

What is Street Epistemology?

Introduced in 2013 by Dr. Peter Boghossian of Portland State University, Street Epistemology (SE) is a conversational method intent on helping people reflect on the reliability of the methods used to arrive at deeply-held beliefs. SE is the application of epistemology (the study of knowledge) outside of formal academic contexts.

Common terms

Interlocutor (IL): The person you are speaking with.

Socratic reasoning: The use of questioning to draw logical conclusions from facts.

Critical thinking: Thinking with an emphasis on evidence and a minimum of assumption (Occam's razor¹).

Guide to a Standard Encounter

This is just a guide and I recommend developing your own style.

- Identify a claim and ask for consent to unpack it with them.
- Using questions, ensure they value truth and agree that truth is objective.
- Using a scale (I like using 0%-100%), determine how confident they are that the belief is true.
- Using questions, identify what exactly they believe and their main reasons why.
- Using questions, determine if they used a reliable or unreliable method to conclude that their confidence in their reasons is justified.
- End the talk with an offer to meet again when it appears they are getting overwhelmed or an important discovery has been made (you may also decide that the conversation will go no further and wish to disengage.)

***Tip: Remember to listen and give the IL time to think about your questions/responses.**

***Keep your opinions
and position as
neutral as possible to
avoid encouraging
bias in responses.***

Common Objections to Street Epistemology



It's confusing!

It's proselytizing!

It's manipulative!

It's deceptive!

Notes & Further Study

It's important to remember that Street Epistemology is a tool for engaging in meaningful conversation about a particular belief. Your goal is to better understand the IL's position and belief and to help them "unpack" it in an effort to allow them to better consider their reasoning for holding that belief. It is not a step-by-step debate method and should not be used with a goal of "winning" the conversation in mind.

While everyone's style differs, it tends to be far more productive if you are polite and make an effort to understand the IL's position whether or not you agree with it or have conflicting data. Try not to offer counterpoints to their answers, this is about you understanding their position - not convincing them. If you are successful and the IL is honest with themselves they will inevitably consider how reasonable or unreasonable their position is.

"Manual for Creating Atheists" by Peter Boghossian

www.streetepistemology.com

Anthony Magnabosco - YouTube

Cordial Curiosity (Reid Nicewonder) - YouTube