

ALoU

Advantages, Limitations, overcoming limitations, Unique Qualities

PPCo

(Pluses, Potentials, Concerns and overcoming concerns)

LCOb

(Likes, Concerns, Opportunities,)

Advantages, Limitations & Unique Connections

This technique (ALU) is built upon the principle of affirmative judgment. The client(s) first identifies the advantages of the option before identifying its limitations and unique aspects or possibilities. The limitations are framed as problem statements upon which to generate ideas to overcome the limitation. Sometimes the order of the activities can be changed, but the advantages should always be identified first.



Be an idea
coach.

Pluses, Potentials and Concerns (PPCo)

Coaching new ideas

PPCo is a tool for evaluating and improving ideas. It's four-step process is based on the power of affirmative judgment and designed to ensure that feedback is complete, but still constructive. PPCo allows you to express both positive and negative responses to the idea without crushing its potential. When concerns about the new idea come up, they are phrased as questions, using statement starters like "How might...", "How to..." or "In what ways might..." Ideas can then be generated to overcome key concerns.

While the PPCo is often associated with analyzing and improving ideas, it can also be used to structure feedback on behaviors, products or proposals. In fact, many people recognize the pluses, potentials and concerns format as the very same feedback method used by their favorite teacher, boss, parent or grandparent.

Pluses

What do you like about the person's idea, work, proposal or performance. What is good about the idea right now?

Potentials

What opportunities might this new idea open up? What might be potential spin-offs for future growth?

Concerns

Express your concerns as open-ended questions that give the person a possible direction for future development. Use the statement starters "How to...", "How might..." and "In what ways might..."

Overcome Concerns

Review your list of concerns. Choose the most important one and brainstorm on at least a dozen ways to overcome it. Do the same for the next most important concern on the list. Continue on until you overcome all your concerns.

The PPC was originally developed in the early 1980s by Diane Foucar-Szocki, Bill Shepard and Roger Firestien.

PPCo Worksheet

PPCo stands for Pluses, Potentials and Concerns (and overcoming those concerns). This tool is a systematic way to articulate what's good about an idea, then to consider and overcome any concerns that arise. First, write down your idea statement:

What I see myself doing is...

Below list at least three pluses or specific strengths of your idea.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now, list three potentials, speculations, spin-offs or possible future gains that could result from your idea. In a future when this idea has become a reality, what has become possible? List potentials, using the phrase "It might..."

1. It might...
2. It might...
3. It might...

Finally, list the concerns you have about the idea. Be sure to phrase each concern as an open-ended question that will allow you to overcome each one and move forward.

1. How to...
2. How to...
3. How to...

Review your concerns. Decide which one is most important to you. Generate at least a dozen ways to overcome that concern. Once you have enough ideas to overcome your most important concern, go to the next most important concern and generate ways to overcome it. Do this until all of your concerns have been overcome.

Concern #1) How to...

Ideas for overcoming concern #1:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

Concern #2) How to...

Ideas for overcoming concern #2:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

Concern #3) How to...

Ideas for overcoming concern #3:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

What I NOW see myself doing is...

PPCo...*A tool to evaluate and further develop ideas or products.*

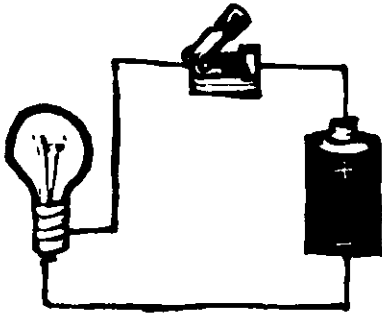
Name of Idea or Product: _____

Pluses + Generate below the advantages or pluses of the idea:

- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____
- + _____

Potentials * Generate below some positive outcomes or future spin offs that might occur as a result of this.

- * It might _____
- * It might _____
- * It might _____
- * It might _____
- * It might _____
- * It might _____



Behind every
bright idea
is a lot of
careful
thinking.

Praise First

Pluses, Opportunities, Issues, New thinking (POINT)

Most of us feel proud — and a little vulnerable — when presenting a new idea. Praise First is a four-step technique for evaluating and improving new ideas. Founded on the principle of affirmative judgment, Praise First allows you to express both positive and negative responses to an idea without crushing its potential—or its originator. When faced with a new idea, resist the inclination to point out its flaws. First, find the value in it. Express what you like about it. Second, say what opportunities might be possible if it worked. Only then should you present your issues. Phrase these issues as questions which invite new thinking. Finally, brainstorm to overcome any issues.

While Praise First is often associated with analyzing and improving ideas, you can also use it to give feedback on behaviors, projects or proposals. In fact, you might recognize it as the very same feedback method used by a favorite teacher, boss or grandparent. The four steps:

Pluses

What do you like about the person's idea, work, proposal or performance right now? Be direct, honest and specific.

Opportunities

What opportunities might this new idea open up? What might be potential spin-offs for future growth?

Issues

Express your concerns as open-ended questions that offer a possible direction for future development. Use the statement starters "How to...", "How might..." and "In what ways might..."

New thinking

Review your list of issues. Choose the most important and brainstorm to generate at least a dozen ways to overcome it. Do the same for the next most important issue on the list. Continue on until you overcome all your issues.

The PPC was originally developed in the early 1980s by Diane Foucar-Szocki, Bill Shephard and Roger Firestien.

Praise First Worksheet

If you have generated ideas and narrowed them down to a few promising options, here's your chance to strengthen, improve, and craft them into workable solutions. Begin by writing your most promising option(s) in the form of an "action statement," beginning with the statement starter "What I see myself (us) doing is..." This statement should include a specific, measurable result. The measure can be as stringent as metrics or dollars, or as simple as verifying that you have accomplished the solution. Write your action statement below.

ACTION STATEMENT

What I see myself (us) doing is:

Tools for Converging

WAIT! Do not fill in the following chart until you have completed the next three pages.

In order to:

Do this:

In order to:

Do this:

In order to:

Do this:

In order to:

Do this:

In order to:

Do this:

Praise First

Now, run a Praise First or POINT on your action statement. Remember, POINT stands for Pluses, Opportunities, Issues and New thinking. The idea is to articulate what's good about the idea, then to consider and overcome any issues you have.

Below list at least three **pluses** or specific strengths of your idea.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now, list at least three **opportunities**, speculations, spin-offs or possible future gains that could result from your idea. "In a future when this idea has become a reality, what has become possible?" List opportunities, using the statement starter "It might..."

1. *It might:*
2. *It might:*
3. *It might:*

Finally, list any **issues** you have with the idea. Be sure to phrase your issues as open-ended questions that will allow you to overcome each one and move forward.

1. *How to:*
2. *How to:*
3. *How to:*

Review your issues. Decide which are most important. List your most important issue below and generate at least 15 ideas to overcome it. Once you have enough **new thinking** to overcome that issue, go to your next most important issue and generate ideas to overcome it. Do this until you have new thinking that helps overcome each issue. Remember, use the ground rules for diverging when you stretch for new thinking to overcome your issues.

Issue #1) How to...

New thinking for overcoming issue #1:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

Issue #2) How to...

New thinking for overcoming issue #2:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

Issue #3) How to...

New thinking for overcoming issue #3:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

Issue #4) How to...

New thinking for overcoming issue #4:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

Issue #5) How to...

New thinking for overcoming issue #5:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 9. |
| 2. | 10. |
| 3. | 11. |
| 4. | 12. |
| 5. | 13. |
| 6. | 14. |
| 7. | 15. |
| 8. | |

Put check marks by the best ideas for overcoming each issue.

NOW, turn back to page 49 and fill in the rest of the chart. Take each issue and rewrite it using the statement starter "In order to..." Then include your best ideas for overcoming each issue in the space labeled "Do this."

For example, an issue over funding might start as:

"How might I get funding?"

After brainstorming, you might end up filling in page 49 by writing:

"In order to obtain funding, we will petition the division vice president and prove a cost-reduction over the next 18 months."

ALUo



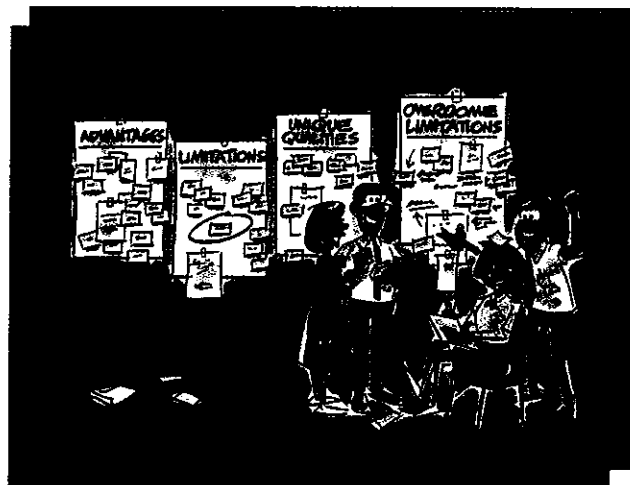
Purpose

ALUo (Advantages, Limitations, Unique Qualities and overcome limitations) is a focusing tool used to analyze, develop and refine promising options. Use this tool to:

- Identify the pros and cons of an option;
- Help make a decision between or among two to three promising options; or
- Think more clearly about a highly unusual or novel option.

Description

ALUo provides a structured approach to analyzing and developing promising options. To use this tool, identify the Advantages (strengths), Limitations (concerns or possible weaknesses) and Unique Qualities (novel or useful elements) of an option. In addition, you will develop and strengthen the option by identifying and overcoming the key limitations (overcome limitations). The tool's structure helps avoid the common the idea-slaughtering that often occurs when groups confront novel or unusual options.



History

The concept of considering advantages (pros) and limitations (cons) can be traced back to Aristotle. ALUo builds on the concept of "itemized response" developed by Synectics in which useful aspects of an option were considered (as opposed to focusing solely on acceptance or rejection). Others have developed similar approaches to evaluation, such as deBono (PMI-Plus, Minus, and Interesting, 1978) or Firestien, Foucar-Szocki and Shephard (PPC-Pluses, Potentials, and Concerns, 1982). Isaksen and Treffinger (1985) originally developed the ALU as a tool for analyzing and developing novel options using the guidelines for focusing. The ALUo is unique in that it explicitly addresses the novel or unusual qualities of an option and provides a structure to overcome the key limitations or concerns. We added the "o" (for *overcome* limitations) to the title to remind people about overcoming key limitations.

References

- de Bono, E. (1978). *Teaching thinking*. NY: Penguin.
- Firestien, R. L., Foucar-Szocki, D., & Shephard, W. J. (1982). Pluses, potentials and concerns. In D. J. Treffinger, S. G. Isaksen, and R. L. Firestien, *Handbook for creative learning*. NY: Center for Creative Learning.
- Isaksen, S. G. & Treffinger, D. J. (1985). *Creative problem solving: The basic course*. Buffalo, NY: Bearly Limited.

Suggested Materials

- Posters or flipcharts with generating and focusing guidelines.
- ALUo worksheets if necessary.
- General facilitation supplies (e.g., flipchart, markers, tape, etc.).

Steps for Using ALUo

1) Focus the Group on the Task

- Write the task so it is visible to the entire group.
- Ask the client to explain the task to the group.
- Have the client answer questions about the topic (if necessary).

2) Review Focusing Guidelines

- Establish the guidelines for focusing options: Use Affirmative Judgment; Be Deliberate; Consider Novelty; and Stay on Course.
- Clarify questions about process or content.

3) Provide an Overview of ALUo (if new to the group)

- Clarify the purpose and outcome of ALUo.
- Explain directions for using the tool.
- Answer questions about ALUo.

4) Identify Advantages

- Ask the group to identify advantages of the option. For example:
 “What do you like about this option?” “What works?”
 “What are the strong points about the option?”
- Check with the client to determine if enough Advantages have been identified. If so, transition to Limitations.

5) Identify Limitations

- Remind the group to phrase Limitations as How to's...
- Identify the Limitations of the option. For example:
 “What are the limitations or shortcomings of this option?”
 “Why might this option not work?” “Where might it fall short?”
- Check with the client to determine if enough Limitations have been identified. If so, transition to identifying Unique Qualities.

6) Identify Unique Qualities

- Remind group that Unique Qualities are elements of uniqueness to preserve.
- Ask the group to identify the Unique Qualities of the option. For example:
 “What does this option have that few or no other options have?”
 “What is unusual about this option?” “Why is this option different?”

- Check with the client to determine if enough Unique Qualities have been identified. If so, transition to Overcoming Limitations.

7) Overcome Key Limitations

- Ask the client to identify the key Limitation(s) from the list. Use Selecting Hits if necessary.
- Focus on one Limitation at a time and have the client explain it to the group.
- Use generating guidelines to identify ways to overcome the Limitation. For example:

“How might this limitation be overcome?”

“What ways can you think of to overcome this limitation?”

- Check with the client to determine if enough options have been generated. Repeat this step until all key Limitations have been addressed.

8) Check on Progress

- Ask the client for feedback about the results of the ALUo. For example:

“What do the results of the ALUo tell you about the option?”

“Did this give you what you need to develop the option?”

9) Take Next Steps

- Examine possible next steps. For example:

Make a decision about the option and plan appropriate steps;
Identify another option needing analysis and conduct an ALUo;
Plan the use of another tool;
Provide time for reflection and incubation; or
Identify actions to be implemented.

Tips for Using ALUo

- The purpose of "Unique Qualities" is to determine if there is something novel about the option you want to preserve. Therefore, it is not necessary to generate a large quantity of these.
- Be sure to identify Unique Qualities before Overcoming Limitations. This helps ensure that uniqueness is maintained when suggesting changes.
- Invite group members to identify Advantages, Limitations and Unique Qualities quietly while the client shares information about the task.
- Remind group about phrasing the Limitations with "How to...".
- Remind group to structure A's, L's, U's and O's with 5-7 words to ensure full meaning is captured.
- Speed up the ALUo by using Brainstorming with Post-its™.
- It may or may not be necessary to emphasize the generating guidelines when identifying A's, L's and U's. This depends on the target number set for each. Therefore, reinforce both sets of guidelines when necessary.
- Label (e.g., Advantages, Limitations, etc.) the top of each flipchart page used.
- Option: Identify Criteria first and use them to stimulate A's, L's, U's, or O's.

ALUo Worksheet

Advantages

Identify the strengths, pluses or positive aspects of the new option.

-
-
-
-
-
-

Limitations

What are the concerns, challenges or weaknesses in the new option (phrase these as How to...)?

-
-
-
-
-
-

Unique Qualities

Identify the new or unusual elements (or possible outcomes) of the option. Focus on the novel aspects of the option (What does this option have that no other option has?).

-
-
-
-
-
-

overcome limitations

On the back of this page, generate ways to overcome the strongest limitations in order to develop and strengthen the option.

FEATURE

ALoU

Advantages, Limitations (Overcoming Limitations), and Unique Qualities

by Susan Keller-Mathers
Buffalo, New York



Overview and Description

Individuals or groups can use Advantages, Limitations (Overcoming Limitations), and Unique Qualities—the ALoU tool—to examine critically a small number of options, to choose effectively among options, or to develop and refine options for implementation. The ALoU tool demonstrates the important principle of affirmative judgment (Isaksen, Treffinger, and Dorval, 1994) by evaluating constructively and emphasizing the importance of a constructive approach to focusing options (i.e., strengthening and developing options rather than simply criticizing them or “picking them apart”).

Centuries ago philosophers such as Aristotle weighed the pros and cons of ideas. More recently, techniques such as Pluses, Minuses, and Interests (deBono, 1982) and Pluses, Potentials, and Concerns (Treffinger, Isaksen, and Firestien, 1982) provide ways to examine both the positive and negative aspects of options and to overcome the common tendency of many individuals and groups to criticize new possibilities or reject them without looking closely at their strengths and potentials. The ALoU tool helps you establish and maintain a positive focus while still examining an option carefully and thoroughly. Isaksen and Treffinger (1985) and subsequently, Isaksen, Dorval, and

Treffinger (1994) and Treffinger, Isaksen, and Dorval (1994) described ways to apply ALoU as a focusing tool to analyze, refine, and develop options during Creative Problem Solving sessions.

In response to a need for new and innovative ways to solve a problem, an individual or group often generates many ideas or options. Once that list of ideas has been narrowed to a smaller set of possibilities (perhaps even 1-3 promising and exciting options), the ALoU tool can be used effectively to analyze, develop, refine, or strengthen the options. When selecting ideas to analyze and improve, highly novel or unusual ideas should not be discarded quickly or without closer examination; among them, there may be a “diamond in the rough” that can be polished by using ALoU.

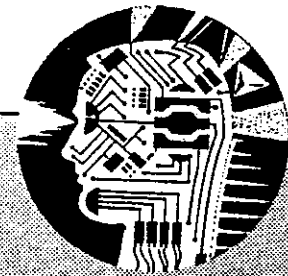
The tool’s name describes the important steps in using it. First, consider and list the advantages of an idea or option that you wish to review or examine. What are the positives or best aspects of this option? What are its best points or strengths? It is important to move beyond superficial or artificial responses, such as “It’s nice,” or “I really like it,” and to state specific, concrete strengths of the option (e.g., “We will be able to implement this option without having to purchase any new materials.”). Note that it is important to *begin* with the

advantages, to establish a positive and constructive tone for examining the options.

After listing the advantages, list the concerns or possible limitations. State the limitations in a way that encourages improvements. State each limitation as a question, using an open-ended phrase such as “How to...?” “How might I...?” or “In what ways might we...?” Instead of saying, “Other people won’t support this idea,” using the open-ended question (e.g., “How to stimulate other people’s support?”) invites you, and others if you are working in a group, to consider ways to overcome the limitation rather than promoting discouragement or a sense of frustration or failure.

The third step in using ALoU is to look for, and record, the unique qualities of the option being considered. When generating unique qualities, consider why the option is original or why you believe it holds promise. Look for the option’s most positive qualities and consider future possibilities or “spin offs” it might generate. Ask what the option has that other options lack. What are the features or qualities of the option that make it particularly appealing, unique, or “special” in some way?

Finally, work toward improving or strengthening the option by overcoming the major limitations you have already listed.



ALoU—Course Evaluation

by Lary Faris
Lakeside, Ohio

Application

The ALoU tool can be used easily, without the need for special materials or resources, by individuals or groups of all ages. Teachers, students, organizations, businesses, and even families can use ALoU individually or together to analyze, develop, and refine options productively and constructively. Although ALoU is an excellent tool to apply in group problem solving sessions, its use in the classroom reaches far beyond group applications. Focusing on the positive can become a "way of life," an attitude for productive evaluation. When considering or discussing new ideas, the ALoU tool helps a group avoid the "knee jerk" reaction of criticizing or rejecting possibilities immediately.

There are many ways to use the ALoU tool in the school or classroom. We will consider several examples. Whether you apply ALoU orally or in writing, it provides a positive method of responding to everyday encounters with evaluation. Using an ALoU format becomes second nature after awhile for both teachers and students. When individuals start to formulate and express their concerns as "How to...?" questions, even in informal settings and casual conversations, they have learned a powerful lesson of productive problem solving.

At the university level, I use the

There is always a need for those who have attended a training session to share their feelings, observations, and conclusions at the end of the course. To fill this need during our two-day Creative Problem Solving workshop, I "camouflage" and use the ALoU tool, which they learned the day before.

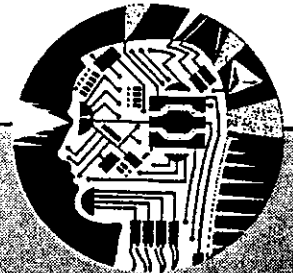
I first suggest to the attendees that we have been on a long journey since we started the course the previous morning and that like any journey, they likely may want to talk about it. I then ask them what the highlights were for them. To stimulate response I rephrase the question several times asking, "What stood out for you?" "What will you talk about when people ask you tomorrow how it went?" "What would you have taken a picture of?" or "What were your ah-ha's?" The responses are all positive and sincere and come in great quantity. Often some of the attendees who have been more reserved during the session speak up. Typical comments are, "Trainers were well experienced," "Lecture-exercise balance was good," "I really learned something," "I can use this right away," "I was pleased to learn that we are all creative," or other similar responses.

Next, I ask where the trouble spots were, and rephrase that using words like pot holes, difficulties, rough spots, or lows. Those questions always bring out some critique saying the course was too long, or they needed more time, or the first morning was slow, or they got lost somewhere. We might also invite ideas about how to change or overcome those concerns.

Finally, I ask what was special about the course (or journey). As we proceed, I rephrase my questions to ask what was different, unique, new, or special. I get comments like music, pictures on wall, toys on tables, and "we actually solved a problem while we were here."

This all takes about 20 minutes. When finished, I ask, "What tool did I just use?" Most are startled and have puzzled looks, but soon several will brighten with "oh-I-get-it looks!" Then I reveal that we just used the ALoU tool and that they have discovered for themselves how effective and simple it can be. It is clear to all that the course has been evaluated. This gives me a great opportunity to point out how easy it is to use what they have learned in the course when they return to their normal work settings. ■

Lary Faris is a retired employee of Procter and Gamble. He conducts training programs on Creative Problem Solving.



ALoU—Marketing Concepts

by Mary Wallgren
Cincinnati, Ohio

Developing marketing concepts can be a long and difficult process. I recently worked with a team from a local community service group. They are responsible for developing the concepts to market their services. The session began with a thorough review of their services and the community needs. It also included a review of some market research data that had been collected. After that, I reviewed the basic approach to developing marketing concepts. Each individual worked independently to develop a concept. They followed a standard format and recorded their ideas on a blank transparency.

The strength of this session came when we reviewed the marketing concepts each person developed. After the first idea was presented to the group, I used the ALoU tool to capture the group's feedback. First, I asked, "What are the advantages of this concept? What did you like about it?" These ideas were captured on a flip chart. There were lots of comments. Everyone in the group participated, even the person who developed

the concept. The positive remarks were a good beginning, and even people who had never used ALoU had no problems participating without being trained.

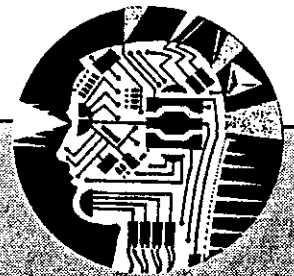
When the group ran out of positive things to say about the concept, I invited them to describe the limitations. Before they started, I asked them to state those limitations as a problem statement, in other words, start their phrase with "How to..." (for example, "How to demonstrate in a radio commercial the benefits of our service?"). This way of stating limitations helped the group more easily to identify ways to overcome the weaknesses. There were lots of limitations, but they sounded more positive in the form of a problem statement. That led right to identifying ways to overcome the drawbacks. At this point in the session, we only spent a couple of minutes on the obvious ways to deal with the limitations.

The last step was to identify the unique aspects of the concept. The trick here was to get the group to identify things that were truly unique and not just restate advantages. I asked the group,

"What distinguishes this product or concept from the competition?" or "What will make this ad memorable?" These items were more difficult for the group to identify. It was the shortest list.

This process took 15-20 minutes per person or about 2 1/2 hours for the team of eight. After all the group members presented their concepts and the entire group had reviewed them, I asked them to pick their three favorite concepts. We reviewed the top three concepts once more. Then we looked at ways to combine elements of each to make an even stronger concept(s). The group found that one concept had limitations another had addressed to its advantage. We repeated the ALoU tool for two new and improved concepts, this time spending more time on ways to overcome the limitations and making appropriate changes to the concept. When we finished, the marketing team took the concepts back for consumer testing. Within a day, the group had developed and refined the marketing concepts that would eventually be used. ■

Mary Wallgren, a specialist in creativity and innovation, works with Procter and Gamble in Cincinnati, Ohio.



ALoU tool in a Creative Studies class during a unit in which the students develop an invention. The students use the ALoU tool in groups to refine and develop their inventions and to receive constructive feedback from their peers on their presentation of a prototype.

Whether planning or conducting an individual or group research project, carrying out a creative writing assignment, or analyzing a character's action in a novel, ALoU offers a practical, useful, and positive tool for focusing options.

For example, a note written at the bottom of a student paper outlining the advantages, limitations, and unique qualities of the work can provide meaningful, positively-focused feedback quickly and effectively. One of the best uses of the ALoU tool involves giving feedback for the purpose of improvement. Personally, I have applied ALoU in my elementary school classroom to provide feedback on students' research papers and other writing assignments. I often complete the ALoU tool on a student's project and ask the student to overcome the limitations to improve the project. For example, fourth-grade students completed a project on endangered animals. It included a written report, a visual display, and a presentation. Both the student and I completed an ALoU on the project and the student worked to over-

ALoU—A Jetway Bridge Slide

by John Cabra
Miami, Florida

Recently, a team of airline employees came up with an idea to prevent last-minute bags from missing the plane. These are bags that are checked-in at the ticket counter five to ten minutes before departure time. Normally, the agents inform the customer that the bags will not be guaranteed to make the plane, and a late-checked bag tag is placed on the bag. The "shared decision making team" felt it was not good customer service to leave bags behind for very late customers. Their idea consisted of installing a slide adjacent to the stairways attached to the jetway (a bridge that connects the terminal to the plane, allowing passengers to deplane and board). The stairs of the jetway can only be used by authorized personnel.

The group used the ALoU tool to examine their new idea more closely. They identified more than 25 positive aspects of the idea. Next, they examined possible limitations, during which time about a dozen important limitations were noted (along with possible ways to

overcome several of the limitations). Finally, the group described approximately eight unique features or aspects of the idea.

We used ALoU to develop our ideas for the slide; it is important to keep in mind that using this tool does not necessarily mean that a certain idea will be adopted or used. Sometimes, as the group looks carefully at the limitations, weighing them against the advantages and considering whether the limitations can readily be overcome, they may decide not to pursue an idea even though it initially seemed promising. In this case, the team used the qualitative information they received from station personnel and additional quantitative information about cost benefits limitations, to conclude that they should not implement the new idea. The data from the ALoU identified a major concern: it would take 50 years of use for the new idea to "break even," while other efficient and much more cost-effective options could be implemented successfully. ■

John Cabra is a consultant in organizational performance and employee development with a major corporation in the transportation area.

come the identified limitations. After completing the project, the student presented the project to the class and received ALoU feedback on the oral presentation.

ALoU is also an excellent tool for examining a "far out" idea more closely to see if it has merit and may be worth further effort and development. For example, a group of teachers was trying to determine what to do with a student who had a severe behavior problem. Since the classroom teacher reported having "tried everything," she was looking for unique ideas. She liked one highly novel idea (building a wall around the student), but naturally, she thought it was impractical or impossible to achieve. Using ALoU, the group helped her overcome major concerns and to refine, modify, and develop the idea into one she implemented successfully. She rearranged her room to better accommodate the student, using room dividers to create the effect of several smaller rooms, and made other modifications based on her colleagues' suggestions.

In group problem solving, the ALoU tool can be helpful in comparing several good ideas or developing one or more ideas for implementation. Completing an ALoU on several ideas lets you analyze strengths and weaknesses and make a better-informed decision.

The ALoU tool can be used in-

dependently by students and does not require a highly-trained leader or facilitator for success. Using this tool will help bring out the best in your ideas and those of others, too.

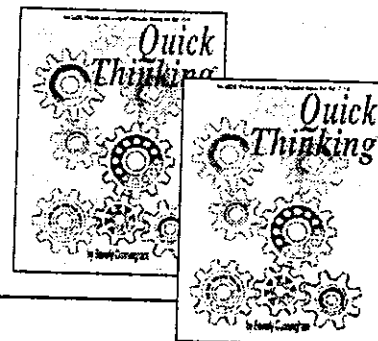
Susan Keller-Mathers, of Buffalo, is a Gifted Specialist at Campus West School, Buffalo Public Schools, New York.

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Facilitator's Notes For Form 17, A-L-U

The purpose of this Form is to provide a convenient, easy to use format for recording the advantages, limitations, and unique potentials for an idea or a cluster of related ideas.

This converging technique is particularly useful when there is a major, dominant idea or innovative theme that has emerged from the Idea-Finding stage. It is less complex to use than several other converging strategies, and is usually a very positive or constructive way to analyze, refine, or develop an idea or a group of closely-related ideas.

Tips to encourage effective use of this Form:

- Begin with the Advantages column ("lead with the positive"), to offset the common tendency to pounce on new ideas by telling all the things that are wrong with them!
- When you do look at limitations, do it constructively or affirmatively. Instead of, "We can't do this because..." or "What's wrong with this idea is..." we suggest starting each limitation with the phrase, "How to..." or "How might we..."
- Advantages are the strengths or best points of the idea. Unique potentials are the future strengths that might emerge later, if the idea is adopted or implemented; they're the possible long range benefits that might develop.

Form 17

A—L—U

Idea or Cluster:

Advantages	Limitations ("How To..." form)	Unique Potentials

ALoU Technique

1. Advantages:

First, generate a number of advantages about the idea or option. Be sure to list whatever comes to mind that might be an advantage.

What are the advantages of the idea? What's good about it? What do you like about it?

2. Limitations:

Next, generate a number of limitations or concerns you have about the idea or option. Phrase your responses in the form of a question starting with "How to..?" or "How might...?"

What are the limitations? What are your concerns about the idea? What are the challenges?

3. Unique Qualities:

Next, examine the unique aspects of the idea or option and look to the future potential by generating unique qualities. Generate positive focused unique qualities.

What is unique about the idea? What is unusual or intriguing about it? What might potentially happen in the future as a result of this idea? What might "snowball" from it?

4. Overcoming Limitations:

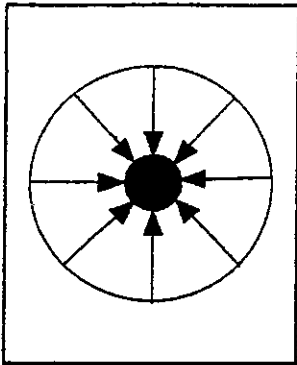
Finally, select one or several limitations and one at a time generate ideas to overcome the limitations generated in #2..

How can we solve the problem or make it less of a problem? What are your ideas for solving ...?

For more information on the ALoU technique see: Treffinger, D., Isaksen, S. & Dorval, K. (1996). Creative problem solving: An introduction. Sarasota, FL: Center for Creative Learning.



A—Lo—U



Overview, Description, and Purpose

A-Lo-U is a focusing tool. The letters represent the words: *Advantages, Limitations (overcome), and Unique Features*. This tool provides a constructive but comprehensive way to analyze or refine one or more promising options. It offers an opportunity to consider the strengths of an option, the concerns or challenges associated with that option, the ways in which the option is original, and the future potentials that might emerge. Limitations or concerns are treated as challenges that might be overcome, rather than as negatives that lead to rejection or exclusion of possibilities. Focusing on the uniqueness and potentials of an option also reinforces a positive attitude of affirmative judgment.

The A-Lo-U tool can be particularly useful for the following purposes, or under these conditions:

- When a group needs to give a balanced and fair-minded consideration of any option;
- To refine and develop intriguing possibilities;
- To help examine one option, a cluster of related options, or a small set of promising possibilities thoroughly;
- When a group needs help focusing on positives and potentials.

Getting Ready to Use A-Lo-U

Materials. Provide A-Lo-U Worksheets as handouts. A sample worksheet is included on page three of this Guide, and other similar resources can be found in the *Creative Problem Solver's Guidebook* (1994) or *Thinking Tools Lessons* (1997). A copy of the Tool Chart that accompanies this Guide. Chart paper, markers, and tape, and an A-Lo-U overhead transparency may also be helpful.

Preparation. If the necessary materials are available, this tool can be applied with little or no special advance preparation.

History and Background

Weighing the pros and cons of ideas has been used for centuries; indeed, ancient philosophers such as Aristotle used such an approach. The A-Lo-U tool has evolved over more than three decades of work, drawing on work from several independent, but clearly inter-related sources. Early work on the synectics approach (e.g., Gordon, 1961) used a tool described as an *itemized response*, in which the strengths and weaknesses of selected options were analyzed. deBono (1982) used the term PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting) as one of the CoRT Thinking tools. Firestien and his colleagues (e.g., Firestien, 1982) used the terms "Pluses, Potentials and Concerns" in working on converging with adult clients in business problem solving groups. These tools were used primarily for convergent analysis or idea evaluation. Isaksen and Treffinger (1985) introduced the ALU as a tool for analyzing and developing novel options. The o was subsequently added to remind users to overcome limitations. Isaksen, Treffinger and Dorval (1994) and Treffinger, Isaksen, and Dorval (1994) described ways to apply A-Lo-U (sometimes also presented as ALUo) as a focusing tool for analyzing, refining, and developing options in Creative Problem Solving sessions.

Learning More About the A-Lo-U Tool

The following sources will help you learn more about this tool:

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For additional information on Creative Problem Solving methods and tools, contact:

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Examples and Applications

Some ways to use the ALoU with students include :

- Providing verbal or written feedback to students in relation to assignments or task performance in either curricular contexts or in counseling or constructive behavior management sessions;
- Teaching students to examine their own work constructively and helping them to distinguish critical thinking from negative criticizing;
- Using the A-Lo-U as a metacognitive tool, through which students learn to monitor their own thinking and productivity and to modify their processes and products as their work proceeds;
- As a tool for organizing and conducting effective, constructive conferences (e.g., teacher-student; teacher-parent);
- To guide students in structuring classroom discussions, critical assessments of content topics, or debates (and to help students distinguish debate from conflict);
- To help students learn to review, analyze, and evaluate each other's work, without personal "attacks" or "game-playing" (e.g., "I'll say something good about yours if you say something good about mine...");
- Teaching students to express their concerns in the "How to...?" question format, to look for positives and potentials, and to approach new possibilities in a fair-minded but rigorous way;
- To evaluate critically the wild and crazy ideas that are often met initially with disdain, dismissal, or sarcasm.

One class used the A-Lo-U tool to analyze and review their work on small group classroom research projects, and to give oral feedback to each other as they presented their reports on European countries they had been studying. Each group member prepared a written A-Lo-U summary sheet regarding his or her group's work on the project. The group members then discussed their individual reports, prepared an overall group A-Lo-U, and included it with the written report submitted to the teacher. When groups made oral presentations summarizing the main findings of their research on the country they chose to study, the teacher used the A-Lo-U tool to organize feedback and discussion of each group's report. The groups were then given time to consider the Limitations (and ways to overcome them) that had been identified by the group before submitting their final projects.

Tips and Variations

General Tips and Suggestions. These suggestions may help you to use the A-Lo-U tool successfully.

1. Encourage the use of "headlining" to express A's, L's, o's and U's. That is, encourage group members to express their thoughts concisely, without extended explanations, elaborations, or descriptions.
2. Be certain to begin with the A's (Advantages) to set a positive tone for applying the tool. This avoids starting the session by "attacking" or "pouncing on" the option(s) being reviewed. Early negativism often leads to defensiveness, arguments, or even hostility within a group.
3. Insure that the limitations are phrased in the "How to..." question format. This format is a natural way to start people thinking about ways to overcome the limitations, rather than using them as "idea killers." This format, combined with deliberate attention to ways to overcome the limitations, distinguishes this tool in significant ways from informal efforts to list the "pluses and minuses, pros and cons, or strengths and weaknesses" of ideas.
4. Monitor the ideas that are proposed when listing Unique Features. This part of the tool is designed to stimulate the group to look at novelty, to explore why an option is appealing or intriguing, and to look ahead toward future possibilities.
5. It may be useful to note that, even though the group will be generating a number of responses during several of the A-Lo-U steps, the overall purpose and use of the tool is to help focus your thinking, to analyze, refine, and develop an option, rather than to generate new possibilities. Therefore, the tool is a *focusing* tool.

Variations. The ALoU tool can easily be modified in a variety of ways.

1. When you want to change the pace of activity within a group, or to provide time for quiet reflection, try using the A-Lo-U tool with Post-ItTM notes.
2. You can discuss and establish criteria for evaluating the options before using this tool. Consider the criteria explicitly when listing the A's, L's, o's, and U's.
3. Use the ALoU tool orally as a group debriefing or critiquing tool, rather than writing down all the responses.
4. Consider setting a time quota (e.g., 3-5 minutes each for the A, L, and U, followed by 8-10 minutes for considering ways to overcome key limitations), or a quota of As and Ls for each person (e.g., "Each person must list at least one A for any L they want to express"). It is usually best to treat these as informal quotas or guidelines, not as rigid rules or prescriptions for the group.

Using the ALoU Tool to Focus Options

List the option(s) to be examined using the ALoU tool:

Advantages	Limitations ("How might..." or "How to...")	Unique Features

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Important Reminders For Using All Focusing Tools!

When using any of the tools for focusing options, keep these suggestions in mind:

- Review the basic guidelines for focusing options (use affirmative judgment, be deliberate, consider novelty, and stay on course), and, if possible, display them on a poster or chart to help the group remember them.
- Determine your purpose or goal and state it clearly and concisely (do you need to analyze, refine or develop, organize or compress, prioritize, or choose among the options?).
- Given your purposes or goals for focusing, select and use the tool(s) that will best help you accomplish them.
- Be aware of your thinking and progress while you are applying the tool, and be prepared to modify what you are doing as you proceed.
- Always allow time to debrief your use of process and your progress on the task.
- After using any tool, think deliberately about what steps you will take next and what other tool(s) you may need to use.

Steps for Using this Tool

1. State the option(s) to be examined.
2. Write this information succinctly on a flipchart.
3. List the *Advantages* of the options. You might ask, "What is appealing about this option? What's good or positive about it?"
4. List the *Limitations* of the option. State these as questions, in "How to..." form (e.g., "How to deal with the size?" instead of "It's too big").
5. List the option's *Unique Features*. You might ask such questions as, "What might this option lead to? What is truly unique about this possibility? Why does this option stand out? What's special about it?"
6. Revisit the Limitations, identify those of significance or particular concern, and explore several possibilities for *overcoming* them.
7. Review all the lists to determine whether the option seems to be workable or worth developing and moving towards implementation.
8. Decide what actions or steps to take next.

DIRECTIONS FOR ALU

When converging on many options, it is often the case that options which represent high novelty are overlooked or disregarded. ALU is a technique which provides a structured approach for productively managing the analysis and development of novelty. It is a technique which most clearly utilizes the guidelines for analyzing, developing and refining options:

1. Consider the Advantages, Strengths or Strong Points

ALU utilizes the affirmative judgment principle by examining the **Advantages**, strong points, plusses or strengths on an option first. The examination of advantages encourages active involvement in the analysis of the option and assists in avoiding the reflexive "no" response to novelty. In order to identify the strengths of the option, it must truly be accepted for consideration. Be careful to avoid trivial plusses or disguised weaknesses (strengths that are really weaknesses). It is important that the advantages be clearly legitimate. You may need to stretch to find them. That's exactly why this exercise comes first.

2. Identify Limitations or Areas for Improvement

Few options are perfect. ALU deliberately considers the **Limitations**, weak points or challenges associated with an option. However, when considering the limitations, ALU avoids the 'dump' of negatives by asking for limitations to be formed as questions beginning with How to...? or How might...? By turning limitations into questions (problem statements), you are encouraging the development of the option by overcoming weakness through idea generation.

3. Identify Unique Connections

ALU consciously considers the new or unusual elements of options by identifying **Unique Connections**. This deliberate consideration of novelty acts as a 'safety net' for the development and analysis of novelty. It deliberately asks the question, "What does this option have that no other option has?" "What are some of the unique qualities or aspects to this option?" This preserves the novelty and can help focus attention on retaining those novel aspects of the option that are useful and valuable.

4. Overcome Limitations

An important application of the ALU technique is to be certain to identify the limitations that are most important to overcome. Once identified, time and energy should be focused on actually developing ways to strengthen and overcome this limitation. In this way, the ALU technique leverages the analysis and increases the likelihood of a novel and useful outcome.

Note: High quality analysis takes time and energy! ALU is effectively applied when one (or a few) options need to be considered and developed. It might be too time-consuming to conduct an ALU on 300 options.

controversy associated with making decisions in a group setting. Put your specific plan for decision making out in the open. This can help avoid “hidden agendas” or decision-making criteria that are not common or shared among a group.

Consider Novelty. We frequently see individuals and groups spend the necessary time and energy generating many unusual options. However, when it becomes time to converge, they simply skip over options that are highly novel and choose something that is less threatening or more closely associated with their original line of thinking. As a result, these people often learn the divergent thinking is meaningless or unimportant. Considering novelty is a guideline designed to ensure that the novelty or newness generated during divergent thinking is nurtured and developed during convergence.

Staying on Course. This guideline emphasizes the importance of remembering the goal or original purpose for converging on the options. Like any navigator, you need to keep your eyes on you destination, making decisions and correcting your course as you travel. Particularly, after deliberate divergent-thinking effort, the excitement and enthusiasm you have experienced can lead you to lose sight of your initial purpose. If all your options are fascinating, your focus or vision for what you want to have happen will be your most important “guidepost” for selecting and developing options.

The convergent-thinking tools used within the CPS framework follow these guidelines. The CPS tool that is most closely associated with the guidelines for convergence is called *Advantages, Limitations and Unique Qualities*.

Advantage, Limitations and Unique Qualities (ALU)

When converging on many options, it is often the case that options which represent high novelty are overlooked, disregarded, or even openly criticized or attacked. ALU (Isaksen & Treffinger, 1985) is a technique

ALU TECHNIQUE Worksheet	
Advantages	Identify the strong points, plusses and positive aspects of the new idea. • • • • •
Limitations	What are the concerns or weak points in the new idea (How to...)? Be sure to generate ideas to overcome the strongest limitations to further develop your solution. • • • • •
Unique Qualities	Identify the new or unusual elements (or possible outcomes) of the idea. Focus on the novel aspects of the option (What does this idea have that no other idea has?). • • • • •
Adapted from Isaksen & Treffinger (1985). Creative Problem Solving: The Basic Course	

Figure 2.8. The ALU technique is one convergent-thinking tool.

which provides a structured approach for productively managing the analysis and development of novelty while avoiding the more common idea “slaughtering” which occurs when novelty is shared. It is a technique which most clearly utilizes the guidelines for analyzing, developing and refining options:

1. Consider the Advantages, Strengths or Strong Points. ALU utilizes the affirmative judgment principle by examining the advantages, strong points, plusses or strengths of an option first. The examination of advantages encourages active involvement in the analysis of the option and

assists in avoiding the reflexive “no” response to novelty. In order to identify the strengths of the option, it must temporarily but truly be accepted for consideration. Be careful to avoid trivial plusses or disguised weaknesses (strengths that are really weaknesses). It is important that the advantages be clearly legitimate. You may need to stretch to find them. That’s exactly why this part of the exercise comes first!

2. Identify Limitations or Areas for Improvement. Few options are perfect. ALU deliberately considers the limitations, weak points or challenges associated with an option. However, when considering the limitations, ALU avoids the ‘dump’ of negatives by asking for limitations to be formed as questions beginning with How to...? or How might...? By turning limitations into questions (problem statements), you are encouraging the development of the option by overcoming weakness through idea generation.

3. Identify Unique Qualities. ALU consciously considers the new or unusual elements of options by identifying unique qualities of the option(s). This deliberate consideration of novelty acts as a 'safety net' for the development and analysis of novelty. It deliberately asks the question, "What does this option have that no other option has?" "What are some of the unique qualities or aspects to this option?" This preserves the novelty and can help focus attention on retaining those novel aspects of the option that are useful and valuable.

4. Overcome Limitations. An important application of the ALU technique is to be certain to identify the limitations that are most important to overcome. Once identified, time and energy should be focused on actually developing ways to strengthen and overcome these limitations. In this way, the ALU technique leverages the analysis and increases the likelihood of a novel and useful outcome.

Brainstorming and ALU represent two basic tools for divergence and convergence. However, there are dozens of tools and techniques, particularly for divergent thinking, that can be used to help you generate and analyze options. Table 2.2 identifies the basic CPS tools we will examine in this book.

The Dynamic Nature of CPS

Our current componential view of the CPS framework emerged through many years of research, development, and experience in many programs and settings. The way CPS has been described has frequently changed over the past 40 years. The purpose of this section is to provide you some background information regarding the our current approach and to place CPS into a historical context.

Alex Osborn was a founding partner of the Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn advertising agency and founder of the Creative Education Foundation. In his book, *Applied Imagination* (1953), he described a seven-

Advantages, Limitations & Unique Connections (ALU)

Advantages

- What are the strengths or advantages of the solutions?
- What are the strong points of the solutions?
- How do the solutions meet the criteria?
- What strengths do you see in the solutions?
- Why do the solutions meet the criteria?
- What do you like about the solutions?

Limitations

Be sure to phrase the limitations as problem statements beginning with How to...? or How might...?

- Why are the solutions inappropriate?
- What are the shortcomings or limitations to the solutions?
- What are the weak points of the solutions?
- Where do the solutions fall short of the criteria?

Overcome Limitations

Once the limitations are identified, it is important to make sure the client(s) have the opportunity to overcome the limitations or weak points of the solutions. The following questions can be used to facilitate that challenge.

- How might the solutions be strengthened?
- How might the limitations be overcome?
- What ideas can you think of for overcoming the limitations?

Unique Connections

The purpose of these questions is to make sure that the client(s) "nails down" the novel or unique elements of the solutions in order to deliberately and explicitly consider this newness for implementation.

- What solutions meet unique aspects of the criteria?
- What are the unique connections found in the solutions?
- What do these solutions have that no other solutions have?
- What is unique about these solutions?
- What is novel about these solutions?
- Why are these solutions different?
- What speculations on future gains might the solution(s) suggest?

Solution-Finding Matrix

- Which solutions meet most of the criteria? Why?
- Where are the highest numbers? Why are they high?
- Where are the lowest numbers? Why are they low?
- Which solutions need to be further developed to better meet criteria? Why?
- How might the low numbers be made high?
- What can you do to strengthen or raise the low numbers?

Acceptance - Finding (Divergent)

When considering implementation of new ideas, it is helpful to examine the social context within which the solutions are to be implemented. The following questions can be used to assist client(s) in developing potential sources of assistance and resistance to the implementation of the proposed solutions.

Affirmative Judgment for Evaluating Performance

Gerard J. Puccio and K. Brian Dorval
 Center for Studies in Creativity
 Buffalo State University College

When providing feedback, many teachers, coaches, or supervisors tend to focus on the shortcomings or negative aspects of someone's performance, telling people what is wrong with their work. Many writers and researchers have demonstrated, however, that negative feedback can have a detrimental impact upon the individual. Dunkin and Biddle (1974), for example, describe Skinner's emphasis on positive reinforcement as a more humane, moral, and generally more effective method than negative feedback. The purpose of this article is to illustrate some benefits of an alternative approach to student evaluation, called **affirmative judgment**.

An affirmative judgment technique which has broad applications in the classroom is *Advantages, Limitations, and Unique connections*, or "ALU" (Isaksen & Treffinger, 1985). When using this technique for evaluation, there are three steps to follow. First, examine the advantages or positive aspects of the student's work or performance. Next, identify the limitations or areas of concern. These are phrased as open-ended questions which begin with an invitational stem, such as "How to..." or "How might...", to challenge students to discover strategies for overcoming the limitations. Finally, identify the unique connections or hidden potentials found within the performance. These may be identified by considering possibilities which might develop from the present activity.

Example: Using ALU in Evaluating Students' Papers

In the classroom, ALU can be used to provide qualitative feedback about many student activities. These might include, for example, papers, projects, and presentations. Table One illustrates an ALU used to evaluate a draft of a student's paper from one of the writer's classes in Creative Studies. You can easily see that one of the benefits of using ALU is that it communicates the positive aspects of the student's work, while also identifying, in a nondemeaning manner, the areas that need improvement. Thus, the potential outcomes of using this technique are to enhance students' confidence in their abilities while also

Table One:
Evaluation of Student Paper Using ALU

Advantages	Limitations	Unique Connections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well written • Excellent connections between the creative process and woodworking • Well-researched topic • Introduction sets up the rest of the paper effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to reference all sources properly? • How to expand the discussion of the benefits of applying the creative process to the wood-working area? • How to include more examples to illustrate the major points of your paper? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be able to apply what you have learned in writing this paper to your woodworking skills. • Others who are interested in woodworking may find these ideas new and useful.

recognizing areas for growth. This encourages students to build upon or improve their own present level of performance. In fact, the student who received the evaluation in the example came into the meeting with little confidence in the work he had begun, but left with much greater confidence and enthusiasm for completing the assignment.

Example: ALU Applied To Performance Feedback

While ALU can be used in evaluating students' classroom work, it is not limited to that context. It can also be a valuable technique to use in a variety of situations involving performance outside the classroom. For example, it might be used successfully by teachers who are coaching or supervising extra-curricular activities such as sports, clubs, student government, or other school organizations.

Improving athletes' performance in a sports setting can provide a useful example. One training model used to develop young players in interscholastic tennis competition involves four stages: *Preparation*, *Performance*, *Post-Activity Analysis*, and *Implementation*. The first stage, *Preparation*, involves both mental and physical practice. The second stage, *Performance*, entails involvement in the athletic event. In the third stage, *Post-Activity Analysis*, the athlete's performance is reviewed and analyzed using the ALU technique. The fourth stage, *Implementation*, occurs after the ALU has been applied to the athlete's experience.

A scenario to demonstrate ALU in the third stage of this model asks you to imagine that you are a tennis coach for a high school, and your number three player has just completed his (or her) match. As the player eventually approaches you, you notice that he appears to be dissatisfied with his performance. As a coach, you believe it is important to discuss your players' matches with them, so they might learn from their experience. Your first question should focus on getting information about the positive aspects (Advantages) of the match. Use a statement such as, "Tell me what you liked about the way you played today," can be used to force the player to consider some positive aspects of the game or match. After the player has shared some positive aspects, share what you observed to be the positive points of his or her performance. After discussing the Advantages, or positive points, turn your focus to those elements of the match that the player could "change" or "do differently" (Limitations) in the future. Unique connections might involve looking for things that hadn't been noticed before, or finding ways to learn from the opponent's actions or strategies. Using the ALU once again enables you and the athlete to work in collaboration to seek ways to improve, while maintaining self-esteem.

In this article, we have discussed some of the benefits of applying ALU as a technique for evaluating performance, both in and out of the classroom. Both the evaluator and the person being evaluated can profit from interactions in which affirmative judgment is practiced by considering advantages, limitations, and unique connections.

References

- Dunkin, M. J. & Biddle, B. J. (1974). *The study of teaching*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Isaksen, S. G. & Treffinger, D. J. (1985). *Creative problem solving: the Basic course*. Buffalo, NY: Bearly Limited.



Purpose

ALUo (Advantages, Limitations, Unique qualities and Overcoming limitations) is a technique for convergent thinking that helps analyze, develop and strengthen promising options. Use this tool when:

- A small number of options needs to be analyzed, developed, or strengthened.
- A novel option needs to be considered in an affirmative manner.

Description

ALUo provides a structured approach to identifying the Advantages (Strengths), Limitations (weaknesses) and Unique Qualities (novel or useful elements) of an option. It manages the analysis and development of novelty while avoiding the more common “idea slaughtering” which occurs when novelty is shared. The technique most directly utilizes the guidelines for analyzing, developing and refining options. In addition to analyzing, the tool helps strengthen the option by generating ways to overcome important limitations.

History

The concept of listing pluses and minuses can be traced back to Aristotle. The ALUo stems from the PPC (Plusses, Potentials & Concerns), developed by Multiple Resource Associates (Roger L. Firestien, Diane L. Foucar-Szocki & William J. Shephard). Similar tools were developed by E. deBono : Plusses, Minuses & Interests, and Synectics: Itemized response. Isaksen & Treffinger (1985) developed the ALU, with a more direct focus on the guidelines for convergent thinking. The ‘negative’ is captured between two ‘positives’ to ensure affirmative judgment and the listing of Unique qualities reinforces the Consider Novelty guideline.

Treffinger, D. J., Isaksen, S. G. & Firestien, R. L. (1982). *Handbook of creative learning*. Williamsville, NY: Center for Creative Learning.

Isaksen, S. G. & Treffinger, D. J. (1985). *CPS, The basic course*. Buffalo, NY: Bearly Ltd.

Isaksen, S. G., Dorval, K. B. & Treffinger, D. J. (1994). *Creative approaches to problem solving*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Getting Ready

- Prepare the following materials: Poster of the guidelines for convergent thinking.
- Prepare with the client a description of the option and some key background information.

General Suggestions

- Use Brainstorming with Post-its™ (see Tool Booklet) within each step of the ALUo.
- Be ready to review and reinforce the guidelines for convergent thinking.
- Be ready to use stimulating divergent thinking tools, like Force Fit or Scamper, within the steps of the ALUo.
- Be aware that the client can easily be overwhelmed with limitations. If this is the case, have the client generate limitations alone.
- Put headings on top of the flip-charts.
- Avoid off-line conversation while client is selecting options or working on limitations.
- The purpose of the “Unique qualities” is to identify novel or useful qualities. It is not always necessary to generate many unique qualities.
- Use check-ins with the client as a transition to the next step.

Steps for ALUo

1) Review the guidelines for convergent thinking:

Affirmative judgment
Be deliberate
Consider novelty
Stay on course

2) State and clarify the option

- Write down the option on flip-chart and place it on a location clearly visible for the group members.
- Have client share the option and key-information.

3) Generate Advantages

- Use guidelines for divergent thinking to have the client and group members generate advantages. Use questions like: "What do you like about this option?"
- Check-in with client.

4) Generate Limitations

- Mention that limitations should be phrased using invitational stems, like: "How to...", "How might...", or "In what ways might..."
- Have the client, if desired with the other group members, generate limitations.
- Check-in with client.

5) Generate Unique Qualities

- Have clients and group members generate Unique Qualities. Use questions like: "What does this option have that no other option has?"
- Check-in with client.

6) Have the client identify key limitations

- Use convergent tools like Hits or Highlighting (see Tool Booklets) to identify the most important limitation(s).

7) Generate Ways to Overcome Concerns

- Make sure the group members understand the limitation.
- Have the group generate ways to overcome the limitation.
- Have the client select the next limitation to overcome, if necessary.

8) Check-in with client

- Evaluate the outcomes of the ALUo by asking the client questions like:

"Did this give you what you needed to strengthen your option?"

"Do you have enough to understand this option?"