



## 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 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 Syntectics 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., Focar-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.

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## Limitations

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

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## 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?).

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## overcome limitations

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