Structuring the dialogue

1. Establish a common goal (if the task doesn’t specify)

* Let’s first establish the aim of our exhibition/presentation/flyer
* So we agree that the aim of the exhibition/presentation is to ….
  + motivate young people to reduce their carbon footprint.
  + increase awareness of the dangers of drugs and alcohol.
  + win over more people to support our campaign.

2. Brainstorm ideas:

* One option would be to ….
* An alternative approach could include …
* One popular method in this field is to ….

3. Challenge those ideas by asking questions like a scientist:

* How might that work in practice?
* How would this help us achieve our goals?
* Can you walk me through how you came to that conclusion?

4. Backing off and taking a new approach:

* I’m not sure we can settle this one now. Let’s move on and come back to it later.
* We need more data to determine whether this can work. Let’s put a pin in it and discuss another option.
* Let me think about that and get back to you. In the mean time do you have any other ideas?

5. Coming to a consensus:

The speaking exam is supposed to be like an authentic situation so there should not be a requirement to come to a final consensus on all issues within the time limit. The students can refer to future discussions to settle open questions. They should come to some conclusion at the end of the exam but they needn’t settle everything. It is realistic and authentic to say, for example:

“So we agree on the topic we want to cover and on the problems with these photos. Next we need to find a different photo which we both like.”

They could even mention a fictional future meeting, tomorrow or next week by which time a certain task will have been completed.

“Let’s go and look for alternative photos, bring them to the meeting tomorrow and see if we can agree on one to use.”