Define the Box

Before a rule can be coded, someone has to define the word behind it. Groups write a precise definition of 'late,' 'trustworthy,' or 'fair' — then discover the disagreement was there before any code existed.

AGE BAND	DURATION	GROUP SIZE	CONCEPT
Ages 9–13	20 minutes	Small groups	Language

Learning objective

Students can **explain why turning a fuzzy, everyday word into a precise rule always requires a judgment call, made by someone, that reasonable people can disagree with.**

What you need

- Word cards: late, trustworthy, cheating, fair, on-topic
- Paper and pencils
- 3 borderline example cases per word, prepared in advance

Why this works

A system doesn't get to be uncertain about what "late" means — it needs one exact rule to check against, every time. Long before any of that gets written as code, a person has to make the fuzzy word precise, and that step is where a value judgment quietly gets buried. This activity makes students do that step themselves, by hand, so the judgment call is visible instead of hidden inside a system.

How it works

1. Each group privately writes a definition for their assigned word — precise enough that someone else could apply it without asking a follow-up question.
2. Groups swap definitions and apply another group's definition to three prepared borderline cases.
3. Compare where the definition produced a surprising or disputed call on a case that felt genuinely unclear.
4. Discuss how a real system — a bus app, a grading tool, a content filter — has to make this same call somewhere, usually without telling anyone it happened.

Talk about it

- Was your definition too strict, too loose, or about right — and how would you actually know?
- Whose job should it be to write a definition like this in real life — and should it be one person's call?
- Can a definition be updated after it's already in use? What happens to the decisions that were already made under the old one?