

## Facilitating Discussion

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Strategic choices can help ensure that your students will be actively engaged in class discussions. Through a variety of activities and classroom choices, you can help your students get the most out of class discussions. Remember that discussion can take multiple forms in the classroom. Below, I have provided a variety of activities and class adjustments along with their benefits regarding classroom discussion barriers.

**Discussion Questions:** Before class, ask students to prepare a question about the readings or other material in the course and write it out on an index card. Questions should encourage critical thinking and deep reading; avoid yes/no varieties. During class, compile the index cards and give one to each student. Pair students and ask one person to start by being the interviewer. The interviewer asks a question and takes notes on the answers given by the other student. Then they switch roles and repeat the process. Any questions that could not be answered are reported to the larger class and students are asked to write for 1-2 minutes on the answers to the tough questions. Alternatively, compile the index cards and pull two or three at the beginning of class. Call on students randomly to answer the questions on the card. If they don't know the answer, ask them to facilitate a short discussion with the class to get the answer.

- Encourages quiet students to be involved; provides thinking time to all students; allows all students to be involved

**Circling Up:** Arrange desks or groups of desks into a circle for discussion. If there are multiple topics to be discussed, arrange desks into groups and the topic (or students) can rotate through the groups

- Encourages face to face interaction among students so they talk to each other, not to the teacher

**Think-Pair-Share:** Before beginning a class discussion, ask students to consider a prompt. Then, have students discuss their responses with a partner before asking the pairs to report back to the larger class

- Allows all students to actively consider the topic; takes pressure off of quiet students by not asking them to respond to the larger group

**Lenses:** Assign students "lenses" through which they must interpret course material. Lenses are usually broadly interpretive perspectives that structure the student's attention and cause salient information to come to the foreground. A reading could be seen, for example, through an environmental lens or a political lens. A presentation in criminal justice, engineering design, or textile marketing could be seen through the lens of gender or age. Follow-up can compare interpretations either in informal writing, online, or during an in-class discussion.

- Encourages multiple perspectives; engages students with class reading material

**Warm Calling:** Provide either the full class or a subset of students warning about a question you will ask them to answer. Let students have time to think through a response while other discussion occurs.

- Reduces anxiety of being called on; provides thinking time

**Provided Questions:** Provide a list of possible discussion questions to students before class time (e.g., on Moodle). Encourage students to read the questions and be prepared to discuss in class

- Provides thinking time; allows deeper discussion
- Provides a focused direction for discussion; taps into different learning styles

**Pluses and Minuses:** During a discussion, encourage students to provide feedback to each other. For example, after a student provides a possible solution to a problem, ask the class for one positive and one negative aspect of that suggestion.

- Encourages even quiet students to respond in a less threatening situation

#### Selected References on Discussion and Participation

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