ENCOURAGING DISCUSSION & PARTICIPATION

In this packet you will find a number of suggestions for encouraging student participation, including:

- Class Discussion Guidelines
- Classroom Structures Which Encourage Student Participation
- See also our “Teaching Large Classes Resources” & “Working Effectively with Small Groups” Packets
SAMPLE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES


Below is a sample of discussion guidelines that you might want to adapt for your courses. Keep in mind that you needn’t include everything listed below; conversely, you and the students can collectively add to the list.

CLASS DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

Discussion is one of the best ways to better understand the course material. In addition, you’ll enhance skills that can help you in your future professions: public speaking, inter-personal skills, and the willingness to recognize that differing viewpoints are valuable and normal, and are part of a democratic decision-making process.

To help make class discussion effective and open so that everyone feels comfortable participating, we will use the following guidelines:

1. The Golden Rule applies to class discussions, e-mails, and other communications between class members and instructors.
2. Everyone is expected to share in class discussions.
3. One speaker at a time should have the floor.
4. Give a speaker your full attention.
5. When you’re ready to add something to a discussion, raise your hand so that the current speaker has time to finish what s/he is saying. The facilitator will then call on you.
6. As part of your contribution, be prepared to explain how your point is relevant to the topic at hand. Sometimes the connections aren’t always clear to the listeners even if they are to the speaker.
7. Approach differing points of view as a means to maximizing your learning. It’s all right to disagree. Always critique the ideas or positions, not the person expressing them.
8. Be open to change. This doesn’t mean that you have to change—just be open to the possibility.
10. Keep confidentiality. What is said in the room should stay in the room.

As a class, what other 3-5 guidelines do you feel should be added to the list?

What signals or catch phrases should we use to keep discussion focused and open? For example, if we need to move on to another speaker, let’s agree to say, “What can someone else add?” or the facilitator can discretely tap his or her watch.
Classroom Structures Which Encourage Student Participation
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“MAGIC” 3x5 CARDS
- **Definition:** Opportunity to receive anonymous feedback/input & promote discussion.
- **When used:** Can be used in any size class for any topic.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Either require students to purchase a packet of multi-colored index cards or provide them. Ask a question and give students 1-3 minutes to write a response. Collect the cards, shuffle them, and then redistribute to the students. (Tell students that if they receive their own card they don’t have to let on.) Call on students to read the response on their card.
- **Advantage:** Students who are reading the cards don’t have to take responsibility for what’s on them. They are more likely to discuss the issues when the responses are anonymous. Since the cards are small, responses must be brief. Cards can also be collected at the end of class for further instructor review.
- **Limitation:** Students forget to bring the cards. In large classes, collection & redistribution of cards is a little harder, but not impossible.
- **Adaptation for Large Classes:** Ask all students to respond to the question on the cards, but randomly select a section from which to collect the cards. Another adaptation is to ask students to hand their cards to the person behind them, then that person hands the card to the person on their left, then to the person behind them again. Students find this fun, it energizes the class, and there’s still anonymity for the respondents.

LOW-TECH POLLING
- **Definition:** Technique for polling a class when electronic means are not available.
- **When used:** Can be used in any size class for any topic.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Either require students to purchase a packet of multi-colored cards or provide them. Put a question up on the board or on a Power Point slide, with four possible responses. Each of the responses should represent one of the colors of the index cards in the students’ packets. Give them a few seconds to select what they think is the answer, then on the count of 3, ask students to raise their cards.
- **Advantage:** The instructor gets a quick visual of what color is most or least prominent. Both the instructor and the students can see whether they are “getting it.”
- **Limitation:** Students forget to bring the cards. Not everyone will vote, but most do. You cannot see the more subtle variations in voting.

GROUP DISCUSSION
- **Definition:** Opportunity for pooling of ideas, experience, and knowledge.
- **When used:** For majority of meetings, because of adaptability to greater group participation.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Preplanning to develop discussion outline. Leader encourages every member to participate by guiding the discussion.
- **Limitation:** Practical with not more than 20 persons. Becomes disorganized without careful planning of material to be covered.
BUZZ GROUPS
- **Definition:** Allows for total participation by group members through small clusters of participants, followed by discussion of the entire group.
- **When used:** As a technique to get participation from every individual in the group.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Prepare one or two questions on the subject to give to each group. Divide the members into small clusters of four to six. A leader is chosen to record and report pertinent ideas discussed.
- **Limitation:** Thought must be given as to the purpose and organization of groups.

PANEL DISCUSSION
- **Definition:** A discussion in a conversational form among a selected group of persons with a leader, in front of an audience that joins in later.
- **When used:** As a technique to stimulate interest and thinking, and to provoke better discussion.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** The leader plans with the four to eight members of the panel. The panel discusses informally without any set speeches. The leader then opens the discussion to the entire group and summarizes.
- **Limitation:** Can get off beam; personality of speakers may overshadow content; vocal speaker can monopolize program.

SYMPOSIUM DISCUSSION
- **Definition:** A discussion in which the topic is broken into its various phases; each part is presented by an expert or person well-informed on that particular phase, in a brief, concise speech.
- **When used:** When specific information is desired.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Leader meets with the three or four members of the symposium and plans outline. Participants are introduced and reports are given, group directs questions to proper symposium members, leader summarizes.
- **Limitation:** Can get off beam; personality of speakers may overshadow content; vocal speaker can monopolize program.

DEBATE DISCUSSION
- **Definition:** A pro-and-con discussion of a controversial issue. Objective is to convince the audience rather than display skill in attacking the opponent.
- **When used:** In discussing a controversial issue on which there are fairly definite opinions in the group on both sides, to bring these differences out into the open in a friendly manner.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Divide the group into sides of pro and con. Each speaker should be limited to a predetermined time, followed by a rebuttal if desired.
- **Limitation:** Members are often not objective toward the subject.
EXPERIENCE DISCUSSION
- **Definition:** A small or large group discussion following a report on the main point of a book, article, movie, or life experience.
- **When used:** To present a new point of view or to present issues that will stimulate thought and discussion.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Plan with others participating on how review is to be presented. Then have an open discussion on pertinent issues and points of view as experienced.
- **Limitation:** Ability of participating members to relate to others and motivate thinking.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLE
- **Definition:** A small circle of group members form within a larger circle. The inner circle discusses a topic while the role of the outside circle is to listen. The discussion is then reversed.
- **When used:** As a technique to stimulate interest and to provoke good discussion. This is especially good to get more response from a group that is slow in participating.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Leader and planning group work out questions that will be discussed by the concentric circle and then by the larger circle. Debriefing is very important at the end of the activity. Begin with the inner circle, move to the outside observers and add any comments you have.
- **Limitation:** Much thought and preparation must be given to the questions for discussion. Room and movable chairs needed.

REACTION SHEET
- **Definition:** A method of reacting to ideas in the following ways: ideas that you question, ideas that are new to you, ideas that really "hit home."
- **When used:** As a way to get the group to react. Combine this with other methods.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Prepare topic and reaction sheets. Explain and distribute reaction sheets with the instructions to write as they listen, watch, or read. Follow with group discussion.
- **Limitation:** Topic should be somewhat controversial.

PHILLIPS 66
- **Definition:** This is a spontaneous method where six people view their opinions on a topic for six minutes.
- **When used:** To add spice and variety to methods of presentations.
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Define topic of presentation. Count off six people and allow six minutes for discussion. Allow for group discussion or reassignment of six people.
- **Limitation:** Must be used somewhat flexibly.
REVERSE THINKING  
- **Definition:** Expressions of thought by thinking in reverse.  
- **When used:** To gain an insight into others' feelings and to see another point of view.  
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Prepare topic. Explain to group the theory of reverse thinking. Combine with other methods. Debrief the activity and give students an opportunity to share significant learning.  
- **Limitation:** A challenge to group members.

ROLE-PLAYING  
- **Definition:** The spontaneous acting out of a situation or an incident by selected members of the group.  
- **When used:** As the basis of developing clearer insights into the feelings of people and the forces in a situation which facilitate or block good human relations.  
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Choose an appropriate situation or problem. Have the group define the roles and general characteristics to be represented by each player. Enact the scene. Observe and discuss such things as specific behavior, underlying forces, or emotional reactions. Debrief students.  
- **Limitation:** Group leader must be skilled so that actors will play their parts seriously, without self-consciousness.

PICTURE MAKING  
- **Definition:** A way of bringing out ideas or principles on a topic by means of simple illustrations made by group members on the blackboard or large chart paper.  
- **When used:** As a technique to stimulate interest, thinking, and participation.  
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Leader and members of planning group select general principles or questions on the topic which would be suitable to illustrate. Leader divides the group into four or five subgroups. Each subgroup is given a statement or problem to illustrate. After completing the picture making, each group shows and explains the picture. This is followed by discussion.  
- **Limitation:** Instruction must be clear as to the value of picture making and adequate materials must be supplied.

BRAINSTORMING  
- **Definition:** Technique in creative thinking in which group members storm a problem with their brains [by generating as much information about a topic as possible. All pertinent information, cognitive and affective, is initially considered. This technique often leads to creative approaches.]  
- **When used:** To get new ideas and release individual potentialities in thinking up ideas.  
- **Preparation/Procedure:** Leader and members of planning group select suitable problems or questions on the topic selected by the entire group. The leader explains to the group the meaning of brainstorming and the following rules:  
  - Judicial (critical) judgments ruled out. Criticism to be applied later.  
  - The more ideas, the better chance of good ones. Freewheeling welcomed.  
  - The wilder the idea the better; it's easier to tame them down than to pump them up.
• Hitchhiking is legitimate. If you can improve on someone else's ideas, so much the better.

Leader rings bell when one of the above ideas is violated.

Recorder lists the ideas.

Follow-up: Type list and bring to next meeting to give to members.

  o **Limitation:** To be utilized as only a part of the class.