**Class Discussion**

\*Principles of Class Discussion

Prepare for discussions

Challenge ideas, not people

Use intelligent give and take

Stick to the subject

Seek the best conclusions

Give encouragement

Listen to everyone’s ideas

Restate speakers’ points

Seek information before you draw conclusions

Allow yourself to change your mind

At the end, summarize

\*Prepare For Discussion

Classroom climate

Encourage students to know one another’s names

 More likely to participate

 Introduce self or other student

 Learn names in groups

 Use cards taped to desks

Arrange seating to promote discussion

 Semi circles

 Conference tables

 Groups

Allow warm-up time

 Few minutes of conversation

Make sure each student has an opportunity to talk in every class

 Even if in groups

 Esp. in first weeks

 The longer they wait, the less likely they will participate

 Use tickets or poker chips

 Pay special attention to reluctant students

 Have questions especially for them

Limit your own comments

Research has shown that even when instructors think we are doing discussion, we dominate the conversation.

One study showed 86% of class time

Be careful not to sound intimidating or dismissive. Use humor carefully

Handling dominating students: Study: 4-5 students account for 75% of

 conversation.

 Say-“Someone besides X”

 Ask other students to respond to dominator

 Assign him/her a role-summarizer, devil’s advocate (ask for response)

 Talk to him/her after class. Tact

\*Discuss discussion:

Emphasize course goal of learning to communicate orally

Use student handouts

Let students arrive at principles-Good and bad discussions

Student handout has more details

Introduce concept of devil’s advocate

\*Explain ground rules:

Will you call on people?

Will discussion be graded? If so, how?

 Rubrics help

 Hard to grade objectively

 Poker chips-pass out 2-3. Take them when student responds

 Comment cards-Give them to students when they make really good

 comments

Do students have a right to “pass” a question?

Explain that, when you ask for clarification or expansion, you are not

 indicating that they are wrong

Explain that you may take notes in order to keep up with discussion

Tell students not to be too quick to regard what is said as a “right answer.” It may only be a preliminary discussion. They should listen for summative statements and conclusions.

\*Students Prepare For Discussions

Help students prepare for specific discussions:

Informal writing

Distribute 4-6 broad study questions

Ask students to find factual evidence in the text for specific concepts

Summarize author’s argument

Identify subtopics and design a question for each

Have students summarize their reaction to the reading

Have students make 1-2 complex “essay” questions for the reading

\*Instructors Prepare for Discussion

Prepare questions for class: Vary the levels and organize them logically.

**Write them down. Think about possible responses, right and wrong.**

Ask for basic facts and knowledge-Not many of these

 “What evidence supports this theory?”

Challenge assumptions, conclusions, and interpretations

 What else might this image mean?

Compare themes, ideas, or issues

 How is Christianity like Judaism? How is it different?

Diagnose motives or causes

 Why do you think he lied?

Ask for recommendations or conclusions

 What should the mayor have done in response to the sit-in?

Ask about relationships to other class issues

 How does this situation relate to the other situations we have

 talked about this semester?

Pose hypothetical situations

 Suppose Peter had been older? Would that have made a

 difference?

Ask for summaries or syntheses

 How would you design a ?

\*Phrasing the questions:

Keep questions clear and brief

Ask questions that lack a “right” answer

 Reasons why

 Controversy is good.

Avoid “yes” or “no” questions

 Not “Is radon considered a pollutant?” but “Why is radon considered

 a pollutant?”

Ask questions to see if students understand

 Often when you ask, “Any questions on today’s reading?” there’s no

 response.

 Why does this happen?

 Ask next class period.

Ask one question at a time.

 Be careful about re-phrasing. Make sure you’re asking the same

 question, not a different but related one.

Ask focused questions

 Not “What about the theory of relativity?” Or “What did you think

 about today’s reading?”

Avoid leading questions

 “Don’t you think that racism still exists?”

\*Conducting Discussions

Asking the questions:

After you ask, wait

 Most instructors only wait a couple of sec. before answer, different

 question, prompt. Studies show we don’t like silence.

15-30 sec. Get a drink of water or coffee.

Encourage student-to-student interaction

 That’s what conversations are all about

 Studies-students become more attentive if you ask them to respond to

 one another. Listen better.

 Could you relate this to what George said earlier?

 Harry, can you respond to William?

Draw out reluctant students

 Gently. Don’t make it an interrogation.

Use follow-up questions. Ask for

Specifics Clarifications

Consequences Examples

Definitions Explanations

\*Beginning the discussion:

Use any of the assigned preparation materials

Pose an opening question and allow a few minutes to write about it

Ask students to recall a memorable incident that relates to topic

Ask students to compile a list of key points

 On board

Pose a controversial question

 Divide into pros and cons

 Come up w/2-3 arguments to support position

 Or come up with the most important arguments of opposition

Divide students into groups and have each compose 3 true statements about a particular topic

\*Handling student responses:

Listen to the student

 Make sure you understand

Vary your reactions

Re-state

Ask for clarification or elaboration

Expand on comment

Acknowledge and ask for another viewpoint

Look interested but remain silent

Praise good answers

Tactfully correct wrong answers

 Say something positive about what’s right or insightful

 Point out aspects that need to be re-thought

 Provide hints, suggestions, or follow-up questions to help them

 correct themselves

 “Good-now let’s take it a step further.”

 “Keep going…”

 “Tell me more about .”

Encourage students to answer their own questions or give questions to class

\*Guiding Discussions

Take rough notes

Keep discussion focused

 Lists on board

 Periodic summary

Bring discussion back to key issues

Listen carefully

Clarify any confusion

 Let’s clear up some things before we go on.

Prevent heated arguments but don’t immediately shut off conflict

 “Let’s slow down a minute”

 “It’s not helpful to jump all over Albert.”

 “Let’s identify areas we agree on and those we disagree on”

 “Let’s move on.”

 “What would a devil’s advocate say?”

 “What might be a counter-position?”

Change task if it begins to break down

Bring closure to discussion

 Summarize

\*After the Discussion

May use it as a basis for writing assignments

Can reflect on discussion in wiki

Ask students to write about how their thinking changed and why as a result of discussion

Ask students to summarize main points and conclusions

 Talk about principles of discussion again.

Make your own informal evaluation