**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