Ten Tips When Facilitating Discussion

Class discussion plays a vital role in active learning. Hearing a wide variety of views challenges students’ thinking. Your role during a group discussion is to facilitate the flow of comments from students. Although it is not necessary to interject after each student speaks, periodically assisting the group with their contributions can be helpful. Here is a ten point facilitation menu to use as you lead group discussions.

1. **Paraphrase** what someone has said so that the student feels understood and the other students can hear a concise summary of what’s been said at greater length:

   *So, what you’re saying is that you have to be very careful about the words you use because a particular person might be offended by them.*

2. **Check** your understanding against the words of a student or ask a student to clarify what he or she is saying:

   *Are you saying that this political correctness has gone too far? I’m not sure that I understand exactly what you meant. Could you please run it by us again?*

3. **Compliment** an interesting or insightful comment:

   *That’s an interesting point. I’m glad that you brought that to our attention.*

4. **Elaborate** on a student’s contribution to the discussion with examples, or
suggest a new way to view the problem:

Your comments provide an interesting point from the minority perspective. We could also consider how the majority would view the same situation.

5. **Energize** a discussion by quickening the pace, using humor, or, if necessary, prodding the group for more contributions.

Oh my, we have lots of quiet people in this class! Here’s a challenge for you. For the next two minutes, let’s see how many words you can think of that are no longer politically acceptable.

6. **Disagree** (gently) with a student’s comments to stimulate further discussion.

I can see where you are coming from, but I’m not sure that what you are describing is always the case. Has anyone else had an experience that is different than Jim’s?

7. **Mediate** differences of opinion between students, and relieve any tensions that may be brewing.

I think that Susan and Mary are not really disagreeing with each other, but are just bringing out two different sides of this issue.

8. **Pull together** ideas, showing their relationship to each other.

As you can see from Dan’s and Jean’s comments, the words we use can offend people. Both of them have given us an example of how they feel excluded by gender-bound words.

9. **Change** the group process by altering the method for obtaining participation or moving the group to a stage of evaluating ideas that have been placed before the group.

   *Let’s break into small groups and see if you can come up with some criteria for establishing gender-sensitive word usage.*

10. **Summarize** (and record, if desired) the major views of the group.

   *I have noted three major ideas that have come from the group’s discussion as to when words are harmful: (1) They exclude some people. (2) They insult some people. (3) They are determined only by the majority culture.*