



Class Discussion Strategies

Whether you are in-person or online, discussions are a large part of many classes. Although every class will have its own conversational dynamics, there are strategies that students can apply in any class conversational setting before, during, and after a discussion takes place.

Before Discussion:

Do the assigned reading

- While you do not need to pore over every single word, understanding the key concepts and how to apply them will be critical.
- Do mark passages that you do not understand- asking clarifying questions about the reading is another great way to get involved in the discussion.
- Quickly review the readings before class and make sure you can summarize the key points- this is a good way to test if you are ready for discussion.
- If possible- chat with a classmate before class and ask them what they thought of the reading- starting up a conversation before class will allow you to be more comfortable with talking about the assigned material during class.

How to Prepare for a Discussion Setting

- If you are online, make sure you are in a comfortable and quiet setting. If you are in-person, think about what you need to be comfortable in the classroom. For example, wear a jacket if you know the classroom tends to run cold. If you get fidgety, bring a stress ball or a snack if you are allowed to eat in the classroom.
- Think about the phrasing you can use to respectfully disagree with someone. It is usually good discussion practice to frame your disagreement in a constructive and positive way. For example, to someone with whom you disagree, you might say: "I can see the merits of that idea and why it might be attractive. But the way I see it..."
- Finally, be confident in yourself. Being shy in discussions is normal,

During Discussion:

Be engaged and pay attention to others

- Be a good listener- tailor your comments around what your classmates are saying instead of having a pre-determined statement and saying it even if it is no longer relevant or appropriate to the discussion.
- Pay attention to nonverbal behaviors- looking up and nodding your head is a great way to show you are engaged. Looking down at a book or device can show the opposite.
- Think with others, do not speak at them- This might mean taking notes on what a classmate says. Writing down thoughts while someone is speaking can be challenging,

but with practice this may help you consolidate your own thoughts, as well as provide specific things that you can refer back to in your own comments.

- If you are confused, frame your confusion into a question. You do not have to understand the material perfectly to engage in the discussion, you just need to be engaged and show a genuine interest in learning the material.
- Remember that less is more- when asking a question or when you have something to say, be careful not to monopolize time.

How to Set Yourself Up for Successful Discussion

- If in-person, be selective about where you sit. Try to sit close to the professor where you can get their attention.
- If you are on zoom, take advantage of the chat function if it is enabled to state your questions and/or comments.

After Discussion:

- Take a few minutes after class to write down two or three main themes from the conversation. You might even practice speaking out loud some of the ideas you heard, as a way to engage in active learning. And as always, plan strategically about how you will review your course material for the next class discussion.

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The University of North Carolina, at C. H. (2021, February 16). Class discussion strategies. Learning Center. <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/class-discussion-strategies/>.

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