OTEI DISCUSSION GUIDE

Contents

Before You Begin…

Think about WHY you want to have a discussion. And HOW you will conduct the discussion.

- What format will you use?
- What questions will you ask?
- What rules or norms will you have?
- How will you encourage/ensure participation?

Preparing Questions for a Discussion

Use the [Online Model for Learning the Elements and Standards of Critical Thinking](#) to help you select *question stems* for discussion questions.

Metacognition: Student Awareness of Own Thinking

Metacognition is awareness or understanding of one's own thought processes. You can nurture metacognition by prompting students to ask how they are thinking about a subject. Encouraging students to assess their own learning through activities and homework helps them take responsibility for their learning--and balances out the "teaching and learning" responsibilities. You can make metacognition part of your classroom discussions.

You can find resources on metacognition at [Improve with Metacognition](#).

Group Discussion Norms

When having class discussions, it is generally a good idea to set group norms beforehand. As the instructor, you could set norms for the group or you could have the group set – or contribute to – the norms. Typical group discussion norms include being inclusive, respectful, and open-minded to other's perspectives.

You can find more about developing and using group discussion ground rules or norms at [Guidelines for Classroom Interactions](#) by the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching.

Leading Effective Group Discussions

Leading group discussions can be challenging. Duke Learning Innovation has a great webpage on [leading effective group discussions](#). Additional resources to check out include:

How to Lead a Class Discussion (for Students)

This [guide on discussions](#) for students who are asked to lead discussion in class, includes useful tips for faculty as well. Written by Rachel Seidman, Carleton College**.**

How to Lead a Discussion

Use this [discussion checklist](#) for faculty wishing to lead discussions, from the Stanford Teaching Commons.

Ideas for Great Class Discussions

These [tips on class discussions](#) from the Duke Learning Innovation Active Learning Fellows address preparing students, facilitating discussions, and assessing discussions, as well as dealing with quiet students and confrontational discussion.

How to Hold Discussions Online

Group Discussion Strategies/Methods

It can often be difficult to get students to participate in group discussions, especially if students are shy or introverted. See Class Discussion: From Blank Stares to True Engagement to read more about strategies for preparing/encouraging students to participate in class discussions. Three strategies suggested in this article are:

- Think/Pair/Share activities
- Providing discussion questions with the reading assignment
- Requiring students to write a short response paper to a question/issue raised in the reading assignment

Check out 5 Ways to Make Class Discussions More Exciting to find out more about the following methods of engaging students in group discussions:

- **Lightning Rounds** – Prepare short answer questions ahead of time and give students 30 seconds to respond. Students may answer or pass. Limit these sessions to about 10 minutes.
- **Throw the Ball** – During a group discussion, call on a student by passing them a beach ball.
- **Group Answers** – Assign students to small groups and have groups discuss a question/prompt. Have cards that identify the different groups and randomly select a card to have that group report out to the larger group.
- **Agreements** – Keep a discussion question going by calling on another student to see if he/she agrees with the first student's response. Keep going until at least five students have participated in a question.
- **Questionnaires** – Small groups develop a set of questions about a topic. They pass their questions on to the next group, and that group answers one of the questions in writing. Papers are changed until all questions have been answered. Each group then shares their questions and the answers they received.

Online Versions of Five Methods

- Lightening Rounds can be done online in several ways, through a quick Canvas survey before a discussion thread is assigned or synchronously using an online app like Mentimeter or PollEverywhere or the Canvas survey (non-graded quiz). A quick Kahoots survey can also add interest online (and in class).
- "Throw the ball" can be done using a random number generator app
- Groups in canvas or in breakout rooms (synchronous online) can be used and prompts sent to each group.
- Agreements can be set up through tagging in the discussions
- Small groups can also create questionnaires that are shared, by students using available free apps such as SurveyMonkey.

Harvard Instructional Moves has some great new resources (including faculty videos) on lecturing and facilitating discussions:

- **Asking Questions that Probe for Deeper Understanding.** "Questions have the power to ignite or short-circuit deeper understanding. While the thoughtfully constructed question might take a discussion to new heights, another can stop it in its tracks. What sorts of questions get students

thinking more deeply? How can these questions be planned in advance or developed "on the go"? In this video, Todd Rakoff uses a questioning strategy inspired by Socratic dialogue to probe for deeper student thinking."   Video at: https://instructionalmoves.gse.harvard.edu/asking-questions-probe-deeper-understanding?admin_panel=1

- **Designing, Scaffolding, and Assessing Student Discussion Leadership.** "Inviting students to plan for and facilitate discussions can have the effect of, as Tim McCarthy puts it, 'provoking robust debate.' Though Tim McCarthy plays an integral role in class discussions, students themselves are responsible for leading the majority of classes, all of which are discussion-based. McCarthy refers to this exercise as a 'provocation.' Leading such 'provocations' affords student facilitators powerful, pedagogical perspectives while challenging them to participate more broadly in classroom discourse." Video at: https://instructionalmoves.gse.harvard.edu/designing-scaffolding-and-assessing-student-discussion-leadership?admin_panel=1

- **Framing Discussion as a Three-way Conversation**. "By framing class discussions as a three-way conversation between authors, students, and herself, Jane Mansbridge broadens and enlivens students' interaction with course material. This clever framing encourages students to consider the author's point of view, place his/her writing in historical context, and uncover assumptions that underpin the author's argument. Framing discussions this way can be an especially powerful technique for instructors teaching historical texts. When done well, it is almost as if the authors are present in the classroom." Video at: https://instructionalmoves.gse.harvard.edu/framing-discussion-three-way-conversation?admin_panel=1

Group Discussion Formats

There are many ways to conduct group discussions. Select a format that will work well for your group and purpose. Using different discussion formats can also help keep students engaged.

Affinity Mapping/Diagramming

Give students a broad question or problem that is likely to generate lots of different ideas. Have students brainstorm ideas and write them on post-it notes (one idea per note) and then post in no particular order. Students can then group the ideas (post-it notes) into categories. Have the students create labels for the categories and then discuss why ideas fit within categories and how the categories relate to each other. For more information, see the Cult of Pedagogy website.

Four Corners

Give students a statement and have them take a position on the statement: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Have them reflect on why they selected this position and then briefly write an explanation. Then have students go to the corner of the room labeled with their corresponding position. Students should discuss in their four groups, and then discussion can spread to the larger group.

This can also be done with just two responses (Agree or Disagree), and students can move to one side of the room or another. This is sometimes known as the Barometer method. You could also have students stand along a continuum, indicating how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement.

Gallery Walk

Set up stations or posters around the room. Have students walk in small groups from station to station. Students will respond to a prompt or perform a task at each station and then discuss. You can also set up "chat stations" with discussion prompts.

In a variation of this, students create the stations/posters and act as tour guides or docents by giving mini presentations at each station. For more information on this technique, see The Cult of Pedagogy website.

Jigsaw Method

Students work in small groups to develop knowledge about given topics. Each group has its own topic. Students then switch groups to teach what they learned with another group. This technique can be useful if you want students to learn about different topics and teach each other. For more information on using this technique, see the K. Patricia Cross Academy website.

Think/Pair/Share

This discussion format works well in any size classroom and is a great way to get all students involved in discussion, especially more introverted or shy students.

In this activity, give the class a question or prompt. Have each student think about how they would respond to the prompt. Then have students partner up with the student next to them to discuss. At the end of this discussion time, you could then have select groups share out to the larger group and have more discussion. For more information on this technique, see the K. Patricia Cross Academy website.

Online Versions of Formats

These can be synchronous (as "break out rooms" in online conferencing apps). And these can be asynchronous using Canvas and Google tools. For instance, Jigsaw and Think/Pair/Share can be done through use of breakout rooms. Think/Pair/Share online synchronously would allow one minute of thinking time, two minutes in two-person break outs, and then coming back and sharing verbally and in chats. Sharing can also be done on a Google page.

Affinity Mapping, Four Corners, and Gallery Walks can be staged asynchronously to have students discuss and create on Google pages or through other apps (don't forget to explore video apps!). The second stage could be sharing these products and soliciting peer comments.

One Final Group Discussion Tip

One final point about good discussions: Most students can easily hear the teacher, but depending on room arrangement, it can often be difficult for students to hear each other. Be sure to repeat student answers if any class member can't hear it.

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