

**Leading Discussions**  
**GTL Weeks 2016**  
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**Create a Climate 4 Discussion**

Set the Stage

- Set participation tone immediately
- Build complexity (start small and build)
- Get to know your students and their interests
- Be explicit about value of interaction
- Address complaints immediately & positively
- Build in accountability

Build trust

- Begin building relationships immediately
- Use inclusive language
- Respect adult learning (students are autonomous, self-directed, and have life experiences)
- Share stories to demonstrate that you identify with them
- Establish “rules of engagement” and enforce (include students in developing guidelines)

**Practice Discussion Friendly Behaviours**

- Use students’ names; encourage students to learn each other’s names
- Arrange room to encourage discussion; vary seating
- Arrive early—stay afterwards
- Use immediacy behaviours to encourage discussion (verbal/non-verbal cues that reduce the physical and psychological distance between instructor and students--smile, nod, move out from behind podium, move closer to speaker, look relaxed and interested)
- Draw students’ special knowledge to encourage shy students (NB: This relies on building relationships with students!)

**Plan a Strategy**

- What is the purpose of the discussion?
- How will you organize the discussion?
  - Entire class, buzz groups, think pair share, combination
  - How will groups be determined?
  - How will you ensure that the groups vary from session to session?
- What will you do if students are not prepared? What can you do to encourage student preparation?
- How will you handle non-participation or dominating students?
- How much time will you allocate and how will flexible can you be with the time allocation?
- What will you consider a digression? How will you handle digressions?
- How will you handle student misconceptions/inaccuracies?
- How will you synthesize the ideas at the end of the discussion?
- How will handle disputes that may arise?
- How will you build in accountability before, during, and after the discussion? (e.g. short assignment submitted in advance, groups report to class, written summary, class develops an exam question)

**Share the Plan**

Make agenda clear in advance

- Require advanced preparation
- Provide guiding questions/theoretical framework for advanced preparation

Provide

- Clear structure for the discussion
- Clear instructions for discussion activity
- Guiding questions/theoretical framework

Make explicit

- How the discussion connects to course objectives, content, assessment, broader job skills (e.g. communication, collaboration)
- Roles, responsibilities, behavioural expectations
- How students will be accountable

## Facilitate, Don't Dominate

- Be in control, but don't talk too much
- Decentralize—invite students to address one *another*
- Model thinking, respect, language that you expect from students
- Pause to give time for reflection
- Provide direction & maintain focus
- Summarize student responses
- Watch for discussion breakdown signs (hair –splitting, private conversations, participants refusing compromise, personal attacks, apathetic participation, repetition of points, ideas are attacked before completely expressed)
  - Prevent discussion from deteriorating into a heated discussion
    - “Let's slow down a moment”
    - “Hold on. It's not helpful to have more than one person talking at a time
    - “It seems like we need to identify the areas upon which we can agree. Let's start there.”
    - “This discussion isn't productive. Those that want to continue can meet after class. For now, let's move on.”

## Share authority

- Invite ideas for discussion
- Assign students to lead discussion on 1 or more questions
- Combine mini-lectures with discussion
- Delegate responsibility for discussion questions
- Have students design exam questions based on discussion
- Don't take a stand one way or other
- Make notes on board /designate note takers
- Bring closure (summarize what has been discussed and how it relates to course content and objectives)

## Don't fall into these common questioning pitfalls!

- Failing to prepare questions in advance
- Failing to *imagine* student perspectives/responses and thinking about how you might respond (NB: You won't be able to anticipate all student responses, but taking the time to think about the material from the *student* perspective will better prepare you for discussion facilitation.)
- Asking too many questions at once
- Asking and answering your own questions
- Failing to probe or explore the implications of answers
- Rewarding rapid response from the same students
- Asking unconnected questions
- Failing to ask questions in a logical sequence
- Asking yes/no, vague, or leading questions
- Ignoring or failing to build on students' answers

## Question Types

Adapted from Davis (1993)

- Epistemological: questions probing how an author comes to know or believe something to be true
- Experiential: examines the text through the lens of relevant personal experiences
- Communicative: probes how the author conveys meaning and whether the approach clarifies or confuses meaning
- Political: examine how the text serves to represent certain issues or challenge others
- Exploratory questions: probe facts and basic knowledge
- Challenge questions: interrogate assumptions, conclusions or interpretations
- Relational questions: ask for comparisons of themes, ideas, or issues
- Diagnostic questions: probe motives or causes
- Action questions: call for a conclusion or action
- Cause-and-effect questions: ask for causal relationships between ideas, actions, or events
- Extension questions: expand the discussion
- Hypothetical questions: pose a change in the facts or issues
- Priority questions: seek to identify the most important issue(s)
- Summary questions: elicit synthesis

## Strategies for Handling Students Who Monopolize the Discussion

Adapted from Davis (1993)

- Break class into smaller groups or assign tasks to pairs of students.
- Use a one-minute paper and then call on students to share their thoughts
- Avoid making eye contact with the talkative student(s)
- If one student has dominated the discussion, ask the other students if they agree or disagree with comments.
- “Let’s hear from some other students”
- Assign a specific task to the dominant student (e.g. summarize discussion, take notes)
- Acknowledge time constraints (“Our time is running out, can we pick up this discussion outside of class?”)
- If the monopolizing is a serious problem, speak to him/her outside of class. Indicate that you value his/her participation, but that you wish more students contributed.

## Techniques to Structure Discussions

Adapted from: Naeth, Anne 2010 and Frederick (1981)

Technique	Description
Jigsaw	Topic/reading is divided into smaller pieces, subgroups are assigned a piece of the “puzzle,” subgroups report back to the; follow with group discussion.
Two-Column	Students consider two sides of an issue; responses are recorded in 2 columns. (e.g. acceptance of cultural difference looks like/doesn’t look like)
4 Corners	Questions appear at four corners of room; students divided into 4 groups and move from corner to corner answering question. Follow with group discussion.
Forced Debate	Ask students to select one or the other of two opposite sides and defend their choice. Ask them to sit on one side of the table/room to represent their decision. Ask why they have chosen where they are. Invite student to change their place during the debate if they are persuaded.
Cross-over debate	Ask students to select one or the other of two opposite sides and defend their choice. Ask them to sit on one side of the table/room to represent their decision. Students are then asked to argue for the opposite side.
Buzz Groups	Small subgroups are assigned questions, subgroup leader records answers and then reports to the group
Concentric Circles	Group forms small circle within larger circle; inner circle discusses topic, outer circle listens; then reverse listening and discussion roles
Phillips 66	Six selected individuals allowed six minutes for topic discussion; followed by group discussion or six assigned individuals follow up on the discussion; or individuals count one to six and all sixes for the discussion group
Picture Making	Group divided into small subgroups; each subgroup illustrates their discussion then explains the picture to the larger group
Socratic Method	Facilitator/subgroups lead discussion by asking questions; or subgroup or individuals follow a question and answer with another question
Truth Statements	Subgroups decide on 3 true statements for a topic; subgroups present truth statements, other subgroups refute them or ask questions; library research after
Circle Response	Questions posed to members of a group seated in a circle; each group member in turn expresses a response
Colloquium	Advanced projects are planned and evaluated as they progress
Chain Reaction Forum	Subgroups discuss a topic or presentation and formulate questions to be asked of the resource persons
Huddle Groups	Pairs or triads discuss specific issue for 2-3 minutes
Listening Team	3-4 designated individuals listen and raise questions after a presentation
Reaction Symposium	3-4 individuals in turn give their reactions to a presentation
Screened Presentation	Subgroups develop questions for speaker or resource person to address either as the presentation progresses or at the end of the presentation
Mini Symposium	Subgroups each address a specific aspect of the topic through a concise presentation followed by questions from other subgroups
Reaction Sheets	Facilitator asks individuals to record their reactions as they listen, watch, or read; individuals then share reactions with the group
Brainstorming	Group thinks about a topic and gives their ideas; facilitator explains importance of no critical judgments, strive for quality of ideas, free wheeling wild ideas are okay, hitchhiking on another idea; follow with structured discussion
Clinic	Diagnosis, analysis and solving of problems by a large group or subgroups can work through the problem and then report to the larger group
Role Playing	Dramatization of a problem or situation followed by discussion

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