

Discussion Leading and Participation Guidelines

Discussion Leading

Discussion leading is a difficult task. Your goal: to lead an on topic, on task conversation. Your ultimate goal: to see that conversation move forward in a meaningful way that results in comprehensive discussion of the reading topic and therefore a deeper understanding of the same. Is this easy? No. It is extremely difficult. The obstacles in your path are: a) yourself and b) everyone else.

A few things to keep in mind:

1. There are at least a majority of people in this class who have chosen to be there. Even if you consider this a “required” honors course, you also chose the Honors College. This is important as it should remind you all that you have committed to doing something as has everyone else AND this topic is of interest to most of you. This is a good starting place.
2. When you are in charge, you should remember that everyone else is a) glad it is not them and b) are interested to see how you will handle things. These are positives.
3. Prepare several (3-4) open-ended questions (not yes/no questions) to help discussion get started, or to re-start a discussion that has lagged.
4. The faculty member in the room is probably an enthusiastic, experienced thinker about this topic. He or she is also interested in supporting the conversation and in ensuring that your discussion follows a factually accurate path. This means, fact check, do not make the faculty member correct or re-direct you unnecessarily (we are learning so yes, this is going to happen, but preparation will help minimize this). On the other hand do not be afraid to say something because you may be incorrect. Under that circumstance all we hear during a discussion are the “sounds of silence” because everyone is afraid to be wrong. This seems to contradict but the first point also helps keep the faculty member out of your hair and that is the goal! Do a great job!
5. How do you do such a great job that the faculty member stays on the sidelines/coaching rather than lecturing? Be prepared. Everyone needs to be on the same page, literally. Discussion leaders should have done the reading and made notes and met with one another and the faculty member about how they plan to lead the group. Discussion followers are participants – you too must have done the reading, made notes and brought them to class. Otherwise how can we all be on the same page together?
6. Finally, point number 5 is where the grading comes from – evidence of your preparation – and this assignment is weighted heavily compared to all other tasks for this semester. Good luck and come meet with me if you need to and even if you do not need it!

Discussion Following & Participation

Like leading a class discussion, serious participation in a class discussion requires *solid preparation*.

1. Read the assigned readings or watch/listen to the assigned media – and then spend a moment or two contemplating what you have learned. What were the “three main points” of the article? Can you summarize the main ideas in 2 sentences?
2. Do you buy the author’s evidence supporting their claim? Why? Are there alternative ways of interpreting the results? Where their methods of finding the evidence appropriate?
3. If the author’s thesis or hypothesis is correct, how does this change your understanding of the world around us? How should this change your behavior?
4. During discussion, listen respectfully to your peers. Critically consider their ideas and points of view. Remember that discussion is a dialogue with the whole class, and everyone should have the opportunity to participate.
5. For discussion to work, we must all approach each other with respect and honor.
6. Personal attacks are never appropriate.