

TIPS FOR TEACHING WITH DISCUSSION

Teaching with discussion can be one of the most rewarding ways to help students learn and develop critical thinking skills. But, yes...it can also be one of the most challenging for teachers (and students) who don't have the experience or the skills for conducting and participating in a classroom discussions. Here are some general points to keep in mind during and after discussions.

DURING THE DISCUSSION

- Provide a structure. Write an outline or guiding questions on the board.
- Use a whiteboard or something similar throughout the class to record key points, ideas, and questions.
- Prompt students to speak with one another.
- Create a balance between controlling the group dynamic and letting group members speak.
- Show respect for all questions and comments; use verbal and non-verbal cues to encourage participation.
- Do not answer your own questions.

AFTER THE DISCUSSION

- Rethink. Note what was good/bad about the discussion.
- Retool. What processes/tools worked best?
- Revise. How can the discussion be improved for the future?

FIVE COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Talking too much; answering your own questions or asking more than one question at once.
- Assuming that students are able to discern, remember, and understand the most important ideas generated in the discussion.
- Expecting students who are new to a topic to discuss it at the same level as students who have already studied the topic in depth or who are intellectually more mature.
- Failing to redirect students back to the ideas at hand when the discussion strays off topic.
- Asking a student to speak for or represent a group of people, especially if that group is in the minority in the class or at the University.

RESOURCES

- LTCITC Library Book: [Discussion as a Way of Teaching](#)
- For a more detailed discussion on this topic, check out [Teaching with Discussions](#).
- Information on good ways to [facilitate a discussion](#).
- There are so many reasons for weak discussion sessions—students might not know the material, they might be afraid or timid, or perhaps the teacher did not clearly articulate discussion goals and expectations. [See Carnegie Mellon's Solve a Teaching Problem](#) that first asks you to select reasons for a particular problem, then gives you research-based strategies for addressing it.

- Take a look at this [handy chart that lists the classroom structures](#) (group discussions, panel, debate, etc) that encourage student participation, explaining when to use one or the other, how to use these structures, and what to consider before using them.

Tags: [discussion](#), [engaging students](#), [active learning](#), [presentation](#)

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