



## IMPROVING CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

Classroom instructors often have student participation as a goal in classroom discussions. When you as a student can be more actively involved in class, you are more likely to learn and remember information. Discussions, however, don't "just happen"; therefore, you may want to consider some of the ideas below in order to help you become a better participant in a discussion group, and to feel more comfortable in the process.

- Prepare for the discussion through reading, reviewing notes and, above all, thinking about the topic for discussion. Hypothesize some possible discussion questions, and answer them as a part of your preparation.
- Respect your instructor's right to lead a discussion as an alternative to lecturing. Do not go to a discussion group expecting a lecture, but instead, learn to recognize your own role in making the class interesting and informative.
- Alleviate your nervousness or shyness by talking out your ideas in informal, small group settings, perhaps while studying with classmates. Verbalize your thoughts: this makes them clearer in your own mind, and also serves to reinforce your learning.
- When you get to the discussion, break the silence barrier and speak up. You may want to first answer a straightforward "knowledge" type question to become more comfortable before jumping into more analytical responses.
- Make your responses brief and to the point. Avoid long-winded answers which may serve to confuse or bore others, rather than to enlighten them.
- Be a good listener. Make sure that you are intent on the flow of the discussion, and make mental and written notes of questions or comments.
- Consider your orientation as a member of the group, and value this role in your interaction with other members of the group. Determine what you do best; is it processing, summarizing, maintaining, contributing new information? Don't feel that you must play all roles well, but experiment with playing different roles.
- To be a valuable member of a discussion, try to summarize earlier comments before adding new ones. This helps you and the class better follow the main points.
- Expect to answer questions that are open-ended, or which involve the information of your own opinions. Think about what you will say before you say it.
- Avoid negative self-talk as you engage in, or listen to discussions. Instead, give yourself credit for even small contributions, and brush up on topics on which you feel less informed.
- Recognize that questioning is a major aspect of discussion. In addition to answering questions, feel free to ask questions of the instructor and of other students.
- Clarify with your instructor how much, if any, of the content of the discussion you will be responsible for later. The note taking that you use should be different from notes taken in a lecture. Write down the topic of the discussion, and only selected points that seem to recur. Listen at the end of class for a summary of the key points of the discussion. Spend a few minutes after class summarizing the discussion and jotting down significant notes.

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