

ENCOURAGING STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN CLASS

Classroom instructors often have as a goal the encouragement of student participation in class. When the students are actively involved in manipulating ideas and information, they have a much greater chance of learning them and remembering them. The ideas presented below should help you get your students responding and learning in class.

Give the students a chance to be prepared to discuss.

Make sure the topic to be covered is known to the students well in advance of the class period. Provide them with appropriate reading materials, and, if possible, a set of "thought" questions or objectives which will be the main points of discussion during the class session. This gives them more ease about what will happen during class.

Give yourself plenty of preparation time before class.

Take time to analyze what your main objectives for the class period are. Prepare a list of questions in advance so you won't need to fumble around during class deciding what to say next. Such advance preparation will also allow you to cover all the levels of questioning appropriate to your goals.

Ask questions at a variety of taxonomic levels during class.

Experts have broken down the types of cognitive activity engaged in at the college level into the following taxonomy:

- *Knowledge* - strictly recall from memory (e.g., what is the atomic weight of oxygen?)
- *Comprehension* - putting a statement into your own words or frame of reference (e.g., what does it mean to say "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny?")
- *Application* - applying a concept or principle to a new setting (e.g., determine the height of the triangle below.)
- *Analysis* - breaking down concepts into their components and determining the relationships among them (e.g., what are the assumptions underlying the first law of thermo-dynamics?)
- *Synthesis* - putting together elements into a new structure (e. g., design an experiment to determine what stimuli will affect an unknown organism.)
- *Evaluation* - making judgments on the basis of data given (e.g., compare two pieces of evidence offered in support of a theory and decide which is more convincing.

Before class, structure the questions you will ask so that they move up the taxonomic ladder. This will make it easier for the students to follow the discussion and contribute.



Phrase your questions carefully so they will be clear to the students.

Open-ended questions, such as those that have no right answer, are more successful in promoting discussion.

Resist the temptation to answer your own questions.

Give the students a chance to answer by waiting and then rephrasing the question. They can't be expected to answer immediately. They'll need between twenty and thirty seconds of thinking time, particularly on higher level questions. Silence is a powerful motivator for speaking.

If an answer is incorrect, don't allow it to pass.

Ask a probing question (for elaboration) or ask for the reactions of other students to that answer or provide a prompt. Don't ridicule a wrong answer, but try to help the students find their own mistakes. This will encourage them in good thought habits.

Provide encouragement and praise for correct answers.

Vary your responses using such things as words of praise or a restatement of the student's answer or an elaboration of it.

Encourage the students to ask questions of each other and you.

Occasionally the use of a blind quiz will help to encourage class review. In this procedure, a short quiz is given at the beginning of the period. The students answer the questions but don't write their names on the papers. These "blind" quizzes are scrambled and passed out again to serve as a basis for discussion. Since the student is giving someone else's answer during the period, he/she will be more likely to respond because the situation is less threatening. Also, such quizzes give the students an idea of how well they understand what's going on in the material without it affecting their grades.

Maintain a warm, outgoing, friendly atmosphere in class.

Don't be on the defensive or feel threatened by the students. They want the class to succeed as much as you do. You are a model for them and their behavior will follow the pattern you establish. If you're willing to entertain alternative viewpoints, they will be, too.

Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."

Do offer to find out the answer if you can be sure to follow it up the next period.

Learn the students' names and some background by having them fill out a 3 X 5 card on the first day.

At the end of class, spend a few minutes summarizing the main points of the discussion.