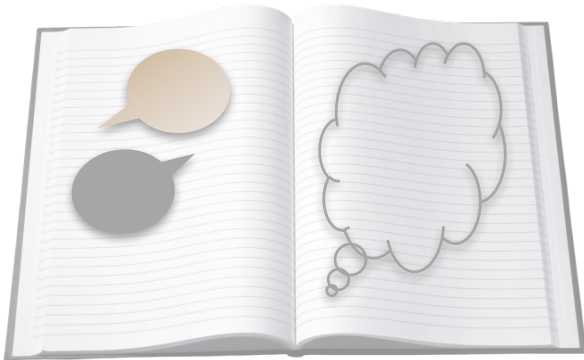


Silence in Discussion? Pause and Write



Even the most vibrant of classes fall victim to a lull in the discussion. This lull can occur for a variety of reasons such as tired students, challenging concepts, difficult-to-articulate questions. Rather than moving the discussion along with a different question or ending the discussion, keep students in the moment by giving them time to write, reflect, and re-engage.

The act of writing can help all types of learners slow down and process the content being discussed.

1. **Allow 10 seconds of silence.** Let's admit it—we hate the silence that falls on a class discussion as much, if not more, than our students. We want to rush in on the silence the moment we sense it is coming with follow-up questions or elaborations. While these may be necessary, challenge yourself to allow the silence to hang among students. This communicates to students their responsibility to keep the dialogue going.
2. **After two minutes of writing, come back to the discussion.** If allowing brief silence does not result in fruitful discussion, have students take a few moments to write their response to a question when spontaneous response has fallen flat. Then, ask students to share what they wrote verbally. This is often the only jumpstart needed.
3. **Collect written responses, and use them to continue the discussion.** If you or students have 4 x 6-inch note cards, invite students to write a response to a discussion question on a card and pass it to you. A 30-second review of cards is enough to find responses worth sharing that can keep the discussion going and prompt further questions or comments from students. *Suggestion: Require students to always have a stack of note cards with them, as they are effective active learning tools that can be used to share ideas in many ways and for many purposes.*
4. **If the discussion is truly fading, have students reflect in writing on how the discussion fits in with the larger picture.** When a good stopping point arises in conversation, ask students to write a conclusion statement of sorts, such as the examples below. This is sometimes called a “one-minute paper” and is typically submitted to the instructor, although grading is not required. Concluding with reflection is a powerful learning method for making sure students retain knowledge and understand its significance.
 - How does this discussion fit in with this class session's/the course's learning outcomes?
 - What are the 1-2 most important points to take away from this discussion?
 - What questions and considerations should be added to this discussion?

Written and designed by Christina Moore, Oakland University. Published October 2017.



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