

Facilitating a Great Discussion

Class discussion is a classic active learning activity that invites a group to challenge ideas and create knowledge together. It sounds great in theory, but we can encounter classrooms full of crickets. Consider these strategies as a way to try something new and revitalize the discussion.

CIRCULATE DISCUSSION AMONG STUDENTS

Most discussions fall into a cadence of student-to-professor interaction.

Encourage students to answer one another's questions or respond to one another's comments.

"What do you all think?"

"How could we answer that question?"

ALLOW SILENCE AND PAUSE

When silence falls after we have asked a question, our impulse is to fill the void with elaboration or a new question. If you know it is the question you want to ask, let students think. Even give students 60 seconds to consult the text or write a response.

"What evidence can support that point?"

"Let's think about it."

KEEP THE FOCUS ON OUTCOMES...

What are the goals of your discussion?

What main questions need to be answered? What points need to be discussed? When the discussion goes on a tangent, use questions to redirect the discussion to the main points.

"So, how does this relate?"

"Let's bring the discussion back to our focus."

...BUT BE OPEN TO THE UNEXPECTED

When your students are deeply involved in a discussion that goes in an unanticipated direction, encourage them to lead the way and stoke their enthusiasm. A good class discussion can motivate students for weeks. Allow space for these discussions by over-allocating time for discussion.

"Say more..."

"Let's go a little further."

For more teaching tips on class discussions, visit
oakland.edu/teachingtips

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