**UMW Speaking Center Presents**



Class Discussion Packet

**PREPARING FOR CLASS DISCUSSION**

**Participant**

* Read the material and bring it with you to class.
* Take notes: highlight key points, underline, write comments in the margins, or use whatever strategy works best for you.
* Have questions prepared. What points confused you? What are you curious about?
* If you are nervous about speaking up, prepare comments you think may be relevant ahead of time. If they are written down, your anxiety can’t let you forget them.

**Leader**

* Read the material and bring it with you to class.
* Take notes, but go above and beyond. Do extra research to prepare for your classmates’ questions.
* Identify areas that you or others may find confusing. Research them and consider using them as strong discussion points to clarify.
* Have a structure in mind. Prepare a time-appropriate amount of questions, and include extras just in case things move quickly. Know where you want the discussion to go.

**LEADING CLASS DISCUSSION**

* Begin with a common experience (a demonstration, a short reading, etc.) and follow with questions. This will grab the class’s attention and get them thinking about the topic you would like to speak on.
* Begin with an engaging question or an opinion based question. These are often good ways to spark larger discussions.
* Begin with controversy. Use a question or statement to play Devil’s Advocate.
* Allow for pauses. Give your classmates ample time to think about their answers before cutting in. If there is still no response, rephrase the question or call on someone. Do not answer
* Don’t ask yes or no questions or questions with one specific right answer. They can shut down discussion. Instead, ask open-ended questions that answer *why* and/or *how.*
* If you do ask a yes/no or right/wrong question, include follow up questions to dig deeper.
* Follow-up group member statements, but avoid leader-member dialogues. Remember that you are a facilitator and let the class answer and respond to statements.
* Limit the number of topics to be covered. Go in depth on a few key points rather than breezing over a hundred trivial details.
* Use discussion techniques (brainstorming, nominal group process, round robin discussion, etc.) to let group members communicate.
* Recognize the person who hasn’t talked in preference to the one who has. Try to keep everyone engaged and participating.
* Use questions that probe for group member feelings, reactions, or perceptions.
* Avoid talking every time a group-member speaks. Allow for individual conversation.
* Be flexible. If conversation deviates from your plan but is relevant and successfully engaging the class, allow it to continue.
* Keep the group on track. Respectfully guide the conversation in constructive directions and refocus the class if comments become tangential or off-topic.
* Be encouraging. Verbally support participants and use positive nonverbal communications such as eye contact, nodding, and good posture.
* Listen attentively and be respectful—don’t interrupt unless it is necessary to keeping the conversation on track.

**PARTICIPATING IN CLASS DISCUSSION**

* Be Prepared. Use different note taking techniques to ensure for yourself a variety of jumping off points for the discussion.
* Bring to class the readings and material you will be discussing. Refer to them during the discussion
* Be responsive: remember you don’t always need to say something “brilliant” to contribute.
* Discussions are not for you to talk about what you know; they are for you to learn more.
* You will get from a discussion what you put into it.
* Ask Questions! Class discussions are the perfect time to clarify confusing or difficult material. Chances are, you aren’t the only one who had a hard time understanding certain points.
* Don’t be afraid to act the leader. Give the discussion direction and purpose. Always think about the needs of others, however. Don’t grandstand, stimulate the discussion.
* Support your classmates. Listen carefully and use verbal and nonverbal cues to encourage them.
* Be respectful. Pay attention to your tone of voice and word choice when you convey your ideas.
* A good discussant…
  + Is physically present and prepared
  + Initiates topics, and encourages others to speak
  + Returns to points when they need further discussion
  + Discusses relevant, important issues
  + Avoids drifting to trivial points
  + Provides and asks for opinions, suggestions, and clarification
  + Speaks loudly, clearly, and in a respectful tone