

## Guidelines for Discussions in Groups

If you are leading or participating in a group discussion, here are some guidelines to keep in mind. For parsimony I have divided up the guidelines for leaders and participants, but you may note that many of the suggestions overlap. All participants share the responsibility for making the discussion productive. One of the most useful suggestions for both discussion leaders and participants is to approach a discussion not intending to show how much you know, but *to learn more* about the topic.

	Discussion Leader	Discussion Participant
Before the Discussion	Prepare a text or common experience and be aware of your focus	Do related readings and/or come ready to engage prior knowledge
During the Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask appropriate questions, avoiding “yes/no” questions or questions with right / wrong answers</li><li>• Allow time for thoughtful response – don’t be afraid of silence</li><li>• Use nominal group process or round-robin approaches if discussion gets bogged down</li><li>• Use encouraging, positive nonverbal communication such as eye contact, nodding, posture, approach</li><li>• Listen attentively and convey respect by not interrupting unless necessary to keep discussion on track</li><li>• Use verbal communication that is conducive to a respectful, yet open discussion of issues (use paraphrasing, mirror questions, probe questions)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask questions to clarify, using paraphrasing or mirroring, referring to text or common experience if necessary</li><li>• Be responsive and participatory: remember that you don’t always need “brilliant” ideas to contribute</li><li>• Ask a question / support previous opinions, state your views or state facts</li><li>• Orient towards the speaker and make eye contact if possible</li><li>• Listen attentively and take simple notes as prompts for follow up questions</li><li>• Participate openly, but respectfully, being aware of your tone, word choice, and the way you are conveying your ideas</li></ul>

These suggestions were compiled from the UMW Speaking Center website handout “Suggestions for Leading Group Discussions”, “Tips for Class Discussions”, “Evaluation of Discussion Leader”, and “Guidelines for Group Discussions”, created by various professors and used with permission. Questions can be addressed to Dr. Esther Yook, [eyook@umw.edu](mailto:eyook@umw.edu)