Effective Discussions

Center for Teaching and Learning

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Today

- Discussions: why we use them
- Student Concerns
- Faculty Concerns
- Setting the stage
- Defining your parameters
- The importance of the prompt
- Discussion management techniques

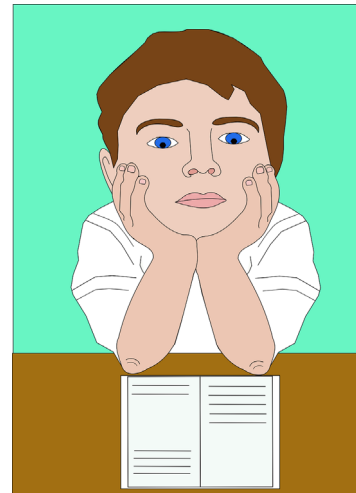- Tools and technologies that support online discussions

Why Do We Use Discussions?

- Moves students away from the role of passive recipient to active co-creators of knowledge

- Encourages students to think in the manner and language of the discipline

- Helps students formulate ideas and communicate them clearly

- Teaches students to become respectful, attentive listeners

- Exposes students to multiple perspectives and an awareness of complexities

- Challenges them to recognize and address their own and others biases and assumptions

- Helps students integrate/synthesize new information into their existing knowledge base

Student Concerns

- I need time to think before I speak

- What if I'm wrong

- I'm the only one who disagrees with the consensus

- I'm not comfortable challenging my faculty and/or peers

- I haven't finished/understood the reading

- I don't know how to be heard

- Am I talking too much?

- What a waste of time and money!

Faculty Concerns

➢ We risk losing some control
  - What if my students are unprepared?
  - How do I keep them on track?
  - What if their responses are misleading or incorrect?
  - What if there is a comment that is offensive and the discussion gets out of hand?
  - How do I ensure that all students are included?

➢ How can I help students value discussion as both a learning tool and a skill?

➢ I'm not sure what discussion approach to take

➢ Why have you decided to use discussion in your classes?

➢ How can you help your students see the value of discussion?

- **Have a discussion about discussions**
  - ✓ Ask them to consider why YOU think discussions are important
    - o Collate their responses and then share your own rationale
  - ✓ Help them see discussions as a critical thinking skill
    - o Emphasize value and relevancy of discussion as a skill
    - o Have students consider where discussion lies within Bloom's Taxonomy

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- What type of discussion would work best to support your objectives/situation, for example….

  ➢ Socratic, open-ended, free-form

  ➢ Think-Pair-Share: students think about their responses, share it with another student and then share out to the larger class

  ➢ Jigsaw: each group focuses on particular topic/aspect. Groups re-shuffle and come together to teach each other and integrate/synthesize knowledge

  ➢ Fishbowl: members take turns being the active participant and the active listener; each is assigned particular roles

- Clarify the objectives and outline the procedures and timeline

Important: Expect a "product"

(For more ideas on types of discussions please see The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies and/or Active Learning while Physical Distancing 2.0)

Suggestion: In F2F or synchronous online sessions
For more considered responses, and to help those who like to think before speaking, give the students the prompt several days before class.

Have them post their responses and comment on others.
At beginning of your "together" session allow them a few minutes to refresh their memories – and then begin the discussion.

➢ Good prompts are open-ended

o Moral/ethical dilemmas

o Assess/ Diagnose/ Act

o Compare and Contrast

o Interpret and Evaluate

o Conceptual Changes

o Personal Exploration

Adapted from 6 Types of Questions to Improve Classroom Discussions

Discussion Management: Prepare: Clarify: Remind

Affirm
- "Yes, and", not "Yes, but"
- Praise & amplify (" Great point. Why is this important? You've raised an interesting point; let's explore this some more)

Probe
- Could you explain your rationale…
- Could you provide an example that illustrates your point

Invite
- Can anyone elaborate? (You can "call" on students)
- Would anyone like to add to this?

Clarify

- "I think I heard; I'm not sure I understand, could you rephrase"
- "Can you provide an example?"

Re-direct

- "Good point. We're going to come back to that"
- "What we're grappling with is xyz. What are your thoughts?"
- Let's hear from….

Calm

- Acknowledge and prepare (Especially if it's a "hot button" topic, consider own and others perspectives in advance)
- Take a moment for reflection (What just happened? Why?)
- Re-visit

Discussion Management Techniques

IF	THEN
The statement is correct but superficial	Affirm but probe for rationale, Invite further input
The statement is one of several possibly correct	Affirm (amplify statement and its rationale) Invite (Anyone else? What else is a factor?)
The statement appears to be incorrect	Clarify (I think I heard) Probe (Could you explain your rationale? What assumptions are you making? Is that what the author stated?) Invite (Would anyone else like to help us out?)
The student response is unclear	Clarify (I'm not sure I understood. I think I heard. Could you rephrase? Could you provide an example that illustrates your point?...)
The students goes off-topic	Affirm (That's a great point, hold that thought...) Re-direct (remember we are trying to understand...what are your thoughts?)

IF	THEN
One student dominates	Affirm positive intent Remind them of guidelines
One student does not participate	Not always a problem Call on student directly Follow-up
Student says something offensive	Clarify (I'm not sure I heard you properly) Probe (Why would you say that? Have you thought about?) Use "I" statements (Can I share with you how I heard that statement?) Follow-Up Exercise control
Student gets angry/upset*	Prepare (prior to discussion, student reflects on gut reaction, considers other perspectives and rationales) Acknowledge (This topic invokes strong feelings) Rationalize (why are we discussing it? What will students gain?) Reflect (give students time individually to reflect. What just happened? Why?) Re-visit (have students of varying opinions listen to each and take notes)

For more information see Making the Most of Hot Topics in the Classroom, and Interrupting Microaggressions

Could the Discussion be Approached Through a Different Lens?

When you think about the goal of the discussion, consider whether other approaches might be helpful

- role playing
- Infographics
- students evaluate/design case studies
- information portals, etc…

Conversely, use discussion as a follow up to these scenarios

For a myriad of ideas, also see the University Libraries' Keep Learning, Teaching and Working Resources

Tools/Technology for Asynchronous Discussion Types

- ➤ **Socratic**
  - ➤ Blackboard
  - ➤ Teams
  - ➤ VoiceThread
  - ➤ Tophat - Homework

- ➤ **Fishbowl**
  - ➤ Blackboard
  - ➤ Teams
  - ➤ VoiceThread
  - ➤ Tophat

- ➤ **Think-Pair-Share**
  - ➤ Blackboard
  - ➤ Teams
  - ➤ VoiceThread
  - ➤ Tophat

- ➤ **Jigsaw**
  - ➤ Blackboard
  - ➤ Teams
  - ➤ VoiceThread
  - ➤ Tophat

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- For more information, to request a follow-up discussion session, or to share your expertise, please contact oii@ohio.edu