



Participating in Class Discussions

Many courses require students to actively participate in class discussion. Whether to find out students' thoughts or opinions, review important content from a reading, or simply engage students on an important issue, class discussion is a valuable teaching tool.

- Discussion is not just about saying the first thing that happens to pop into your head. In order for it to be most effective, all participants must prepare, and the best way to prepare is to educate yourself on the topic. This may mean completing an assigned reading, doing some external/additional research on areas you don't know much about, and/or thinking carefully about your opinion, position, or experiences in order to be able to articulate them clearly.
- Even if you have prepared extensively for a class discussion, that does not guarantee you will be an effective or helpful contributor to that discussion. Another requirement is that you listen carefully to your classmates' comments while the discussion is taking place. The best contributions are those that build off of what has been said by others and relate back to the assigned reading or topic in some meaningful way. It's great if you can refer directly to a student whose comment you found particularly helpful, or to which you would like to add another idea.
- It is recommended that you take brief notes on what your classmates and professor say so that you can refer back to them as needed, especially as you think about what you want to say. Perhaps you have noticed a theme among the comments. Or perhaps you can see that the seemingly-random ideas being tossed around really center around three major issues or points of disagreement. Or maybe you can see that several people seem to be saying similar things but don't seem to realize it – you could be the student who points that out and helps tie multiple ideas together.
- Before offering your contribution, take a moment to organize your thoughts. Maybe there are two separate observations you wish to make. Jot down a few quick notes on each idea so you can remember what you wanted to say without rambling aimlessly. Your classmates and professor should not have to guess about where you're going or what your point is, and they should not have to listen to a really long-winded explanation. Help them understand you by organizing your ideas.