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Discussion Strategies

Getting a discussion started

- Sentence completion:
What impressed me most about the reading for today was...
The question I'd most like to ask the author is...
The idea in the reading that I most disagree with is...
- Quotes from reading:
The passage in the reading that I agree with most is...
The quote from the reading that I disagree with most is...
- Illustrative quotes:
The quote that best illustrates today's concept is...
The quote that best exemplifies my viewpoint on this issue is...
- Hatful of quotes:
Each student selects a slip of paper from a container. Slips have ideas, passages, ideas or other statements related to the topic of the day. Each student must respond to the statement on his or her slip.
- Open-ended questions
Ask how, why. Have students compare the relative merits of something or to consider how well something fulfills its function. Have the students bring their own list of questions

Helping students try various conversational roles

- Problem, dilemma or theme poser:
Introduces the topic of conversation
- Reflective analyst:
Records the conversation's flow, offering a periodic summary
- Scrounger:
Listens for suggestions and needs, records them and reviews them at the end of the discussion so the group may decide an action plan
- Devil's advocate:
Expresses a contrary view to group consensus
- Detective:
Listens for unexplored biases, and brings attention to them
- Theme spotter:
Identifies themes needing time at the next session
- Umpire:
Listens for personal judgments in order to enforce ground rules

Helping students develop conversational skills

- Assign conversational moves for participants to try
- Express interest in someone's comments
 - Encourage someone to elaborate on his or her comments

-  Explain a link between the comments of two people
-  Make a contribution that builds on someone's comment
-  Paraphrase someone's comment
-  Summarize several comments
-  Ask a cause and effect question
-  Ask for time to think about a comment
-  Express appreciation for what you've gained from the discussion
-  Disagree with a comment in a respectful and constructive way

Keeping a conversation going

Resist responding to student comments yourself. Become comfortable with silences during class discussion, and wait while a student formulates an answer. Remember that good discussion is based more on responses than on reactions. The difference between a reaction—which is intuitive, instinctual, instantaneous, gut-level—and a response—which is well-considered, thoughtful, deliberative, analytical—is a matter of seconds. Help students respond to one another using conversational roles.



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