

Facilitating Productive Discussions



Learning Outcomes

After this session, we will be able to ...

- explain how productive discussions are opportunities for engaged teaching and learning by creating a safe and inclusive space
- identify the kinds of questions that stimulate discussion
- devise ground rules; appropriate divergent prompts and be able to scaffold argument skills: and
- analyze our discussion facilitation skills using the [Discussion Facilitation Instrument](#)

Some Basics of Discussions

(Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Davis, 1993; McKeachie, 2005)

- Create a safe and inclusive place
- Ground rules (attack idea, not person)
- Argument Skills (shouting doesn't count) - may need to teach, model
- Divergent questions - Suppose, Predict, What are some possible consequences...
(don't close the loop)
- Appropriate **prompts**
(probing)

Blooms Prompts for Creating ?'s

Knowledge (facts): Who, What, Why, When, Where, How

Comprehension a pattern): Create, How would you test;

Propose an alternative (translate, interpret): In your own words;

What does this mean; Give an example; Classify, Infer

Application(new situations): Predict, Choose, Select, Explain, ID

Analysis (break down into parts): Distinguish, What assumptions; What conclusions, What ideas apply

Synthesis (combine elements into a pattern): Create, How would you test; Propose an alternative; Solve; Plan; Design

Evaluation (criteria): Appraise, Criticize, Defend, Compare

Example Questions (Davis, 1993)

“What research evidence supports the theory of a cancer-prone personality?”

“How else might we account for the findings of this experiment?”

“In response to a sit-in at California Hall, what should the chancellor do?”

“If the government stopped farm subsidies for wheat, what would happen to the price of bread?”

Research on Discussions

(Howard, 2016)

- Classroom Discussion Norms (and how to change them)
- How to Keep a Discussion on Track
- Common Challenges: Participation Grades, Bad Answers, and Divisive Topics

What are some Classroom Norms Related to Classroom Discussions?

(Howard, 2016)

Norm No. 1: Civil attention

- Students appear to be listening
- expect professor won't call on them unless they signal a willingness to participate.

How do students demonstrate civil attention?

- nodding their heads, taking notes, chuckling at the instructor's attempts at humor, or making brief eye contact

What are some Classroom Norms Related to Classroom Discussions?

(Howard, 2016)

Norm No. 2: Consolidation of responsibility

small number of students — typically five to eight — will account for **75 to 95 percent** of the comments made in a discussion.

Disrupt Norms

(Howard, 2016)

No. 1: Ask better questions.

No. 2: Set the stage on the first day.

No. 3: Use syllabus quiz to show that you value participation

No. 4: Try a discussion about discussion

No. 5: Don't give up on discussion

No. 6: Have students pair up

No. 7: Take the conversation online.

How to Keep a Discussion on Track- Focused, Fair, and Inclusive

(Howard, 2016)

- Slow down the dominant talkers.
- Control the rhythm
- Use discussion questions to focus their reading
- Shine a light on the “muddiest” point
- Encourage comments from students of varied backgrounds

Participation Grades

(Howard, 2016)

Against:

- punishes shy students, extroverts are rewarded
- judging fleeting comments in class discussion is difficult
- task becomes impossible as # of students increases

Favor

- we often require students to do uncomfortable things, why not this
- sometimes being uncomfortable is necessary to facilitate learning

Bad Answers, Divisive Topics

(Howard, 2016)

Bad Answers

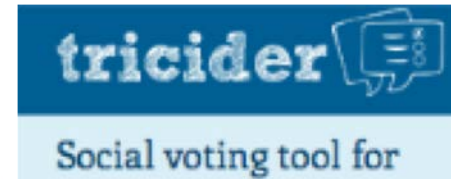
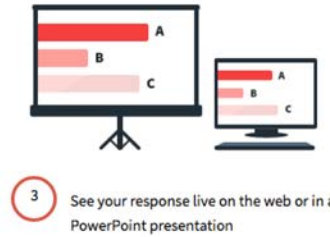
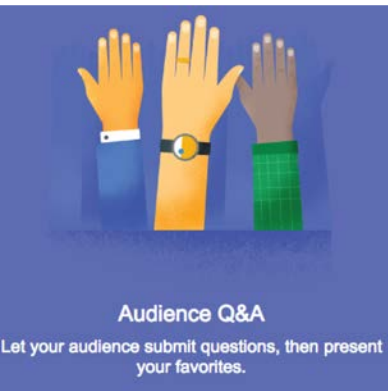
- Affirm and then correct
- Ask for more evidence
- If their argument seems muddy ask for clarification, or ask another student if they can help clarify

Controversial Issues

- Can go well, can go terribly
- Relevance is key
- Should faculty reveal their own positions when talking about heated topics?

Student Response Systems

[Plickers](#), [Poll Everywhere](#), [Padlet](#), [Kahoot](#), [GoFormative](#),
[Twitter](#), [Answer Garden](#), [Tricider](#), GSlides



SRS Research

- Assists in creating learner-centered classroom (Blasco, 2013)
- **Increases communication (Lantz & Stawiski, 2014)**
- Improved process of instructor-feedback (Chen & Lan, 2013)
- **Creates deeper understanding (Cubric & Jefferies, 2015)**
- Improves academic performance (Lantz & Stawiski, 2014)
- **Improves instructional methods (Chen & Lan, 2013)**
- Improves Long Term Memory (Bojinova & Oigara, 2011)
- **Enables self-reflection (Mula & Kavanagh, 2009)**
- Increases Engagement (Johnson & Lillis, 2010)
- **Increases positive attitudes (Hedgcock & Rouwenhorst, 2014)**

Types of SRS Questions

([Vanderbilt CTL](#), 2017)

- Recall Questions
- **Conceptual Understanding Questions**
- Application Questions
- **Critical Thinking Questions**
- Student Perspective Questions
- **Confidence Level Questions**
- Monitoring Questions
- **Classroom Experiments**



SRS Activities

([Vanderbilt CTL](#), 2017)

- Summative Assessment
- **Formative Assessment**
- Homework Collection
- **Discussion Warm-Up**
- Peer Instruction
- **Choose Own Adventure**



SRS Research on Use (Iwamoto & Hargis, 2018)

- Do not use to just keep attendance.
- Use often; in different ways to engage.
- Multiple Choice options, five or less; “Actionable” distractors
- Allow time: <30 Ss, 15 seconds.
- Encourage discussion.
- Use for key concepts; 10-20 min intervals.
- Use "countdown timer."
- Clear instructions; allow for practice.



Discussion Facilitation Instrument

(Finn & Schrod, 2017)

Instructors increased student engagement in the course and thus increased student understanding by-

- 1- Provoking and organizing discussions using a variety of questions
- 2- Employing responses that affirm students
- 3- Correcting discussions to focus on course content

Discussion Facilitation Instrument

(Finn & Schrod, 2017)

Provokes Discussion: My instructor ...

1. simulates debates.
2. makes controversial or debatable statements.
3. plays devil's advocate.
4. encourages us to challenge other students' PoV.
5. asks whether we agree or not with others' interpretations.

Organizes Discussion: My instructor ...

6. organizes discussions to ensure structured presentation.
7. helps keep discussions on track.
8. redirects discussions if they are getting off point.
9. organizes discussions for clear direction.
10. directs conversations to ensure material addressed.

DFI Con't ([Word Doc](#))

Questions Students: My instructor asks...

open-ended; probing; leading; thought-provoking questions.

Affirms Students: My instructor ...

encourages participation; is patient; treats students with respect; creates a relaxed atmosphere; communicates appreciation for contributions; values what is said; summarizes conclusions.

Corrects Students: My instructor ...

corrects wrong answers; helps us understand incorrect answers provided; uses constructive criticism.

END

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