

Tips for Class Discussions

- **Discussions are NOT for you to talk about what you know; they are for you to learn MORE.** Ask questions. Get elaborations. Challenge yourself and others. (See below.)
- **Bring to class the readings you will be discussing.** You will likely need to refer to them at some point.
- **Be prepared.** That does not mean that you have to have read every word or that you have to understand everything that you have read. But you need a list (probably written) of ideas and questions in order to cover everything you believe should be covered in the discussion.
- **Decide what should be discussed.** Give the discussion direction and purpose. Before anyone says a word, you should know what you want the discussion to accomplish. If the discussion strays, return it to its essential point(s). Don't waste the only class time you will have on the topic/readings. (See below.) Waiting and listening will not necessarily provide you with what you need.
- **Ask questions.** Take advantage of the discussion to improve your understanding of the readings and related topics. Discussions are not just for people who understand everything about the readings; they are just as much - - if not more - - for people with questions.
- **Think about the needs of others.** Your role is to stimulate a discussion, not give mini-speeches. Ask others about their understanding or ask them for clarification; give others an opportunity to talk.
- **Look and act involved and encouraging.** It is hard to talk if your "audience" looks bored and uninterested. So, when someone else is speaking, you should smile, nod, etc. And when you are speaking, look at everyone; do not direct your attention to one person, thus excluding everyone else.
- **If someone changes the subject before you think that it has been adequately discussed, wait for your chance and return the class to that topic.** ("I'd like to return to an earlier point that I still don't understand.")
- **If the discussion gets bogged down, change the topic.** ("Maybe we should move on to another topic before we run out of time." "Can we talk about Mary's question for a while?") If you are sitting there bored or frustrated, it is your job to redirect the discussion; don't blame "the class."
- **Don't let any one person dominate the discussion.** Don't let two people turn the discussion into a two-sided debate. Break in politely; ask others for their views. If the discussion turns into a monologue/dialogue, it is everyone's fault, not just the speaker/s.
- **Don't get worried when you say something and there is a pause.** People need time to think about what you have said. Especially if you raise a new point or ask a question they do not expect, they need time to digest, decide what they think, and determine how they want to respond. In some cases, the class may not have an answer to your question.