Our goal in facilitating discussions is to help students jointly construct an understanding of a topic, event, process, variable, etc. Thus we focus more on promoting high-level thinking [critical analysis, interpretation, explanation] than on information delivery. We base our approach on "constructivism." "The purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorize the 'right' answers and regurgitate someone else’s meaning." (http://www.funderstanding.com/theory/constructivism/)

As the learning pyramid shows, discussion promotes retention at a much higher level than lecture or reading. Thus we direct the students' search for meaning; we do no simply deliver the "right" answers to them. The key here is to redirect student questions back to the class. [See the principles of facilitative teaching below.]

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Discussion Guide

Help student come prepared
If students are to have anything substantive to contribute to a discussion, they must prepare ahead of time. This might be readings, a video, a collection of photographs, etc. Have additional materials on hand to extend the range of materials for analysis and discussion. See the examples of "group discussion triggers" below.

Get help from technology
To participate effectively, students must do their homework. You can help them prepare by previewing some of the discussion online, using Moodle forum. Give students brief readings and a few relevant questions. Have them post responses to Moodle before class. In class, you can call up their responses as discussion starters. You can also print out and distribute some of the responses (removing names). Have students read these selections as discussion starters.

Keeping the discussion focused
If we let students generate ideas, how do we keep the discussion focused and moving in the direction we wish (we are the expert guides)? You best ally is a whiteboard pen. As students contribute their ideas, write them on the board. You can either provide preexisting categories (social, economic, political issues, for example), or you can merely list the ideas and have the class try to organize and classify them later.

Use followup prompts if a student raises what you consider a tangential or wrong response. Rephrase and recast what the student said, moving the idea back toward your target list.

Focus on Big Ideas
"Nobody can be a good reasoner unless by constant practice he has realized the importance of getting hold of the big ideas and of hanging onto them like grim death." A. N. Whitehead, 1929. An idea is "big" if it helps us make sense of lots of confusing experiences and seemingly isolated facts. It’s like the picture that connects the dots or a simple rule of thumb in a complex field.

For example: “the water cycle” is a big idea for connecting seemingly discrete and one-way events (the water seems to just disappear as it evaporates). “The heroic cycle” enables us to comprehend literature from many places, cultures, and times. “Measure twice, cut once” is a profound reminder about how to avoid heartache and inefficiency in building anything.

A big idea is thus a way of seeing better and working smarter, not just a vague notion or another piece of knowledge. It is more like a lens for looking than another object seen; more like a theme than the details of a narrative; more like an active strategy in your favorite sport or reading than a specific skill. It is a theory, not a detail.

In literacy or history teaching, the important “themes” are big ideas. Why? Because – if used properly – they provide learners with mental schemas or templates that help make sense of all the details of texts that threaten to overwhelm inexperienced readers. If I am alerted to “the heroic quest,” or “the American Dream” I can read and think with more control and insight.

In short: think of “big” as “powerful” not as a large abstract category. An idea is big if it helps us make sense of lots of otherwise meaningless, isolated, inert, or confusing facts. A big idea is a way of usefully
seeing connections, not just another piece of knowledge. It is more like a lens for better looking than something additionally seen; more like a theme than the facts of the story. A big idea is a powerful intellectual tool, from which we can derive more specific and helpful understandings and facts. by Grant Wiggins [Jun 10, 2010 abridged] http://www.authenticeducation.org/ae_bigideas/article.lasso?artid=99

Promote Collaborative Learning; Peer Teaching and Learning
Constructivism assumes (correctly) that students can teach and learn from one another. Give them ample opportunities! Consider giving students, probably in small groups, the opportunity to lead some discussions or to prepare questions and materials for the discussion. See recommended activities in the section on Collaborative Learning below. Encourage students to bring external learning and experiences into the discussions. Most students need much more practice at transferring learning from one domain to another. Perhaps they can relate a concept from a sociology or political science course to the historical issue under discussion. Or perhaps they have travel, work, or other experience that might illuminate the discussion.

What if they won't talk?
Open a brainstorming session. Emphasize there are no wrong answers--the goal is to generate a large quantity of ideas. Step 2 will then be to discuss and analyze the relevance and validity of each idea. Brainstorming can also be done in small groups or pairs, with each group writing down its own list of contributions and then relaying them to the class. Each pair would take turns tossing out ideas which the other student writes down.

Another tactic is to provide more information. Put a document excerpt on the board. Always have additional materials at hand--pertinent selections from primary sources are especially helpful. Or raise a thorny historiographical debate for student consideration and discussion. See section on structured approaches to brainstorming below.

Provide closure
Students can get frustrated if they don't perceive a direction or logical endpoint to a discussion. So, frame every discussion around some "big ideas." At the end, put what you consider key "must-know) points on a PowerPoint slide or a list to display on the projector. Take pains to show students which "big" ideas they developed themselves. Extend the discussion to any issues they did not raise to make certain they understand them and see their relationship to the topic.

Prepare students for next session
Toward the end of a discussion session, leave time to help students prepare for the next session. Plant a seed to get them thinking about the next topic. Perhaps have them brainstorm the topic. Jot down their responses and call them up after the next discussion. Point out when they anticipated an important element of the topic, even before reading or researching it. Or give them a short document fragment to give them a taste of the topic. Ask students how the forthcoming topic relates to or builds upon earlier discussions and issues.

To grade or not to grade discussion participation
The pedagogical literature is somewhat divided on whether to grade discussion participation. The main don't-grade argument is that grading has a chilling effect on participation. Students will clam up for fear of saying the wrong thing or giving a wrong answer. In addition to embarrassment, their grade suffers. The counter argument on behalf of grading is the widespread student belief "if it doesn't count (points), it doesn't matter."
One can subtly encourage quality by referring to or reinforcing good points or questions raised by students. It is also much easier to note simply who spoke and who did not, rather than trying to make qualitative judgments on the fly during the discussion. I also share a class participation rubric with students to sensitize them to what makes for higher-quality comments [see below].

**Supplemental Materials**

**Favorite Discussion Formats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think (Write)</td>
<td>Individual thinks or writes and then discusses with one other</td>
<td>Focuses attention, prepares for larger class discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair Share</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-Taking Pairs</td>
<td>Students share class notes or notes based on complex reading assignments, it is a good idea to give students guidance about note taking in advance</td>
<td>Provides an opportunity for students to teach each other as well as helping them make needed clarifications of complex or detailed material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round Robin</td>
<td>Speak in order moving from one student to another without elaboration can be used with small groups, sections of class or entire class</td>
<td>Good brainstorming, all students participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buzz Groups</td>
<td>One of the most common types, small groups discuss a question or problem report out to entire class</td>
<td>Generate information and ideas in a short period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Triad</td>
<td>One person responds to questions, one generates questions or probes, one listens and takes notes, change roles at least once</td>
<td>Students practice networking, verbal and listening and synthesizing skills, the quality of the question or prompt is important and might require that you give questions to students in advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Debates</td>
<td>Student teams of 4 to 6 debate a topic choosing the side they disagree with, allow sufficient time and resources for preparation</td>
<td>Many benefits including emphasizing research skills and challenging existing assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Play</td>
<td>Students assume a different identity and act out a scenario, it is important to give time for students to consider the scenarios and to ask clarifying questions, can be followed with group or whole class discussions</td>
<td>Create thinking seeing alternative perspectives and teamwork can be enhanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jigsaw</td>
<td>A task or reading is broken into parts, students in small groups develop expertise about one of the parts and then break up into other small groups to teach their expertise to others, the task must be difficult enough to require discussion but simple enough that students can master it</td>
<td>Students learn to take leadership roles and to develop in depth knowledge, this is one of my most often used techniques</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nine Ways to Improve Class Discussions
By: Maryellen Weimer, PhD Teaching Professor Blog SEPTEMBER 30TH, 2015

I once heard class discussions described as “transient instructional events.” They pass through the class, the course, and the educational experiences of students with few lingering effects. Ideas are batted around, often with forced participation; students don’t take notes; and then the discussion ends—it runs out of steam or the class runs out of time. If asked a few days later about the exchange, most students would be hard-pressed to remember anything beyond what they themselves might have said, if that. So this post offers some simple suggestions for increasing the impact of the discussions that occur in our courses.

1. Be more focused and for less time – It’s easy to forget that students are newcomers to academic discourse. Academics can go on about a topic of interest for days; hours, if it’s a department meeting. Students aren’t used to exchanges that include points, counterpoints, and connections to previous points with references to research, related resources, and previous experience. Early on, students do better with short discussions—focused and specific. Think 10 minutes, maybe 15.

2. Use better hooks to launch the discussion – Usually discussion starts with a question. That works if it’s a powerful question—one immediately recognized as a “good question.” Prompts of that caliber require thoughtful preparation; they don’t usually pop into our minds the moment we need them. But questions aren’t the only option. A pithy quotation, a short scenario that requires content application, a hypothetical case or situation, a synopsis of a relevant current event—all of these can jump-start a discussion.

3. Pause – Stop the discussion and ask students to think about what’s been said so far, or ask them to write down what struck them as a key idea, a new insight, a question still unanswered, or maybe where they think the discussion should go next. Think short pauses, 30 seconds, maybe a minute.

4. Have note takers – Ask whether there are two or three students who’d be willing to take notes during the discussion. Then post their notes on the course website or otherwise distribute them. This should count as class participation! It gives introverts a way to contribute comfortably. You might encourage some extrovert who has tendency to over-participate to make your day by volunteering to quietly take copious notes, which he or she could use to summarize the discussion when it ends.

5. Talk less or not at all – Too many classroom discussions are still dominated by teacher talk. You will talk less if you assign yourself a recorder role. You’ll key in on the essence of comments, record the examples, and list the questions. You’ll be listening closely and will probably hear more than you usually do because you aren’t thinking about what to say next. Or you can function as the discussion

| Test-Taking Teams | Students take a test individually, hand it in and then retake as a group, often students study together prior to taking test, can be used for short quizzes or for exams covering more material | Students’ develop mastery, appreciation for group learning, individual accountability |
| Send A Problem | One group proposes an answer to a problem and without looking at the first solution sends the problem to another group, the third group evaluates the solutions, begin by giving all the groups a different problem | Students teach each other problem solving skills and learn to compare and evaluate multiple solutions to problems |
facilitator. Recognize those who are volunteering. Encourage others to speak. Point out good comments that merit response. Ask what questions the conversation is raising. Challenge those with different views to share them. Do everything you can to make it a good student discussion.

6. **End with something definitive** – Return to the hook that launched the discussion. Ask some students to write a one-sentence summary of the discussion. Ask other students to list the questions the discussion has answered. And ask a third group to identify unanswered questions that emerged during the discussion. Finally, use what students have written to help them bring closure to the discussion.

7. **Use the discussion – Keep referring to it!** “Remember that discussion we had about X? What did we conclude?” Refer to individual comments made during the discussion. “Paula had an interesting insight about Y. Who remembers what she said? Does it relate to this topic?” And if you really want students to listen up and take discussions seriously, use a comment made in the discussion as the frame for a short essay question on the next exam or quiz.

8. **Invite students to suggest discussion topics** – If the suggestion is good, reward the student with a few bonus points and ask him or her to launch the discussion by explaining why it’s a topic that merits discussion.

9. **Discuss discussions** – Briefly is fine. “Why do teachers use them? What keeps everyone listening? How do they help us learn?” Or do a debriefing of a discussion that just occurred. “So, the discussion we just had, say we’d like to improve it. What would you recommend?”

http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/nine-ways-to-improve-class-discussions/

**Suggestions for Creating Effective Online & Face-to-Face Discussion Prompts**

1. **Craft questions that drive students to go beyond “just the facts.”** It’s important to check students’ knowledge of the core concepts you’re covering in your class. However, those types of questions don’t go far in fostering an engaging online discussion. Instead, you’ll want to create discussion questions that require analysis and further investigation into the topics you’re covering through your readings and lectures.

   As Bonnie Tensen suggests in the presentation “Reenergizing Online Discussions,” you could also ask students to post their own critical-thinking questions about the assigned reading or viewings. Do stipulate that these questions should require an answer that stretches beyond a simple “yes” or “no”; the questions should be open ended, require short answers, and call for analysis, comparison, or interpretation of the ideas presented.

2. **Consider how to use your questions as a means of creating community in the class.** Often, students don’t feel connected to their classmates in their online courses because they don’t truly have a chance to get to know them. Ideally, the discussion board is a place for them to make those connections! By asking questions that encourage personal responses to the material, as well as a degree of self-disclosure, you can help students develop more of a sense of community… and increased engagement in the class.

   Our previous post “Creating Community in Online Courses: Faculty Tips” offers a number of suggestions from instructors who have been able to foster this sense of community in their online courses. Here’s a sampling of their tips:
• Frame questions that generate multiple views. Ask students to respond to other student’s posts. Model the behavior by sharing information about yourself or your research. It helps to break down barriers. —Krista R. Feinberg, Lakeland College (Sheboygan, WI)

• I teach psychology and find it helps to use assignments early on that require discussion around personal (but not confidential) experiences and relate them to the text or other material. —James Rollin, Saginaw Valley State University (University Center, MI)

3. Design activities that encourage students to explore course topics at a deeper level. In their chapter on “Technology and Teaching,” included in McKeachie’s Teaching Tips, Erping Zhu and Matthew Kaplan suggest “…using role plays, simulations, and pros and cons” as a means of increasing engagement and dialogue on your online discussion board (Zhu and Kaplan, 247).

You might create a scenario based on an important course concept, and ask each student to discuss that scenario from the perspective of one of the individuals involved in or affected by it. Or, you could link to a journal article, blog post, chapter excerpt, or case study, and ask students to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the ideas that the authors proposed, requiring them to support their positions with material gleaned from other readings or your lectures.

4. Relate the questions to students’ real-life experiences and challenges. As noted in a previous post about engaging discussions: questions that connect class topics to students’ real-life challenges and choices can create meaningful and engaging dialogue in the classroom. Throughout the term, include some discussion questions that prompt students to relate course topics to their own experiences. You could also challenge them to apply theories and concepts to scenarios that they have faced, or will face, on the job.

http://blog.cengage.com/successful-strategies-for-creating-online-discussion-prompts 10/16/2015

Assessing Class Participation
Adapted from www.stephenbrookfield.com

Part of your grade for this class is based on your participation in discussion. Participating in discussion does not necessarily mean talking a lot or showing everyone else that you know or have studied a lot. Good discussion participation involves people trying to build on, and synthesize, comments from others, and on showing appreciation for others’ contributions. It also involves inviting others to say more about what they are thinking. Remember, we are a community of inquirers, so we all contribute as learners and teachers. Some of the most helpful things you can do are call for a quiet interlude, bring a new resource to the classroom, or post an observation on line. So there are multiple ways quieter learners can participate.

Below are some examples of how you can participate effectively in discussion.

1. Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says.
2. Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said.
3. Bring in a resource (a reading, web link, video) not covered in the syllabus but adds new information/perspectives to our learning.
4. Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions & make this link explicit in your comment.
5. Use body language (in only a slightly exaggerated way) to show interest in what different speakers are saying.
6. Post a comment on the course chat room that summarizes our conversations so far and/or suggests new directions and questions to be explored in the future.
7. Make a comment (online if this is appropriate) indicating that you found another person's ideas interesting or useful.
8. Be specific as to why this was the case. Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said.
9. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person's thoughts – this can be done online.
10. Make a comment on your CIQ that prompts us to examine discussion dynamics.
11. When you think it's appropriate, ask the group for a moment's silence to slow the pace of conversation to give you, and others, time to think.
12. Make a comment that at least partly paraphrases a point someone has already made.
13. Make a summary observation that takes into account several people's contributions & that touches on a recurring theme in the discussion (online if you like).
14. Ask a cause and effect question - for example, "can you explain why you think it's true that if these things are in place such and such a thing will occur?"
15. Find a way to express appreciation for the enlightenment you have gained from the discussion. Try to be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better. Again this can be done online if this suits you better.

Principles of Facilitative Teaching
[from Learner-Centered Teaching by Maryellen Weimer [ed ed. 2014]]

In the learner-centered model, the teacher takes on the role of facilitator: guide, coach, conductor, midwife, gardener. Why? Because the students are doing the work of problem solving, reviewing, discussing and creating. Initially, this may feel like the teacher’s job has been replaced by her students. However, the teacher’s voice becomes more critical because she is now engaging her students as they work through higher order thinking skills of application, evaluation, and creation. [Slatta notes in brackets.]

1. **Let Your Students Do More Learning Tasks**: Set your students up to do all of the things mentioned in the quote at the top of this post. The challenge we encounter here is that our students aren’t going to do these tasks as well or in the same way as we would. It’s like learning to walk--they will pick up the skills of our discipline as they try it out. [Learn by doing.]

2. **Teachers Do Less Telling so that Students Can Do More Discovering**: Most teachers I know spend an entire class session reading through their syllabus. Weimer offers a totally different and interactive approach where here students explore and discuss the elements and structure of the course. [Be transparent--help students understand WHY they do things.]

3. **Teachers Do Instructional Design Work More Carefully**: In short, the lion’s share of a teacher’s work is done before class. I think that online teachers have an edge here because their classroom time has been displaced and is most often asynchronous. For those of us moving our courses to a hybrid format, we are offered an opportunity to rethink and better integrate the learning activities in our courses. Instead of just preparing lectures, we are designing learning activities for our students to participate in. [Students do the work of historians rather than merely absorbing the conclusions reached by other historians.]

4. **Faculty More Explicitly Model How Experts Learn**: In the place of a polished talk, we explain our own process: what we do when we encounter difficult learning tasks, how do we decide if a resource is worthwhile, and how they are encountering new information in their field. She explains that “Students
need to see examples of learning as hard, messy work, even for experienced learners.” [Share with students your drafts, your works-in-progress.]

5. Faculty Encourage Student to Learn From and With Each Other: Most students and teachers groan when they hear about “group work.” But I think that’s because we expect collaborative projects to work right out of the box. They don’t. Later in the chapter, the author shares one such experience and what she learned from it. Given time by perseverance, and improvement through redesign and skill development, group work can be a very effective teaching strategy. [Students tend to tune one another out. Develop strategies to keep everyone focused and listening actively—regardless of how is speaking.]

6. Faculty and Students Work to Create Climates for Learning: When students are given responsibility for their classroom experience, classroom management becomes a secondary issue. [Create a collaborative learning laboratory in which instructor models learning and teaching—and students also do both.]

7. Faculty Use Evaluation to Promote Learning: Students learn to evaluate their own work and the work of their peers. Teachers still issue grades, but the evaluation process becomes formative as well as evaluative. [Formative assessment gives students timely feedback to improve future performance. Summative assessment (final grades) reflects overall performance but provides no on-the-fly information to improve.]

Three approaches to group learning

1. **Cooperative learning:** In this form of group learning, students work together in a small group so that everyone participates on a collective task that has been clearly assigned (Cohen, 1994, p. 3). A classic example of this approach is Think-Pair-Share (Barkley et al, 2014), in which the teacher assigns a question and then students think for a minute independently, form a pair to discuss their answers, and share their answers with a larger group. The goal is that all students achieve similar outcomes. Each student considers the same teacher-assigned question, and they all work on performing the same tasks: thinking, pairing, and sharing.

2. **Collaborative learning:** In this form of group learning, students and faculty work together to create knowledge. The process should enrich and enlarge them (Matthews, 1996, p. 101). An example of this form of group work is a collaborative paper (Barkley et al, 2014). In a collaborative group, students work together to create a product that is greater than any individual might achieve alone. They do not all necessarily do the same task, however, but rather may divide the work among themselves according to their interests and skills. The goal is not for the same learning to occur, but rather that meaningful learning occurs.

3. **Reciprocal peer teaching:** In this form of group learning, one student teaches others, who then reciprocate in kind (Major et al, 2015). Arguably, this approach is a variation of either cooperative learning or collaborative learning, depending on the task. An example that leans more toward cooperative learning is the jigsaw, in which base groups study together to become experts (Barkley et al, 2014). The base groups then split, and new groups are formed with a member of each base group serving as an expert in a particular area. An example that leans more toward collaborative learning is microteaching, in which individual students take turns teaching the full class (Major et al, 2015).

**Pedagogical considerations** How do we choose the right pedagogical tool for the learning task? In choosing any approach to group learning, it is essential to start with the learning goal. What should students be able to do after the completion of the activity? If the goal is for them all to gain the same information, cooperative learning may be the best approach. If the goal is for them to create new
knowledge, then collaborative learning may be the best approach. If it is to share knowledge, reciprocal peer teaching may be a good approach.

**Learner considerations:** When making any pedagogical consideration, it is essential to consider the students. Their level of expertise is important, for example, and if they are new to a subject and need foundational knowledge, then cooperative learning may be the best approach. If they are advanced students, then collaborative learning or reciprocal peer teaching may be more engaging for them.

**Contextual considerations:** While contextual considerations are not always the most glamorous, they certainly play a part in our ability to carry out group work. For example, if the class is a large one, a short collaborative activity such as a Think-Pair-Share may simply be more manageable than a long-term collaborative activity; likewise, reciprocal microteaching may be a great approach in an online class but would not be as feasible in a large lecture scenario. A collaborative paper might be a great way to introduce graduate seminar students who work as research assistants at a flagship university to the process of co-authoring, but the same approach might not work as well for first-year students at a community college.

The intent here is not to prescribe a specific approach based on a checklist of considerations. Rather, it is to say that, as teachers, we need to know what the instructional options are and to take into account the goals, the learners, and the learning context when making pedagogical decisions. Ultimately, we are in the best place to know what will work best in our unique situations, and it is thus our responsibility to choose well when deciding to use group work in the college classroom.

Author: Join Claire Howell Major for the live online seminar Choosing and Using Group Activities in the College Classroom.

**Collaborative learning/ Peer Teaching Techniques**

- **Stump your partner**
  - Students take a minute to create a challenging question based on the lecture content up to that point.
  - Students pose the question to the person sitting next to them.
  - To take this activity a step further, ask students to write down their questions and hand them in. These questions can be used to create tests or exams. They can also be reviewed to gauge student understanding.

- **Think-pair-share/ Write-pair-share**
  - The instructor poses a question that demands analysis, evaluation, or synthesis.
  - Students take a few minutes to think through an appropriate response.
  - Students turn to a partner (or small groups) and share their responses. Take this a step further by asking students to find someone who arrived at an answer different from their own and convince their partner to change their mind.
  - Student responses are shared within larger teams or with the entire class during a follow-up discussion.

- **Catch-up**
  - Stop at a transition point in your lecture.
  - Have students turn to a partner or work in small groups to compare notes and ask clarifying questions.
• After a few minutes, open the floor to a few questions.

- **Fishbowl debate**
  - Ask students to sit in groups of three.
  - Assign roles. For example, the person on left takes one position on a topic for debate, the person on right takes the opposite position, and the person in the middle takes notes and decides which side is the most convincing and provides an argument for his or her choice.
  - Debrief by calling on a few groups to summarize their discussions.

- **Case study**
  - Create four to five case studies of similar difficulty.
  - Have students work in groups of four or five to work through and analyze their case study.
  - Provide 10-15 minutes (or adequate time to work through the cases).
  - Walk around and address any questions.
  - Call on groups randomly and ask that students share their analysis. Continue until each case study has been addressed.

See also [http://teambasedlearning.org](http://teambasedlearning.org)

- Create jigsaws. See [https://www.jigsaw.org/](https://www.jigsaw.org/) for instructions.

**Group Discussion Triggers**

Effective ways to present a common experience to engage a group in a discussion. Awareness of complexity and enhanced understanding result when learners discuss the meaning of events with each other. But to be successful, groups need a common experience to draw them into participation, establish a personal connection with the content, and provide a shared referent from which to exemplify their ideas. There are many kinds of triggers, but all are designed to precede group discussion. Participants, therefore, become connected with both a concrete example of the content and each other.

- **Short Readings:** Brief assignments to read in class (especially effective are contrasting viewpoints).
- **Short Writings:** Students write a short essay based upon assigned readings done outside the classroom and bring the essays to class. Student may quote from their essays, or students exchange essays and read a strong paragraph from one another's work.
- **Brainstorm:** Generate as many relevant concepts, views, and ideas as possible in a short amount of time. Stage 2: Evaluate the list, looking for fundamental concepts and the most relevant issues.
- **First Person Experience:** Works written in a personal voice, autobiographies, biographies, oral histories, diaries, and memoirs, when used as counterpoints to abstract texts, bridge the gap between their own lives and the content under study. Students more readily take part in discussions when they can personally relate to the material.
- **Individual Task with Review:** Problems to solve that apply the concepts presented. Students complete a worksheet or other task and compare the results with their neighbors before the whole class discusses the answers.
- **Self-assessment Questionnaires:** Short surveys of learner attitudes and values.
- **Total Group Response:** Human Graph: Learners literally take a stand on an imaginary graph or continuum. The first few volunteers justify their choice of position, and then the remainder of the class joins them without comment.
- **Case Studies:** A case study is the factual account of human experience centered in a problem or issue faced by a person, group or organization. It can raise a variety of complex issues and stimulate discussions of alternative viewpoints. Typically, case studies are written objectively and include a brief overview of the situation, its context, and the major decisions that must be made. Rather than expecting
learners to have a right answer, learners develop their ability to articulate their thoughts, frame problems, generate solutions, and evolve principles that may apply to other situations.

- **Visual Studies**: Seeing first hand creates a common ground. Photographic essays, video programs, and personally made video recordings are examples of ways to bring into the classroom direct depictions of the concepts being discussed.

- **Role Play**: Learners explore human relations problems by enacting problem situations and then discussing the enactments. Together learners explore feelings, attitudes, values, and problem solving strategies. Individuals find personal meaning within their social world and resolve personal dilemmas with the assistance of the social group.


**Brainstorming exercises**

**Free-writing** Find a clock, watch, or timer to help you keep track of time. Choose a topic, idea, question you would like to consider. It can be a specific detail or a broad concept—whatever you are interested in exploring at the moment. Write (on paper or on a computer) for 7-10 minutes non-stop on that topic. If you get stuck and don’t know what to say next, write “I’m stuck and don’t know what to say next…” or try asking yourself “what else?” until another idea comes to you. Do not concern yourself with spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Your goal is to generate as much as you can about the topic in a short period of time and to get used to the feeling of articulating ideas on the page. It’s ok if it’s messy or makes sense only to you. You can repeat this exercise several times, using the same or a variety of topics connecting to your subject. Read what you have written to see if you have discovered anything about your subject or found a line of questioning you’d like to pursue.

**Clustering/Webbing** Find a clock, watch, or timer to help you keep track of time. Put a word you’d like to explore in the center of a piece of paper and put a circle around it. As fast as you can, free-associate or jot down anywhere on the page as many words as you can think of associated with your center word. If you get stuck, go back to the center word and launch again. Speed is important and quantity is your goal. Don’t discount any word or phrase that comes to you, just put it down on the page. Jot words for between 5-10 minutes. When you are finished you will have a page filled with seemingly random words. Read around on the page and see if you have discovered anything or can see connections between any ideas.

**Listing** On a piece of paper list all the ideas you can think of connected to subjects you are considering exploring. Consider any idea or observation as valid and worthy of listing. List quickly and then set your list aside for a few minutes. Come back and read your list and do the exercise again.

**Cubing** This technique helps you look at your subject from six different points of view (imagine the 6 sides of a cube and you get the idea). Take your topic or idea and 1) describe it, 2) compare it, 3) associate it with something else you know, 4) analyze it (meaning break it into parts), 5) apply it to a situation you are familiar with, 6) argue for or against it. Write at a paragraph, page, or more about each of the six points of view on your subject.

**Journalistic questions** Write these questions down the left hand margin of a piece of paper: Who? What? Where? When? How? And Why? Think about your topic in terms of each question.

**What? So What? Now what?** To begin to explore an idea first ask yourself, “What do I want to explore?” and write about that topic for a page or more. Then read what you have written and ask “So what?” of the ideas expressed so far. Again, write for a page or more. Finally ask yourself, “Now
what?” to begin to think about what else you might consider or where you might go next with an idea.

**Defining terms** Although this suggestion is simple and may seem obvious, it is often overlooked. Write definitions for key terms or concepts in your own words. Find others’ articulations of the terms in your course readings, the dictionary, or through conversations and compare the definitions to your own. Seek input from your instructor if you can’t get a working definition of a term for yourself.

**Summarizing positions** Sometimes it’s helpful to simply describe what you know as a way to solidify your own understanding of something before you try to analyze or synthesize new ideas. You can summarize readings by individual articles or you can combine what you think are like perspectives into a summary of a position. Try to be brief in your description of the readings. Write a paragraph or up to a page describing a reading or a position.

**Metaphor writing** Metaphors or similes are comparisons sometimes using the words “like” or “as.” For example, “writing is like swimming” or the “sky is as blue as map water” or “the keyboard wrinkled with ideas.” When you create a metaphor, you put one idea in terms of another and thereby create a new vision of the original idea. Sometimes it may be easier to create a metaphor or simile may help you understand your view of an idea before you can put it fully into sentences or paragraphs. Write a metaphor or simile and then explain to someone why your metaphor works or what it means to you.

**Applying ideas to personal circumstance or known situations** Sometimes ideas come clearest when you can put them in a frame that is meaningful to you. Take a concept from your reading assignments and apply it so a situation in your own life or to a current event with which you are familiar. You may not end up using this application in your final draft, but applying it to something you know will help you to understand it better and prepare you to analyze the idea as your instructor directs.

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### Class Participation Rubric for Frequency & Quality of Remarks

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<tr>
<td>• Attends all classes and <strong>always contributes to class discussions</strong> by [for example]</td>
<td>Attends class regularly and <strong>sometimes contributes</strong> to the discussion in the ways listed to the left.</td>
<td>• Attends class regularly but <strong>rarely contributes</strong> to the discussions. • Expressing one's views in public is an essential success skill--practice--you'll improve.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. raising thoughtful questions</td>
<td>2. connecting relevant issues</td>
<td><strong>To improve</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. building on others’ ideas</td>
<td>4. presenting an interpretation of past events</td>
<td>1. While reading documents, jot down questions to ask in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. expanding the class perspective</td>
<td>6. appropriately challenging assumptions and perspectives</td>
<td>2. Read in class from your assigned documents or other materials.</td>
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<td>7. contributing relevant information from another class or venue</td>
<td>8. identifying contradictions in the primary sources</td>
<td>3. Be an active listener--respond to what your classmates say.</td>
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<td>4. Strive to bring learning from elsewhere into the discussion (transfer knowledge).</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>identifying ethnocentric or otherwise questionable statements in the documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>recalling links to previous themes &amp; issues</td>
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Original by Susan Ambrose, Eberly Center, Carnegie-Mellon University; adapted by Professor Rich Slatta