



PARTICIPATING IN CLASS DISCUSSION

ESEM FALL 2021

PREPARATION: MINDSET

This semester, I will...

- Be open-minded and respectful of others' perspectives and opinions.
- Actively listen to others in the class and try to understand where they're coming from.
- Set a goal to speak at least once per class.
- Create space for others to speak and encourage others to join the conversation if I notice that I've been talking a lot.
- Learn the names of the other students in class so I can refer to what they say.

PREPARATION: BEFORE CLASS

I will:

- Do the reading.
- Note my reactions: agreement, disagreement, confusion, interest.
- Prepare at least one question or comment to bring to class.
- Choose a passage from the text that I don't understand so I can share it with the class and figure it out together.
- Circle unfamiliar vocabulary or references to people or titles of works that I've never heard of. Look up one or two of them to share with the class, but don't waste too much time on it.

DURING CLASS: ETIQUETTE

In a small class, I don't have to raise my hand. I'll wait for a pause and speak when ready.

Address everyone in the class, not just the instructor

Focus on coming to the best possible interpretation, decision, or solution, not on winning

Give others credit for their ideas. Example: "Malala had an interesting idea during our small group conversation..."

Restate or ask for clarification if what someone has said isn't clear to me

Avoid long stories, anecdotes, or examples

Give encouragement and approval to others (nod my head, smile)

Make eye contact with other students in class to show that I'm engaging with the group.

NOTETAKING

Taking notes during a discussion differs from notetaking during lectures. It goes by fast, there are multiple speakers, and usually no visual aids.

- Focus on “the gist,” key points, questions raised by instructor and other students, and key terms
- Use shorthand to write down reactions: !! good point, I agree, I need to think about this more; Y? why?
- If I'm too busy participating to take notes, I'll take a minute at the end of class to write down a couple of take-aways.

STRATEGIES

Ask a question: Why, How, I wonder, What if?

Bring a confusing passage to everyone's attention and get the group to work together to figure it out.

Point out contradictions or implications.

Make connections to other course texts or concepts from other classes you're taking.

"Anchor" your comments by referring to a specific word, sentence, or passage in the text.

When someone poses a question, don't assume there's only one answer. Spend time exploring alternatives or thinking of ways to make the answer more specific.

If you have something to say but the conversation changes direction before you get to say it, you can contribute anyway: "I'd like to return to the previous topic for a second..."

WAYS TO AGREE OR DISAGREE

1) Practice listening by trying to formulate in your own words the point that the previous speaker made

2) State your position relative to the previous speaker's

- Agree, with a difference. "I agree because [new reason or evidence]."
- Disagree, and explain why.
- Yes, but...partially agree and then disagree. "I see your point about how dangerous tigers are, but I think if students wore protective gear, it would be OK to let them roam campus."
- No, but...partially disagree and then agree. "I'd prefer to have a composting center on campus rather than composting in my dorm room, but I agree that composting is the right solution to food waste."

TROUBLESHOOTING

What if I never talk in class? Will the professor think I'm not doing the work?

- Write down one or two Qs that you hear during class and email your professor your answers later. Or, write down one person's comment that you react strongly to and respond to it.
- Talk to your professor during office hours and ask for suggestions of other ways you could communicate your ideas with the class.

What if I state a position strongly and then change my mind?

- It's OK to change your mind! In fact, it's a sign of a productive discussion if you reconsider your opinion after weighing new evidence and other points of view.

What if the professor calls on me and I'm not ready to respond?

- Take a risk and try to answer anyway. Who cares if you're wrong?
- Say, "I'm not sure yet—I need more time to think. Could you come back to me?"

CONFIDENCE

Introverts can be fully engaged without saying a word. It takes energy to listen, and it can be hard to respond quickly when you're processing. Set your own standards for engagement.

Speak loudly and slowly. Enunciate.

Don't worry if listeners ask you to repeat yourself or can't understand what you mean right away. Just try again.

You're curious and eager to learn, and your classmates are too. They're genuinely interested in your worldview and perspective on the texts or course material.