TEACHING ENGAGEMENT TEP PROGRAM

Leading Effective Discussions

Discussion Basics

Keep in mind these are strategies, not rules. The classroom is dynamic. Pay attention to student needs and do whatever works best in the moment.

1. Creating a Welcoming Space

Establishing Community

Room Set-up: Look at the space in your room. Ask yourself what physical space is most conducive to conversation. Circles often work best; everyone can be seen easily. Where are you in the circle? Do you want to remain at the head of the class? Stand near the board? Move around the room?

First Day Activities:

Go Round — Have each student say one sentence about what she would most like to learn from discussion section or what makes her feel most comfortable and excited to participate in group discussion.

Introductions — Pair students and have them talk for five minutes about the most interesting thing they've done. Then have them introduce each other to the rest of the class.

Establishing Expectation

Set Ground Rules: Ask the group to brainstorm what makes a discussion useful, respectful and welcoming. As a group, create a "code of conduct" with guidelines such as "Respond to ideas; refrain from personal comments."

Clarify Participation: Make clear how they'll be evaluated for discussion. Tell them your goals for the class and the ways in which their participation can contribute. How often do you expect them to speak? Is volunteering necessary? Encourage them to take notes; discussion is as meaningful and useful as lecture.

Offer Varied Options: On the first day of class, encourage any students who feel uncomfortable speaking in front of the group to contact you in office hours or by email, so that you can discuss alternative ways to engage their participation in class.

Feedback Cycles

Verbal: Especially in the beginning, verbally acknowledge their contributions; let them know you appreciate their participation and thoughtfulness. Appreciate questions as much as statements. Remember to be even-handed, respond supportively to all comments regardless of speaker or point of view. Address inappropriate comments quickly and calmly; remind them of the guidelines they created.

Non-verbal: Model attentive behavior; look at the person speaking and limit distracting movements. While it's occasionally necessary to look around and monitor the rest of the class or glance at your watch or make notes on the board, try to keep distracting movement to a minimum.

Respond: Be aware of students' body language. If they are slumped in their seats or unusually distracted, change your discussion strategy.

A Balance of Voices

Managing Dominant Voices: Interrupt gently; wait for the speaker to pause for breath and then say, "Thank you." Or begin to reflect and summarize what they've said so far (model brevity). Whatever you do or say, it should be gentle and without negative charge.

Encouraging Reluctant Voices: Periodically solicit input from those who haven't yet spoken, either as a group ("Would anyone who hasn't spoken like to contribute?") or by name. You can also use the reading responses to ask directed questions. [For example, "Some of you said in your reading responses that you thought the example McDougal used only applied to a nuclear family and might not be true for other kinds of households. Can anyone speak more about that?"]

2. Preparation

For Students

Reading Questions: Give students questions to think about as they read. They're more likely to consider these questions if you require them to turn in written responses. You can also ask them to prepare discussion topics or questions.

For You

What are your goals for discussion? Comprehension? Analysis? Connection? What needs to be covered? It will be different for every discussion. Make a list of your goals and material to be covered as well as questions designed to elicit this material. It's also useful to keep up with their previous reading responses so you know which concepts they find difficult and which they're interested in.

3. Useful kinds of questions

Comprehension

Can they reflect the author's argument in their own words?

[For example, "What is Freud's thesis in this chapter?"]

[For example, "How does the id differ from the super-ego?"]

Context

How does the article/theory reflect their personal experience or current events?

[For example, "How did you learn your multiplication tables? Was it by rote or experiential?]

[For example, Does Wolf's theory accurately describe today's fashion magazines?]

Connections

How does the article/theory relate to other class material?

[For example, "What would Marx say about Smith's model of economic behavior?"]

[For example, "Would the main character in 'Comfort' have objected to teaching a unit on creationism?"]

Formal Choices

How do the formal choices and author's perspective change your understanding of the material?

[For example, "Was the article funny? Did that make you more or less likely to accept its thesis?"]

For example, "What assumptions about human nature does the author make?"]

Questions are not the only way to generate conversation.
You can use pictures, movies, music and other media/exercises as conversation starters.

4. Your Role as Facilitator

Moderator

Track the list of speakers. Clearly signal students who raise their hand, so they know you've acknowledged their desire to speak and can concentrate on listening. Try to list in the order you saw their signals or you can give preference to students who haven't yet contributed.

Hold an awareness of time and material that needs to be covered.

Translator/Connector

Reflect. Frame what students say in the context of the larger questions or in relationship to what has been said in the discussion so far.

[For example, "So you agree that education should be experiential, but feel that to use this method exclusively would keep you from covering the breadth of material necessary?"]

Be as accurate as possible. These have to be genuine questions or it feels pushy and rhetorical.

Use the Board. Make active lists and diagrams. Emphasize connections and dichotomies the class has noticed by circling sections or drawing arrows across columns. This is especially important for including visual and kinetic learners.

Representing the Text
It's okay to "correct" students on textual accuracy; you can ask questions that invite other students to redirect misunderstandings.

[For example, "Did she feel more or less conflicted after meeting her biological father?"]

Introducing Multiple Perspectives
You can and should introduce counter-arguments that the students haven't surfaced but that are common enough to be important arguments, or you can solicit potential counter-arguments from them.

[For example," Why might someone object to stem-cell research? What if you believed stem cells could experience distress?"]

5. Alternatives to Whole Class Discussion (see also "Discussion Techniques" Handout)

Anonymous Cards
Students write their responses on index cards that are then mixed and read by you or other students.

Varying Group Size (Sliding Groups)
You can begin discussion by pairing students and, after five or ten minutes, pairing couples to make groups of four. You can vary group size as appropriate during a discussion.

Online Discussion Boards
Online tools such as forums offer a discussion board function that lets you pose questions and have students "post" responses to these questions and each other's posts. Students can do so anonymously, in their own time.

6. Evaluation

Wrap-up
A few minutes before the end of class, stop and summarize the major points of discussion. This practice helps students retain the content of discussion and encourages them to understand discussion as a content-generating exercise, similar in importance and relevance to a lecture.

Quality vs. Quantity
In evaluating student participation remember that students have different needs, norms and modes around public discourse. Consider the quality of contribution in the context of discussion goals and personal difficulty.

Self-Assessment
Keep track of which tactics work best for you and your class. Keep a list of activities and questions that generate the most fruitful discussion. In your course evaluations be sure to ask questions about the efficacy of discussion, student comfort level, etc. You can also solicit immediate, anonymous student feedback about discussion using the anonymous cards technique.

Discussion Techniques

Buzz Groups

Steps:

1. Divide students into small groups of three to six (depending on class size). If the students don't know each other well (e.g. early in the course or if it is a very large class), give the groups a minute or two for students to introduce themselves.
2. Have each group select someone who will report for the group.
3. Introduce a problem or question and ask each group to come up with a reasonable hypothesis or answer that includes a specific application of a principle or development of a concept.
4. Explain that each member of the group is to contribute one idea about the problem or question posed, and then the group is to select its best idea (come to consensus) for reporting to the rest of the class. Have the group write down each member's idea on paper, which you can later collect as a way to assess student understanding (allow students to contribute anonymously). Give the groups from five to fifteen minutes to work together, depending on the complexity of the problem or question.
5. Next have each group report its chosen idea.
6. Initiate discussion in response to the ideas given (e.g. have one group comment on another group's idea or facilitate large group discussion or some other technique, as appropriate). If the class is very large, select only a few of the groups to share but have all groups turn in a written summary that includes the ideas of each member and the group's chosen "best" idea.

Variation: Have students reflect individually on the problem or question before dividing the class into groups. This can help students who are shy or require more time to formulate their thoughts, before the pressure is on to share their idea with their peers.

Value: Buzz groups get everyone to participate without having to do so in front of the whole class, and they foster collaboration among peers for the purpose of group problem solving. This technique also requires students to consider viewpoints other than their own and, working together, to choose a particular view to present and – depending on the discussion format – defend in front of their peers. It is also a good to prioritize ideas for discussion based on students' interests and concerns about the material.

Feedback Discussion

Steps:

1. Divide the class into two groups, with one group forming an inside circle and the other group observing from the outside.
2. Present a designated number of questions on a particular topic and have the inside group discuss them.
3. Have the outside group take notes on inside group dynamics and quality of discussion.
4. Midway through the class period have the two groups switch roles.
5. Throughout the discussion, stay on the outside and don't interfere unless absolutely necessary.
6. Toward the end of the class facilitate a debrief session that addresses two things: (1) the quality of the discussion – did the question/questions asked get answered well? (2) group dynamics – how well did each group work together while on the inside? Did they distribute "air time" equitably? Did they encourage shy people to speak? Did they introduce new questions or insights? Did they challenge each other appropriately? Did they help each other clarify their contributions? Did they make relevant contributions?

Variations:

1. Run two feedback discussions at once (invite a colleague in to help you observe the second group) if you are dealing with a large class and your classroom allows for this in terms of space, acoustics, movable chairs, etc.
2. Have an "empty chair." If someone from the outside circle feels like they have to join in, they can take the empty chair, say their piece and rejoin the outside circle.

Value: Students take initiative to facilitate discussion among themselves without having the instructor in a primary role. Students also learn about group roles and dynamics.

Jigsaw Process

Steps:

1. Have several different assignments pertaining to the same problem or theme prepared ahead of time.
2. Divide the class into groups, each one to complete one of the assignments.
3. Once the assignments are completed, have the groups disperse and students form new groups that contain one member each from the original groups. In this way, each new group will contain an "expert" that has completed each assignment.
4. Now have each student "expert" in turn teach the rest of his/her group about what was learned from completing the assignment. [Be sure to allow sufficient time for each student in the group to present]
5. Finally, have the new groups put all the assignment pieces together and address a larger synthesis question posed by the teacher.

Variation: Have the original student groups complete the assignments outside of class. This can be useful for more complex problems or issues, allowing the students "experts" more time to teach each other and address the synthesis question at the end.

Value: Enables students to make decisions informed by "experts," allows development of research and communications skills, and fosters collaborative problem solving.

Nominal Group Process ('Anonymous Cards')

Steps:

1. Pass out 3 x 5 index cards (or pieces of paper or whatever is convenient for you) to each student
2. If you want to focus class discussion on course material, have the students respond on their cards to a strategic question you have posed. [For example: "Tell me why Medea was or was not justified in killing her children." Or "Write down all the variables you can think of that might affect the reaction between these two compounds."].
3. If you want to focus class discussion on clarifying a concept covered earlier (in lecture, reading, or previous discussion), then have the students pose questions to you. [For example, "Write down any questions you have about yesterday's lecture -- anything you don't understand or have a hard time connecting to the homework."].
4. Collect the cards and redistribute them randomly to the class (explain that it is okay if a student gets her/his own card – no one will know).
5. Have each student read what is on the card she/he has.
6. While students read, write the responses on the board, and cluster them according to topic or theme. Put hash marks on the board next to ideas, issues or questions that are repeated. This gives everyone a visual display of the opinions or priorities of the class as a whole.
7. Once all responses have been given, you can initiate discussion on one of the topics (such as the idea or question that is most popular) using some other discussion technique. Continue discussion by moving from topic to topic as each becomes summarized or clarified.

Variation: Have the cards already distributed on desks at the beginning of class, before students arrive. When it is time for class to start, begin the process. This is a good way to start class periods devoted specifically to discussion (i.e. discussion sections that meet separately from lecture), because it engages students right away and it helps prioritize the discussion agenda for the session. It has the added bonus of signaling to students that they need to arrive at discussion on time and be ready to engage.

Value: Students are often anxious about contributing to discussion because they don't want to look stupid in front of the class. The advantage of the nominal group process is that it minimizes this fear by soliciting anonymous

contributions from everyone – and no one looks stupid. This makes it especially effective to use early in the course to break the ice and set a tone of inclusive participation. Because it solicits contributions from everyone, the technique is also effective at getting everyone to participate in any class climate, whether the majority of students are shy or over-active. Finally, the technique can be useful at any time because it provides instant feedback about a particular issue or question, and it helps prioritize the ideas or questions the students feel are most important.

Poster / Post-It Process

Steps:

1. Divide students into groups of three to five, either randomly or 'strategically' selected (e.g. the instructor forms the groups so that there is a mix of shy and more outgoing students, gender and age balance, etc.).
2. Give each group a number and have them stand next to a poster on the wall with the corresponding number.
3. Have each group elect a 'secretary' that is in charge of a pad of 3"x5" post-it notes.
4. Pose a question or brainstorming task.
5. Ask each group to generate as many ideas as it can, per the question or task, writing each idea on a post-it note and slapping the note on the poster.
6. When the allotted time is up, there are various ways to proceed. For example, each group can:
   a. Report its answers to the rest of the class (or justify and explain its examples)
   b. Use the information on its poster to formulate a concise thesis statement in response to a question
   c. Be asked to consider a new piece of information or question and synthesize the disparate resources.
   d. Comment on the 'usefulness' of one another's information and create a study guide for an exam.

Value: This method is valuable for both students and the instructor. The relatively simple process of brainstorming engages most students, and they tend to be comfortable with small group problem solving. If they start to compare their output with that of their peers, they might be encouraged to put in some extra energy. They are also comfortable with refining 'their' data. Whether students report once or twice, verbally or in writing, the information they need to rely on is all around them and in their own handwriting. The instructor can observe which students contribute to the group efforts and those who stare out the window. This method also provides opportunities for aiding skill development. If the group is having a hard time with a thesis statement, for example, the instructor can observe the material they're working with and deduce whether it is a lack of evidence that's the problem, or if they need additional thesis models. This method can help move a class away from a simple content absorption dynamic. It demands an active classroom, and the quality of the output rests heavily on the amount of preparation and energy students are willing to put into it.

Sliding Groups

Steps:

1. Introduce a topic for discussion. [For example: "*The Book of History* is an important document in the history of China. Today we are going to try to figure out what it says about the politics of Chinese culture at the time."]
2. Have students spend two or three minutes jotting down any ideas, questions or issues they have about the topic. [For example: "Take out a piece of paper and write down some ideas or opinions you have about what *The Book of History* says or does. Anything that comes to mind, as long as it relates to the book or Chinese culture."]
3. Next have students form pairs and discuss the ideas they came up with. What is each person's view on the other's issues? Keep on the sidelines. [For example, "O.K., now pair up with someone and compare notes. Keep working on the question: what was going on in China at the time and why did the authors sit down and write *The Book of History*? Come to some agreement about the purpose of the Book."]
4. Now have each pair join another pair, forming groups of four, and have the four-person groups continue the process of exchanging information and opinions. Again, let the groups form their own ideas, and try not to

answer any questions. If there are questions, have groups write them down. [For example, "Each pair grab another pair to form small groups and keep going. How does *The Book of History* present the world to its readers and why would the authors write it that way?"]

5. Finally, open the topic up to the whole class, using the energy the groups have created. Have each group report on what issues they felt were most important and why. Then get interaction going among the groups: pick one group's issues that you think are particularly valuable and have another group comment on those issues. Then ask groups to relate their own issues to the issues of another group, and so on. Pick a third group to synthesize the points of the first two groups, or whatever feels right. By this time, you should have a fairly lively interaction. [For example: "Group One, you have some points about Chinese culture at the time that are interesting. Can you relate them to Group Three's ideas about what *The Book of History* says about the 'Mandate of Heaven?' Group Two, what do you think of Group One's analysis?"]
6. However, if things start to bog down or sidetrack, "slide" the class into a different format: back into quartets, pairs, or all the way to individual reflection. Give them a question or topic that you feel heads in a productive direction. This topic can come from something said earlier, or your own notes. [For example: "O.K., we've covered ground about the feudal wars, and that is important. But before we get ahead of ourselves, we need to spend a few more minutes on *The Book of History*. Everybody take a sheet of paper and spend a minute writing down your reactions to what the reading said about the purpose of education in Chinese society." (After a minute or two): "Now bring those ideas back to your groups and relate your ideas about the purpose of Chinese education to the purpose of *The Book of History*."]

Value: The "sliding" structure allows you to continue class discussion in a different way when one format doesn't work or stops working. It mixes up the energy in the room and keeps students interacting around the course content, making it harder for topics to get "stale."

Talking Stick ('Torch Passing')

Steps:

1. Pose a question or topic
2. Have each student give an answer in a set amount of time and then pass the stick or torch to the next student (in the circle or line) until all have take a turn

Variation: Each student must speak to the response of the previous student (extending it, critiquing it, etc., depending on the guidelines you set). You can also require that students must wait a set amount of time before responding in order to reflect on their responses (e.g. 30 sec or 1 min). Also, you can ask students to restate what the previous student said before giving a response.

Value: Every student has equal opportunity to contribute. Students must also develop the skills of listening and reflecting (and paraphrasing, depending on the variation used). The technique is best used once a group of students has become familiar with each other and more or less comfortable participating in class. It can be useful because it provides instant feedback about a particular issue or question.

Think – Pair – Share

Steps:

1. Pose a question.
2. Students get into pairs and discuss question, coming to some resolution.
3. Each student pair then shares conclusions with entire class (in large classes, call on as many pairs as time allows).

Variation: Follow-up with large group discussion of key points that arise.

Value: Students engage in critical thinking and collaborative learning, and more shy students do not feel intimidated by a large group process.

Resources

Articles

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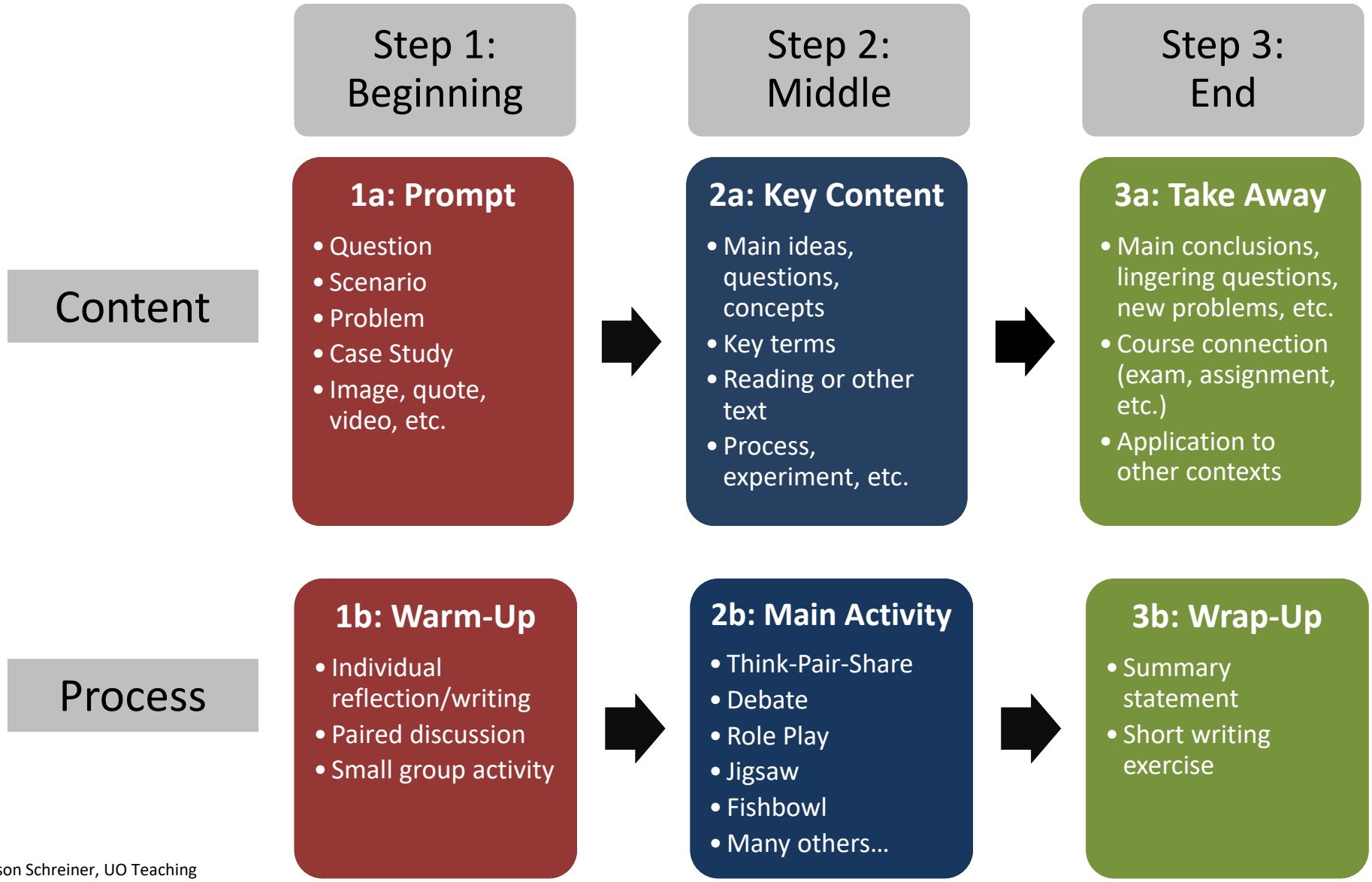
Basic Discussion Plan



Jason Schreiner, UO Teaching Engagement Program, 2019

Table 1:

Socratic Questioning Prompts

Questions for Clarification

- What do you mean by _____?
- What is your main point?
- How does _____ relate to _____?
- Could you put it another way?
- What do you think is the main issue here?
- Let me see if I understand you: do you mean _____ or _____?
- Jane, could you summarize in your own words what Richard has said?
- Richard, is that what you meant?
- Could you give me an example?
- Would this be an example: _____?
- Could you explain that further?

Questions about the Initial Question or Issue

- How can we find out?
- What does this question assume?
- Would _____ put the question differently?
- Can we break this question down at all?
- Does this question lead to other questions or issues?

Questions that Probe Assumptions

- What are you assuming?
- What could we assume instead?
- You seem to be assuming _____. Do I understand you correctly?
- How would you justify taking this for granted?
- Is this always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?

Questions that Probe Reasons and Evidence

- What would be an example?
- Could you explain your reasons to us?
- Are those reasons adequate?
- Do you have any evidence for that?
- How could we find out if that is true?

Questions that Probe Origin or Source Questions

- Where did you get this idea?
- Have you been influenced by media?
- What caused you to feel this way?

Questions that Probe Implications and Consequences

- What are you implying by that?
- What effect would that have?
- What is an alternative?
- If this is the case, then what else must be true?

Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives

- How would other groups of people respond? Why?
- How could you answer the objection that ___ would make?
- Can anyone see this another way?
- What would someone who disagrees say?

Selected questions from a list compiled by Richard Paul, in *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World* (Rohnert Park, CA: Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, 1990). Used with permission.

Types of Questions That Help Keep a Discussion Lively*

Questions That Ask for More Evidence
These questions are asked when participants state an opinion that seems unconnected to what's already been said or that someone else in the group thinks is erroneous, unsupported, or unjustified. The question should be asked as a simple request for more information, not as a challenge to the speaker's intelligence.

Examples:

- How do you know that?
- What data is that claim based on?
- What does the author say that supports your argument?
- Where did you find that view expressed in text?
- What evidence would you give to someone who doubted your interpretation?

Questions That Ask for Clarification
Clarifying questions give speakers the chance to expand on their ideas so that they are understood by others in the group. They should be an invitation to convey one's meaning in the most complete sense possible.

Examples:

- Can you put that another way?
- What's a good example of what you are talking about?
- What do you mean by that?
- Can you explain the term you just used?
- Could you give a different illustration of your point?

Open Questions
Questions that are open-ended, particularly those beginning with how and why, are more likely to provoke the students; thinking and problem-solving abilities and make the fullest use of discussion's potential for expanding intellectual and emotional horizons. Of course, using open questions obliges the teacher to take such responses seriously and to keep the discussion genuinely unrestricted. It is neither fair nor appropriate to ask an open-ended question and then to hold students accountable for failing to furnish one's preferred response. As Van Ments (1990) says, "The experienced teacher will accept the answer given to an open questions and build on it" (p.78). That is, as we all know, easier said than done.

*The content of this handout is from *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, by Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999).

Examples:

- Sauvage says that when facing moral crises, people who agonize don't act, and people who act don't agonize. What does he mean by this? (Follow-up question: Can you think of an example that is consistent with Sauvage's maxim and another that conflicts with it?)
- Racism pervaded American society throughout the twentieth century. What are some signs that things are as bad as ever? What are other signs that racism has abated significantly?
- Why do you think many people devoted their lives to education despite the often low pay and poor working conditions?

Linking or Extension Questions

An effective discussion leader tries to create a dialogical community in which new insights emerge from prior contributions of group members. Linking or extension questions actively engage students in building on one another's responses to questions.

Examples:

- Is there any connection between what you've just said and what Rajiv was saying a moment ago?
- How does your comment fit in with Neng's earlier comment?
- How does your observation relate to what the group decided last week?
- Does your idea challenge or support what we seem to be saying?
- How does that contribution add to what has already been said?

These kinds of questions tend to prompt student-to-student conversation and help students see that discussion is a collaborative enterprise in which the wisdom and experience of each participant contributes something important to the whole. Too often discussion degenerates into a gathering of isolated heads, each saying things that bear no relationship to other comments. The circular response exercise (see Chapter Four), which requires students to ground their comments in the words of the previous speakers, gives students practice in creating discussions that are developmental and cooperative. Skillfully employing linking questions can also help participants practice discussion as "a connected series of spoken ideas" (Leonard, 1991, p. 145).

Hypothetical Questions

Hypothetical questions ask students to consider how changing the circumstances of a case might alter the outcome. They require students to draw on their knowledge and experience to come up with plausible scenarios. Because such questions encourage highly creative responses, they can sometime cause learners to veer off into unfamiliar and seeming tangential realms. But with a group that is reluctant to take risks or that typically answers in a perfunctory, routine manner, the hypothetical question can provoke flights of fancy that can take a group to a new level of engagement and understanding,

Examples:

- How might World War II have turned out if Hitler had not decided to attack the Soviet Union in 1941?
- What might have happened to the career of Orson Welles, in RKO Studios had not tampered with his second film, *The Magnificent Ambersons*?
- In the video we just saw, how might the discussion have been different if the leader had refrained from lecturing the group?
- If Shakespeare had intended Iago to be a tragic or more sympathetic figure, how might he have changed the narrative of *Othello*?

Cause-and-Effect Questions

Questions that provoke students to explore cause-and-effect linkages are fundamental to developing critical thought. Questions that ask students to consider the relationship between class size and academic achievement or to consider why downtown parking fees double on days when there's a game at the stadium encourage them to investigate conventional wisdom. Asking the class-size question might prompt other questions concerning the discussion method itself.

Examples:

- What is likely to be the effect of raising the average class size from twenty to thirty on the ability of learners to conduct interesting and engaging discussions?
- How might halving our class affect our discussion?

Summary and Synthesis Questions

Finally, one of the most valuable types of questions that teachers can ask invites students to summarize or synthesize what has been thought and said. These questions call on participations to identify important ideas and think about them in ways that will aid recall.

Examples:

- What are the one or two most important ideas that emerged from this discussion?
- What remains unresolved or contentious about this topic?
- What do you understand better as a result of today's discussion?
- Based on our discussion today, what do we need to talk about next time if we're to understand this issue better?
- What key word or concept best captures out discussion today?

By skillfully mixing all the different kinds of questions outlined in this chapter, teachers can alter the pace and direction of conversation, keeping students alert and engaged. Although good teachers prepare questions beforehand to ensure variety and movement, they also readily change their plans as the actual discussion proceeds, abandoning prepared questions and formulating new ones on the spot.

References

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*The content of this handout is from *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, by Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999).

Strategies for Getting Students to Prepare for Class Discussion

Reading Responses

The traditional response paper can be effective in preparing students for discussion, especially if you require more than a summary. Having students take the next step and develop arguments about a text – to critique or assess it in some fashion – can provide good fodder for lively discussion. Alternately, you might require a response in the form of bringing questions that students have about the reading, such as asking for clarification of confusing points or asking about how the text relates to other texts or key themes in the course. Students can also respond by bringing short statements about the most significant or confusing points.

Guided Questions

Provide students with a set of questions they should answer when reading. Such questions might be general and appropriate for any text (e.g. who, what, when, where, why, how, etc.), and/or specific, based on the particular content of a given reading. Students can turn in their answers for participation credit, and they can discuss together their answers at the beginning of class as a warm-up for discussion.

Journals

Have students write journal notes in response to readings. Explain that their notes are an expression of their "mind thinking while reading." Students can summarize key points and express what the points mean to them, can relate the reading to other readings or knowledge they already have, or can respond to or critique the reading, and so forth. This process can help students move past initial impressions and consider the material in more depth. It also helps them connect new information to what they already know. [source: Sarah K. Clark, "Making the Review of Assigned Reading Meaningful," *Faculty Focus*, http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/making-the-review-of-assigned-reading-meaningful/]

Top Ten List

Ask student to create their own "Top Ten List" (or "Top Five") of important concepts presented in the reading(s). Perhaps have students collaborate in the creation of these lists, either before class or at the beginning of class. Creating the list can serve as students' review of the material, can highlight for you which areas need further explanation, and can provide you with a (sometimes surprising) glimpse at what students consider to be most important. Students who didn't do the reading can get exposure to ideas and thus be prepared at least minimally for discussing the topic of the day. [source: Sarah K. Clark, "Making the Review of Assigned Reading Meaningful," *Faculty Focus*, http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/making-the-review-of-assigned-reading-meaningful/]

Secondary Sources

Have students locate another viewpoint on the topic – something other than the assigned reading(s) – and bring it to class. Then have students work in pairs or groups to discuss the secondary sources and note areas of difference or overlap with the assigned reading. Such discussions can set the stage for interesting and provocative engagement with the assigned material, and the work of locating secondary sources engages students in the research process as well as exposes them to additional perspectives. [source: Sarah K. Clark, "Making the Review of Assigned Reading Meaningful," *Faculty Focus*, http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/making-the-review-of-assigned-reading-meaningful/]

Provocative Passages

Have students bring to class 2-3 passages from a reading that they found most provocative (interesting, enlightening, problematic, confusing, etc.). Students can get in small groups and take turns sharing a passage and why they chose it, followed by group discussion. Each group can then identify the most provocative passage(s) and share this with the whole class. This activity can also involve a writing component, with students

bringing short, written explanations for each passage to class. The short explanations could also be posted online as part of a repository of student responses to particular readings.

Collaborative Reading

Have students form groups in which each student is responsible for a section of the reading – a "divide and master" approach. When the group meets – prior to class or at the beginning of class – each student is responsible for summarizing her or his section to the other members of the group. They can thus engage the entire article in a collective fashion. A variation is to have students who read the same section meet in a group to discuss it, and then meet with groups that are engaging other sections. In this way, each student can focus more intensely on a smaller chunk of reading and become a "master" on it, yet still engage the entire article via the work of other students. This approach can help make complex or long texts more accessible for students.
[source: Sarah K. Clark, "Making the Review of Assigned Reading Meaningful," *Faculty Focus*, http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/making-the-review-of-assigned-reading-meaningful/]

Debrief Teams

At the beginning of the term, put students into small groups and assign each group to be responsible for the reading (s) for a particular class session. Each group, on its assigned day to serve as the "debrief team," must bring to class a short summary and list of questions that it has formulated and submitted for your approval prior to class. At the beginning of class, divide the entire class into groups, and have one student from the debrief team serve as the leader for each group. The leader will present the summary of the reading and the questions generated prior to class (summary and questions will be the same for each group). The leader will then facilitate group discussion to generate possible solutions. After a certain period of time, each group will report its findings, which will serve as fodder for discussion and debate to determine which group has the best answers. Often the best answers come from those groups in which the majority of students have done the reading. Thus, to create more incentive for all students to come prepared, you can rank groups' answers and assign points accordingly. Multiple variations of this technique are possible.

Creative Projects

Instead of traditional response papers, have students submit a creative product such as a poem, song, image montage, rhetorical statement, drawing/painting, etc., in which they articulate key themes from a reading or series of readings. Students could work individually, in pairs, or as teams. This approach can stimulate students' creativity and make readings (or other course materials) more interesting, although you may want to limit how often you use this method due to students' time constraints. Of course, not all students will feel confident with such an approach, so you might allow a more traditional response paper to remain an option.

Response Prompts

Students could bring their responses to readings by choosing any number of the following sentence prompts to complete in writing and be prepared to explain in class:

- What most struck me about the text is…
- The question that I'd most like to ask the author of the text is…
- The idea I most take issue with in the text is…
- The most crucial point in the text is…
- The part of the text that I feel makes the most sense to me is…
- The part of the text that I feel is the most obscure or confusing is…
- The most contentious claim or statement in the text is…
- The most unsupported assertion in the text is…
- The most provocative or stimulating claim or statement in the text is…
- If we take the main arguments of this text seriously, the implications are…
- If we fail to take the main arguments of this text seriously, the implications are…

[source: adapted from Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching* (Jossey-Bass, 1999), pp. 70-71]

Critical Reading Guide

Critical reading is a rigorous process. It demands active engagement with the text, and thus requires time, effort, and care. The purpose of reading critically is not only to comprehend ideas and assess the validity of the arguments and evidence that support these ideas, but also to discern how ideas influence (or might influence) the world – that is, the ways and extent to which they contribute (or might contribute) to change in the world. This also includes reflection on how particular ideas or arguments change your own thinking and thus become part of who you are and what you're about.

Although mastery of critical reading strategies will not necessarily make the reading process an easy one, it can make reading more satisfying and productive and thus help you engage difficult material with more confidence.

CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES

Here are five steps to follow that can help you get the most productivity out of your reading:

Step 1: Previewing

Before you read the first sentence, orient yourself to the author and the text, asking questions such as: Who is the **author**? What are the author's **qualifications**? **When and why** was this written? What **type** of writing is this? What kind of **publication** is it in? What is the **significance** of the title? What do the headings or other graphics call attention to?

Step 2: Annotating

To focus and sustain a critical reading, annotate as you read. Underline, box, or highlight passages that express the author's point, serve your purpose for reading this text, or require further study. More importantly, write notes that state the significance of the passages you have noted, show the logic of the passage, give your reactions, explain difficult points, or suggest how you might use the information. Of course, with respect for others, you should only mark in a text if it is your own copy; for library or borrowed texts, take notes on paper and jot down page numbers for each note.

It can be helpful to develop a note-taking system – symbols or abbreviations – that you use for each text you read. For instance, you might use a "T" in the margin to indicate the thesis or main argument, "Ex" to indicate examples, "Def" to indicate definitions of key terms, "A" to indicate arguments (A1, A2, etc.), "?" for questions or confusions you have, "!" for significant point (with which you agree or disagree), and so forth. You can also write key terms in the margin or condense arguments into a few words. Whichever method you choose, try to use a system that allows you to find what you need quickly when you re-visit the text.

Step 3: Condensing and Outlining

Condense the essay into a brief **summary**, the thesis statement into a **short title**, and significant passages into a few **key words**. Then outline the work by listing the **thesis statement**, subheads of **major sections**, supporting arguments, topic sentences, and any important **supporting details** such as evidence or examples.

Step 4: Evaluating

- Evaluate the **meaning** by asking what is the **overall point**. How is this point conveyed? What are the secondary or supporting points?
- Evaluate the **organization** by asking **why** are particular passages **included**. Why are they in particular places, in the order they are? What does each add to the whole?
- Evaluate the **authority** by asking is the author a recognized authority? Is the evidence from authoritative **sources**? Is the **evidence** convincing? Is the **logic** valid? Is the author's use of evidence **reasonable**?
- Evaluate the **argument** by asking do I **agree?** If not, can I **refute** it**?** Are there particularly good **examples**? Is there a striking turn of phrase?

Step 5: Reflecting

Reflect on the **social** and **historical** significance of the text or author's arguments by asking what has been or might be their influence on social affairs, scholarly discourse, and so on. How is this **connected** to other topics? How has or might these ideas change the world? Also reflect on your **personal learning**, asking what have I **learned** from this? How might I use this in my life to achieve my goals?

CHECKLIST FOR ANALYZING AN ARGUMENT

□ What is the writer's main claim or thesis? Ask yourself:

- What claim is being asserted?
- What assumptions are being made – and are they acceptable?
- Are important terms satisfactorily defined?

□ What support (evidence) is offered on behalf of the claim? Ask yourself:

- Are the examples relevant, and are they convincing?
- Are the statistics (if any) relevant, accurate, and complete? Do they allow only the interpretation that is offered in the argument?
- If authorities or experts are cited, are they indeed authorities or experts on this topic, and can they be regarded as impartial or fair?
- Is the logic – the reasoning used – valid?
- If there is an appeal to emotion – for instance, if satire is used to ridicule the opposing view – is this appeal acceptable?

□ Does the writer seem to you to be fair? Ask yourself:

- Are counterarguments adequately considered?
- Is there any evidence of dishonesty or of a discreditable attempt to manipulate the reader?
- How does the writer establish the image of himself or herself that we sense in the essay?

WAYS TO RESPOND TO A READING

The following sentence starters can help you formulate your thinking when responding to a reading:

- What most struck me about the text is…
- The question that I'd most like to ask the author of the text is…
- The idea I most take issue with in the text is…
- The most crucial point in the text is…
- The part of the text that I feel makes the most sense to me is…
- The part of the text that I feel is the most obscure or confusing is…
- The most contentious claim or statement in the text is…
- The most unsupported assertion in the text is…
- The most provocative or stimulating claim or statement in the text is…
- If we take the main arguments of this text seriously, the implications are…
- If we fail to take the main arguments of this text seriously, the implications are…