

Learning Skills, Room 120

Classroom Participation

Making Your Voice Heard: How to contribute to the discussion

At the appropriate time in classroom discussion, don't be afraid to voice your opinion, even if you differ from your instructor or classmates. Your opinion can be based on the text, other readings, class discussions, library sources, and experts in the topic, as well as your own experience.

- In class, listen carefully to what others are saying.
- Mark or make notes of the points you wish to answer or discuss or question.
- Remember that a question is as valuable as an opinion in the course of discussion. It shows that you are trying to understand others, as well as be understood!
- Introduce your contribution with a quick summary of the discussion or point... "As I understand it..." Restating the discussion/author's main idea also shows that you are trying to understand and shows where you are in understanding. It is very likely that if you have questions or concerns, others will share them.
- Be certain it is clear when you are summarizing and when you are giving your opinion.
- Try to keep your comments to the point and don't hesitate to refer to your notes. Logic is not a speed test...
- In making an argument, begin with examples from the author or teacher but generally use your own examples to make your points. This demonstrates independent thinking, which is valued in an academic setting.
- After you have spoken, it is appropriate to ask for feedback about whether others understand what you have said and agree/disagree with you.
- Demonstrate openness and dialogue to increase your own learning and contribute to the learning of others.

If discussion is based upon reading

- Study course lectures, articles, texts.
- Find the author's thesis; restate it in your own words.
- Decide what your opinion or reaction is to the author's thesis.

Assumptions

- A sense of competition underlies the informality of most classrooms.
- Voicing a well-informed opinion is important to your overall academic evaluation.
- First listen and try to understand others' opinions. Respect theirs and insist on being respected for yours.
- Evaluations are made by instructors throughout the semester and usually include class participation as well as marks on assignments and tests.

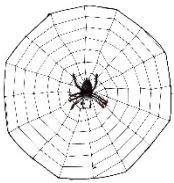
- Focus your contribution on your analysis of the topic, your reaction, your opinion, and finally your openness to understanding others.

Paying Attention in the Classroom:

If you have difficulty paying attention to what is being said in the classroom

- Try to anticipate the main ideas of the coming lecture. Look over your notes of the previous lecture and read the course material. If you have questions about material from the previous class or text, ask the instructor before class. Prepare a few questions you expect to be answered on new material.
- Put yourself in the “mood” with attentive expression and posture; do not sprawl.
- Shift position in your seat every so often. Don’t sit frozen in one position. Shifting on occasion will help keep the blood circulating, send more oxygen to your brain, and help you remain alert.
- When appropriate, ask a question, ask for more clarity, or engage an instructor and the class in dialogue.
- Train yourself not to give in to distractions. Resist distractions by sitting in front of the room away from disruptive classmates and by focusing on the instructor through active listening and note taking.

The Spider Technique



Hold a vibrating tuning fork next to a spider web. The spider will react and come looking for what is vibrating the web. Do it several times and the spider “wises up” and knows there’s no bug and doesn’t come looking.

You can learn that. When someone enters the room, or when a door slams, do not allow yourself to participate. Rather, keep your concentration on what’s in front of you.

Form a tunnel between you and the lecturer

- Practice letting people move or cough without having to look at them - just let them “be there” as you focus on what is being taught.
- When talking with someone, keep your attention on that person, look at his face, and note what is being said. Let the rest of the world just be “out there.”
- Use the “be here now” technique to help you regain concentration when you do become distracted momentarily.

Preparing for Classroom Learning

Before class:

- **Do your homework!** Read critically; form your own opinions.
- **Review your notes** from the previous lecture and reading for the day.
- **Communicate immediately with instructors** about any study problems.
- **Focus on the task at hand before class:** Take a moment of silence to gather your thoughts and mentally prepare yourself to the topic.
- **Write any objectives** that come to mind at the head of your notepaper
 - preparing for an up-coming test
 - understanding a particular concept

- gaining a good foundation on a topic
- understanding or reviewing the readings

In class:

- **Arrive on time for class.** Instructors do not take lateness lightly, and you will miss important information
- **Position yourself in the classroom** to focus on the subject matter. Consider the best location for
 - listening
 - asking questions
 - seeing visual materials
 - discussing - not only with the teacher but also your classmates
- **Avoid distractions** that may interfere with your concentration (daydreaming, looking around the room, talking to a friend, passing notes, dozing).
- **Evaluate as you listen:**
 - Decide what is important and should be placed in your notes and what can be left out
 - Listen long enough to be sure you understand what is said before writing
 - Ask clarifying questions (but wait for “breaks” in the instructor’s stream)
- **Review your class objectives** throughout the class period
 - Did your objectives mesh with the instructor’s introductory remarks?
 - Has the class digressed from stated objectives - yours or the instructor’s?
- **Write a “to do” list** including
 - assignments
 - reviewing difficult concepts
 - joining study groups
 - making appointments with a study pal, tutor, or the instructor
 - connecting with a classmate who seems to have a good grasp of the material.