

### Strategy: Preparing Students for Class Participation

Providing opportunities for students to participate in class can ensure that students come to class prepared to participate, specifically through reading assigned material before coming to class.

### Origin

Frederick, P. (1981). "The dreaded discussion—Ten ways to start," *Improving College and University Teaching*, 29 (2), 109-114.

Gose, M. (2008). When Socratic dialogue is flagging: Questions and strategies for engaging students. *College Teaching*, 57 (1), 45-49.

### Application

#### Asking guided reading/discussion questions

- Find and read passages where you had trouble.
- Find and read passages that help sort out issues with the readings.
- Read a passage aloud and answer a question about it.
- Clarify a key term in the reading.
- Discuss the basic organization or logic of the text in a step-by-step manner.
- Summarize key points or important ideas.
- Explain two passages that seem to contradict one another.
- Find a key sentence or paragraph that suggests the meaning of the whole work.
- Ask a question about the reading that stands out.
- After discussion, ask the best remaining question about the text/topic.

#### Ten ways to start a discussion

1. Goals and values testing:  
In pairs or groups, have students discuss: Why are we reading this? Why now?  
You could also have students do tasks related to reading: Identify three themes common to both texts; Suggest the most obvious differences between the texts; Examine what you liked best and why; Make a list of as many comparisons and/or contrasts as you can in ten minutes.
2. Concrete images:  
In pairs or groups, have students provide one concrete image/scene/event/moment from the text that stands out to them. Have students record these images and then ask: What themes emerge? What connects these images? What is missing?
3. Generating questions:  
As individuals or in pairs or groups, have students formulate questions about the text ahead of time, as a "ticket" to enter class or to guide their group discussion.
4. Finding illustrative quotations:  
In pairs or groups, have students read aloud from the text to one another. Prompt students to: Find a quotation they especially liked/disliked; Find a quotation that illustrates the major thesis of the text; Select a quotation that is a symbol of the text.

5. Break into small groups:  
Divide students randomly into groups throughout the course, allowing for variation in sizes and composition. Have students discuss ideas with the following tasks: Identify three positive and three negative ideas/qualities; Identify the three main themes; List as many themes or ideas from the text as you can and have groups compete with one another
6. Generate truth statements:  
In small groups, have students develop three statements that they believe to be true about a particular issue (Ex. "We have agreed that it is true about X that"; "We know it to be true about the theory of X that"). Then have groups merge and share their truth statements with one another. Not only will this generate discussion while the statements are being developed, but statements of groups will also conflict, promoting good discussion opportunities.
7. Forced debate:  
In pairs or groups, give individuals two positions from which they must choose and defend their position. You may want to use this during entry to class and have students sit by their position. You can use this opportunity for students to talk among individuals with like points of view and then have them interact.
8. Role playing:  
Managed carefully, this can be effective in promoting discussion. This should involve planning ahead, options for students to opt-in or out, time for students to prepare, groups to provide safety in numbers, etc.
9. Non-structured scene setting:  
Remove yourself from the discussion and give students the opportunity to do most, if not all, of the talking. Strategies for this involve developing a series of Power Point slides, playing audio of a speech or song, using a quotation or list of topics, or providing an agenda for discussion. Make it clear to students that a particular amount of time will be instructor-free and they're in charge of maintaining discussion.
10. How'd you like it?  
Begin class with this simple question.

<b>Reflection</b>
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- What is something about this idea that confirms a current practice in your course?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is something about this idea that you would adapt for your course?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is something new from this idea that you would like to remember?