

FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS

Not every student is comfortable speaking candidly in front of the whole class. Some students prefer time to think and prepare before speaking, others thrive in small group discussions. To ensure positive and productive discussions, consider using these discussion strategies:

Activities to Encourage Student Participation



Count to 10:

After you have asked a question, pause and count to ten. It may feel like a long pause, but students need time to process their ideas before they can respond thoughtfully. When calling on students, be mindful of who has their hand up and has not yet had a chance to speak.



Think-Pair-Share:

Ask a question and give students time to think or write down their answer. Then, have them turn to an assigned partner and discuss. Finally, ask students to share what they discussed with the class. You might call on just a few or ask each pair to share.



Group discussion with reporter:

Divide the class into small groups (4-5 students) to discuss a question and then designate a “reporter” from each group to share their ideas with the class.

Sentence Stems:

Ask the class a question and then write two or three sentence stems on the board that they could use to frame their answers. For example, “Were you surprised by the outlook for any of the careers?” might be answered using the sentence stem “I was surprised to learn about _____ career because _____” or “I was not surprised because I already knew _____ about _____ career.”



Cold calling on students:

Cold calling on students is when the discussion facilitator chooses a student to speak without asking for volunteers first. Only utilize this strategy when you know that all students have prepared a response. Some educators have tools like a cup of popsicle sticks with students’ names on them that you can draw from. If you are thinking of utilizing this strategy, first discuss it with the educator.

Affirming Response

Facilitating discussions includes responding to student ideas. An affirming response helps students develop a positive self-concept and gives value to their lived experiences. If a student responds in a way you were not expecting, before concluding that the student misunderstood the question or gave a wrong answer, ask them to tell you more about their response. Give them a chance to elaborate instead of dismissing their answer, which can be frustrating to a student and damaging to their self-esteem. Most often you will find that their ideas and thought process are very relevant to the discussion, they may just be viewing it from a different perspective than you are. Remember that it’s a privilege to be in a space with students that are rich in backgrounds and ideas – celebrate the diverse voices and responses!

More Resources to Explore:

[Article: The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies](#)

[Video: Using Hand Signals for Equitable Discussion](#) (for the virtual or in-person classroom)

[Article: Tips on Facilitating Effective Group Discussions](#)