

**Class Facilitation Tips:**  
*(almost) everything you wanted to know about leading a fun and informative class*

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**PREPARATIONS**

- Understand clearly what is expected of your presentation: are you supposed to lead class discussion? Present new information? Do additional research on the assigned topic? Work alone? Work in a group? Generate a handout? Pre-circulate discussion questions? If you are unsure of any of the above, be sure to consult the course instructor well in advance.
- Read the assignment well in advance. Additional research on the topic, discussions with the instructor during office hours, and conversations with your co-presenters will help you to grasp the key elements of the assignment.
- As you read, think: what is the author's argument in this text? How does s/he advance that argument? Is this method persuasive? What has the author failed to address or inadequately cover? What has s/he done particularly well or in a new or interesting way? How does this reading connect to other materials in the class – both those assigned for the same class day, and previously? How does this reading intersect with the stated goals and objectives of the course as a whole?

**WORKING AS A GROUP**

- Team work is often critical to the success of a class presentation. Set up at least two times to meet as a group outside of class in the week(s) before the presentation.
- If you are required to write a response paper, it can often be very useful to share these papers with your co-facilitators in advance of the class meeting.
- When you meet to plan the presentation, you will want to discuss the material thoroughly and plan the form and content of your presentation.
- Respect different styles and experiences within the group: these can be strengths! One facilitator may have AV experience or ideas; a quiet or “shy” person can be invaluable as a note-taker (at the chalk board) or to call on students, to be in charge of “flow” (see below), but s/he may be less comfortable “lecturing”.
- Make sure that all members of the group contribute to the planing and actual facilitation. If one person dominates the presentation, this can adversely effect everyone's grade.
- Be sure that you are clear on who does what, and when.
- It can be a good idea to have one person in charge of “flow” – keeping track of time and helping to move the presentation from one element, activity, or topic to another.

**GENERATING STUDY QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Try to write discussion questions that open up conversation, rather than closing conversation down. “Closers” tend to have yes/no answers, or require students to speculate, rather than analyze. “Opening” questions ask students to make connections, to interpret tricky text, to read key sections closely.

- Try to avoid the “guess what I’m thinking” school of questions – these are “closers” as well.
- Try to generate study questions that help students to focus on the big ideas of an article and its relevance to the course as a whole.
- It can be helpful to include specific page references or short quotations for some questions.
- Part of your job is to be selective in your questions: if you distribute a question sheet that contains too many questions, your classmates may feel overwhelmed and, as a result, under-prepare. A good rule of thumb is 2-3 good questions per article or 3-5 questions per class hour.

### LEADING CLASS DISCUSSION

- A class period often requires a warm-up time for people to focus their attention on the course, the readings, and the tasks for the day. Thus it can be a good idea to have prepared a short (2-5 minute) introductory talk, a quotation to read and discuss, or even a brief (10 minute) writing assignment. These sorts of introductory activities help focus the class’s critical energies: just as athletes, actors, and musicians “warm up” before an event or performance, so too should scholars and students!
- Handouts can be a great way to communicate additional information (from outside research), to list additional resources, and to focus class discussion (through questions, quotations, charts, images, etc).
  - Make sure your handout is clear, accurate, and proofread.
  - If you need the handout copied, be sure to give the instructor a master copy well in advance.
  - In class, be careful to allow time for the students to *read* the handout – whether silently or out loud all at once, or in sections as you refer to the handout.
- Silence is golden: after you pose a question for discussion, sometimes it can feel like silence lasts forever. This is okay. Your classmates will need time to think about the question, check their text, and formulate answers. Most inexperienced class leaders make the mistake of jumping in too early. After you pose a question, silently and slowly count to ten in your head. Then if no one has raised her/his hand or begun to talk, rephrase the question. Count to ten again. *Then* you might direct the group to a specific page or offer your opinion to get things going if there is still no response. But nine times out of ten, if you wait 10-20 seconds, the members of the class will respond to your question.
- Have one assigned facilitator/presenter call on students whose hands are raised. If one person has this task (and the assigned person should rotate as the class facilitation continues) then students know who to look to, etc. to participate.
- If a lot of people have their hands up to talk at once, it can be a good idea to “take stack”. This simply means writing down people’s names in a list, then consulting the list and calling on people in order. Add people to the bottom of the list as they raise their hands to speak.
- Be sure to look around the room frequently. Sometimes students just outside your range of vision are eager to participate but momentarily hidden from view.
- Make use of the chalk board to highlight important ideas, to “brainstorm” and/or generate lists of ideas, to illustrate your points graphically.

- Always have prepared notes about the questions and topics you plan to discuss. Jot down key passages or page numbers, your ideas or questions about the topic, and/or information that you've researched about the topic. As a facilitator it often is not your job to be an "expert" but your role is to be as prepared as possible for that day's course material.

### **CREATIVE CLASS PLANS**

- Unless the presentation assignment has a specific format that you are instructed to follow, the form of your presentation is as important to plan as its content.
- Depending on the length of time you have to present, or the nature of the assigned material or course, you may want to plan several activities within your facilitation. Think about what you find engaging or interesting as a student, and try to create a class experience that you would enjoy!
- If you plan multiple activities, be sure that you allow enough time to complete each activity and transition to the next.
- With unusual formats, be sure that your instructions to the class are clear – be as specific as possible.
- Some formats that often work well include:
  - Small group work. If you are going to break into small groups, it usually works best if there is one facilitator working with each group to keep things on task and focused (you can rotate if there are more groups than facilitators). You should also be very clear in your instructions for the small group task. Decide ahead of time how you will divide people into groups. Plan what you will expect each small group to share with the large group after their discussions.
  - Multimedia presentations. If you require additional AV for your classroom presentation, be sure to ask your instructor how to access the technology well in advance. Bringing in music, video, or images can be a great stimulus for discussion. However be sure that the material you bring in is relevant to the class.
  - Quiz or team games. Sometimes a fast-paced Q&A activity can be a good way to get a lot of information covered in a fun context. However, games are often difficult to structure around "thought" questions. Select a format appropriate to your goals and materials.
  - Other activities. Students have sometimes brought in objects to discuss in relation to course material, have come in costume, have asked their classmates to bring in newspaper clippings, images, or objects. Be as creative as you wish, but make sure that your activities do not exclude anyone in the class from participating and that they will not put people on the spot or make them feel uncomfortable. If you have questions about the appropriateness of an activity, be sure to consult the instructor in advance.
- For all formats, remember that your primary goal is to create an educational environment, not to entertain. Sometimes the best classes do both, but at other times, an exciting, wonderful class period is created through a very standard format, but with care, preparation, and energy invested into the materials themselves. Try to strike a balance!