

Discussions in the Classroom

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about various responsibilities a student has within a classroom discussion setting. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Class Discussion

Class discussion can be the most dynamic, memorable, and significant aspect of your experience in a course. While some instructors are skilled lecturers who are compelling and even entertaining to listen to, it's no surprise that students tend to feel more profoundly impacted when they are directly involved in the class.

Rather than just taking it all in, in a good class discussion you are helping to direct and shape the learning experience. You can bring your own perspective to the table and respond to both your instructor and your classmates. If you have done the work to prepare yourself for class and have taken notes during lectures or assigned readings, you should have plenty of material to discuss with your class.

Typically, your instructor will frame the discussion by posing some specific questions, but this is not always the case. Regardless of the topic, there are a few other things you can do to ensure you contribute in a productive way to class discussions:

- **Keep track of what has been said by taking notes** This will help you retain the information and keep you from repeating things that have already been said.
- **Make your comments brief and to the point:** Sometimes it's helpful to add examples, but you need to be mindful of others' time.
- **Know when to speak and when to listen:** If it's a question you can answer or something you can clarify, contribute. If you don't know at all, it may be best to listen.
- **Formulate what you are going to say before you say it** If you are not practiced in participating in class discussions, jot down what you plan to contribute. This will give you the opportunity to edit before you post or say it to the class.

In addition to these class discussion tips, it's important to be mindful of the protocol regarding discussion and to be open-minded and respectful of others when you deliver your opinions. Recall what you read in Unit 1 about diversity and cultural sensitivity in higher education. It's your role to contribute to the class, but it's not your role to judge others.

It's also important to balance speaking and listening; being vocal in a class is a good thing, but if you overdo it, you can monopolize a discussion and make other students feel intimidated or silenced. If you feel tempted to

over-participate, take a deep breath and wait for others to respond and provide their perspective. As long as you are a conscientious “citizen of the classroom,” class discussion can be both edifying and exhilarating.

2. Student Participation

Contributing to class discussions is one of the most significant and impactful ways you can participate in your class. In many classes, student participation is not only valued theoretically, but it accounts for a portion of your grade. If the motivation and benefit of contributing your voice to the conversation is not enough on its own, participating in class is an important part of your measurable success—not only your GPA but the impression you leave on instructors who can write you letters of recommendation. This does not mean, though, that participation just for its own sake is always a good thing.

It’s easy for instructors to spot students that contribute in a manner that is relatively thoughtless or shallow—for instance, those students whose comments have little to do with the assigned homework or the relevant concepts from the course. If you are a student who is anxious or just not confident about class discussion, it may be possible to demonstrate your participation in other ways.

Regular attendance, apparent engagement, timely submission of all of your assignments, and communication with your instructor might all be considered alternative forms of participation. Your syllabus should contain details about what is considered participation, and if you are not sure, you can always ask your instructor or their assistant.



SUMMARY

Class discussions give you an opportunity to hear what the other students have to say about the topics you are learning about. Preparation, active listening, and thoughtful **student participation** are essential to productive classroom discussions.