

Preparing to Facilitate Discussions

Here is an overview of some concrete ideas you can use prepare for discussions in advance, adapted from Davidson & Lopez's "Facilitating Discussion & Engagement."

Have goals

- Having clearly articulated goals is essential! It is important to move beyond just asking students to "discuss."
- Learners are more engaged when they know what they're learning & why it matters.

Have a plan, but don't be afraid to deviate

- Ask yourself: How will *you* know when the class has reached the articulated goal(s)? How will your *students* know?
 - In a synchronous discussion (online or face-to-face), having students create or write something often helps you assess how far they got in their discussion. Can they create a graphic? Solve a problem? Record notes from their discussion? Highlight one main take-away?
- How hands on or off will you be as you facilitate? It can be helpful to have some sense of the sorts of alternative directions you'll let play out and which tangents you'll likely cut off if the discussion moves away from your explicit goals.

Help students prepare

- What background knowledge do your students need to be comfortable contributing to the discussion? Can you have a spontaneous discussion or would the goal be better suited to a planned discussion with resources for them review beforehand?
- How much time will you give them?
- If you are breaking them into smaller groups that may exit the classroom space, how can they access instructions/prompts for discussion (e.g. will you provide them with a handout, or assign a learner to record the prompts before they leave the room?)

Plan some questions

As noted above, it's okay to deviate during the discussion, but it can be helpful to have some key questions designed ready to lead your students along, should they need your support. If you are planning a discussion ahead of time, you can also ask your students to brainstorm a question each, or come to the discussion with a question about the material ready.

To plan some of your own questions, first take a look at your goal. What are you hoping your students will be able to do?

Question Type	What does it attempt to do?	Examples
Knowledge	Questions that test for content knowledge of subject matter	What is the purpose of ___? Describe ___? Who, what, where, how ___?
Comprehension	Explain, interpret, give examples, summarize concepts in own words	What was the contribution of ___? Can you summarize what X student said about ___? What would be another example of ___?
Application	Requires application of knowledge (use of rules, facts, principles)	How is ___ an example of ___? How is ___ related to ___? How could you apply ___ to ___?
Analysis	Requires application of principles in new settings	Compare and contrast ___ with ___? What are the parts or features of ___? What evidence do you have for ___? Outline the steps of ____.
Synthesis	Requires combining ideas	How would you design ___. How would you suggest ___? What might happen if you combine ___ with ___?

Evaluation	Requires making a judgement, reimagining, or assessing.	What is the most compelling to you? Why? What criteria would you use to assess ___? What is the most important ___? What do you think about ___? How would you reimagine ___?
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