**A List of Tactics to Spur Class Discussion**

Supplemental Handout to Accompany: “Encouraging Classroom Discussion in any Discipline” by Sarah Holtan, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Communication, Concordia University Wisconsin

Preparing for a Discussion:

* Establish ground rules and set expectations for students (e.g., do not need to raise hands; all must contribute at least once).
* Offer pointers about how to disagree with ideas and not be critical of people.

Starting a Discussion:

* Start with the focus questions already distributed.
* Allow students to discuss questions with a partner or small group before sharing aloud or writing answers on board.
* Pose a controversial question.

Facilitating a Discussion:

* Arrange seating to promote discussion, if possible.
* Take notes on key ideas and insights, either on paper or the board.
* Keep discussion on task, but allow for minor digressions on occasion. Bring back to topic when needed.
* Listen very carefully to substance and tone. Respond as appropriate.
* Clarify any confusion.
* Calm heated moments but don’t shut down disagreement too soon.
* Change the topic/questions if discussion stagnates.
* Draw out quiet and reluctant students by asking them to relate to other students (e.g., “Jenna, I saw you nod your head while Conner was talking. Which part resonated with you?”)
* Instructor should limit the amount of his/her comments.
* Be aware of how instructor comments and nonverbals can be off-putting to students (e.g., “We discussed that last week.”)

Low-level Tactics that Require Little Instructor Planning:

* TQE Method
	+ Students come up with their own Thoughts, lingering Questions, and Epiphanies from an assigned reading or in-class lecture. This can be done either verbally or in writing. Can make a master list on the board and then discuss the most insightful TQE’s.
* Goals testing questions
	+ Why are we reading this? Why now? What are the key similarities and differences between this text and the last one we read?
* Concrete images
	+ What is one concrete image/scene/event that stands out for you?
* Student-generated questions
	+ Ask ahead of time or as they enter the room to craft one question about the reading.
* Illustrative quotations
	+ Identify a quotation from the reading they especially liked/disliked/found confusing and discuss how it relates to the thesis. Have students support their opinions. Push beyond the *what* to the *why*.
* Hot Seat
	+ One or more students assume the role of a book character, significant figure in history or present time or even a concept (e.g., tornado, economic downturn). The student(s) sits in the front of the classroom and responds to questions from classmates while staying in character.
* Concentric Circles
	+ Students form two circles, one inside circle and one outside circle. Each student on the inside is paired with a student on the outside and they face each other. The teacher poses a question to all and the pairs discuss answers. After each question, students on the outside circle move one space to the right so they rotate partners.
* Panel Discussions
* Assign different students to different roles on the panel (e.g., experts in a particular topic). Give the students at least a week to prepare by doing research, research, etc. The students will present their information to the whole class in a panel discussion format. Can assign a moderator or the instructor can serve as the moderator.

High-level Tactics that Require More Instructor Planning:

* “Vote with your feet” exercise
* When the topic allows for dichotomous positions (e.g., Ethical vs. Unethical; Appropriate vs. Inappropriate; Professional vs. Unprofessional; Effective vs. Ineffective; Significant vs. Insignificant; Accurate vs. Inaccurate; Profitable vs. Not Profitable; Socially Responsible vs. Socially Irresponsible; Yes vs. No; Legal vs. Illegal; Pro vs. Con; Agree vs. Disagree; Solution A vs. Solution B), post signs on two sides of the classroom. One sign contains the position of the first side (e.g., Ethical) and the other sign contains the position of the second side (e.g., Unethical). Ask students to consider a complicated and/or provocative case study or scenario. After considering the case study or scenario, ask students to stand up and walk to the side of the room that represents their position best. They cannot remain neutral. You can then call on individual students to ask why they voted the way they did. To extend the activity, one side must try to convince the other side to change their position.

Tactics for Group or Partner Work:

* Debate
	+ Assign readings – or have them research for relevant articles – on two sides of an issue. Allow them some time in groups to prepare responses to questions the instructor or student moderator has crafted. Have students work in two teams. Can appoint 1-3 student judges who determine the criteria/standards for evaluation. Can appoint one moderator or the instructor can serve as the moderator.
* Role-playing
	+ Put students into small groups. Assign one group to be the university’s Board of Trustees. Assign the other groups to become student representatives that take specific positions of a hot-button issue studied in class (e.g., LGBTQIA rights). The student rep groups should craft substantial statements to persuade the Board of Trustees to adopt or reject the issue. The student rep groups will localize the issue to their campus. The Board of Trustees will listen to each group statement, ask clarifying questions, and ultimately decide which group had the most convincing argument.
* Generating truth statements
* Small groups should decide upon three statements known to be true about an issue. Example: It is true that racism...

Tactics for Reflection Questions:

Reflection questions help students take ownership of personal attitudes. The main tactic is to allow time for students to reflect quietly and individually first before responding aloud.

* + Have them write mini-essays inside or outside of class and then share with a partner. Example: How are you an outsider to your culture? Do you want to be assimilated into the dominant culture? Why or why not?

Sources:

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