

US Classroom Culture: Leading and Participating in Classroom Discussions

1. The Traditional Lecture Model (40-50 minutes of lecture with 5-10 minutes of Q&A)
 - a. Advantages of lecturing:
 - i. Very quick way of distilling a large amount of data
 - ii. Data can be presented logically and clearly
 - b. Problems with traditional model
 - i. Physiologically limited: student's heart rate drops after 15 minutes
 - ii. Passive learning (listening) is not an effective way to learn

2. Student Active Learning
 - a. In-class writing exercises
 - i. Examples:
 1. Writing a summary of a reading or material just covered in a lecture or previous class
 2. Answering specific questions about a reading, etc...
 - ii. Advantages:
 1. Gives more introverted students a chance to reflect actively on material
 2. Engages a different part of the brain in the learning process
 - b. Paired work: groups of two
 - i. Write/Pair/Share: after completing one of the above writing exercises invite students to share answers in groups of two
 1. Advantages: builds off of advantages of in-class writing exercises and engages another part of the brain
 2. Disadvantage: takes more time
 - ii. Pair/shares: quicker but less effective
 1. More introverted students need a moment to think of answers
 - c. Small group work (3-4 people)
 - i. Collaborative answering of specific questions
 - ii. One person may function as scribe for group
 - d. Class Discussions (whole class)
 - i. Following any of the above types of active learning, gather together as a class and share answers
 - e. Quizzes: on reading or material just covered in a lecture or previous class
 - i. Advantages:
 1. Good for end of class
 2. Forces immediate recall, which helps with long term memory
 3. Quickly identifies for the student what they do and do not understand
 4. May lead to positive Q&A time afterwards

3. Marks of a Productive Class Discussion
 - a. Guided by teacher
 - b. Focused on a specific topic

- i. Teacher must keep refocusing discussion on topic through restating topic and asking specific questions related to the topic
 - ii. Tangents must be politely stopped or bracketed for later
 - iii. Questions of topic can be answered after class
 - c. Maximized number of people speaking/participating
 - i. Teacher must invite less active students to participate by name
 - ii. Teacher asks active students to give other students a chance to speak
 - iii. Discussion clarified by teacher
 - 1. Teacher may rearticulate a student's contribution in more clear or relevant language
 - 2. Teacher may repeat a quieter student's contribution so all can hear it
 - d. Choose specific questions that can be answered in more than one way
 - i. Avoid vague, open-ended questions such as: did you like the reading? Or, what do you think of x?
 - 1. (such questions could be used as icebreakers)
 - ii. Avoid Yes/No questions
 - iii. Focus on a specific issue or selection from the readings
- 4. How to participate in a Class Discussion?
 - a. Write down ideas or questions before speaking (especially, if you are more introverted)
 - b. During lectures or while reading, think of good questions or ideas to share
 - c. Stay focused on the specific topic; save tangential questions for later
 - d. If you are a more active participant, allow other students the chance to speak