

AADS Guidelines for Graduate-Level Course Participation

Class Discussion

Class discussion is a prime time for refining your thinking and your communication skills. Make good use of this rare opportunity for deep engagement. Your unique perspective should be presented in *every* class session.

Preparation.

**Before each class*, consider the in-class contribution you want to make. Determine which ideas from the assignments you want to highlight.

*Knowing that you are going to offer a comment in class will also improve your reading skills.

*You might—

- want clarification on a concept from the reading,
- provide additional context for the reading,
- ask a question regarding the real life application of an idea in the reading,
- suggest an alternative understanding of a concept based on your work in other classes.

These are suggestions to stimulate your thinking about how you will develop your prepared contributions.

*Support your position with specific references/quotations from the readings.

Spontaneous Contributions.

*Impromptu class comments require careful, generous listening.

*Allow others to complete their thoughts before offering your comment.

*Challenging the ideas of others can be active without being combative.

*If your own idea is contrary to the primary direction of the discussion, there are strategies you can use for entering the conversation—

“Could you explain in more detail how you arrived at that idea?”

“I had a different understanding of that concept, which is. . .”

“Do you think there are alternatives to the approach you have described?”

These questions/statements can reduce the discomfort of offering a different direction to the discussion, and can allow you to insert your perspective without denying the validity of the other perspectives given.

Classroom Protocols.

*There is no need to re-state what someone else has already said. You can simply say “I agree” without paraphrasing what has been stated. However, if your agreement goes beyond a comment that has already been made, do add that amplification.

*The goal of class discussion is to deepen understanding. This is not a time for gratuitous displays of knowledge.

*Share the talking space with your peers. Do not monopolize a discussion; allow room for less vocal students to contribute.

Class Presentations

Class presentations are essential opportunities for honing your analytical and pedagogical skills. University life centers on your ability to *express* your ideas in writing and orally. Use class presentations *of all types* as a way to hone your presentational skills.

Analyze, not summarize.

* Summaries are ineffective engagements with the reading.

*For many assignments, you may be asked to offer critical commentary on an essay that is part of the reading for the course. When this is the case, everyone will have read the essay, which makes a summary unnecessary and even frustrating for listeners.

*For some assignments, you may be offering critical commentary on an essay that only you have read. Even in this circumstance, you should put your focus on your analysis of the essay rather than a summary of it.

*In analyzing the essay, identify 1-3 key ideas that you will support, question, or refute. Ground your support, question or refutation with evidence such as (but not limited to) historical data (how do these ideas square with a reading of history?), comparative data (how do these ideas compare to similar significant ideas in the field?), authorial position (how does the author's background shape her or his work?), unstated assumptions (what implicit beliefs undergird the primary ideas?)

Outline.

*Organize your presentation carefully. Do not rely on your ability to extemporize the presentation. Any anxiety you have is likely to undermine your success if you do not have a precise outline for the presentation.

*The outline should not be a verbatim script of the presentation; instead, the outline should offer the structure for the important ideas you will present. For example:

- I. Name the essay and author
- II. Key Idea One
 - a. Explain
 - b. Support, Question, or Refute with Grounding
- III. Key Idea Two
 - a. Explain
 - b. Support, Question, or Refute with Grounding
- IV. Key Idea Three
 - a. Explain
 - b. Support, Question, or Refute with Grounding

Rehearse.

*You should present your ideas smoothly, coherently and confidently. This requires practice.

*Before class, deliver your presentation at least twice. Ideally, have this rehearsal with someone so that you acquire ease in interacting. If this isn't possible, rehearse out loud alone.

*The rehearsal should be done in the same format you will use in class—sitting with your professor and classmates, or standing at a lectern. Replicate the class circumstances as closely as possible.

*Make certain you adhere to the time limits the professor has established. If you use more time than stipulated, you are infringing on the time your classmates will have for their own work. You are being assessed, in part, on your ability to make clear arguments within a specified time frame.

Listen.

*Embrace the feedback from your peers and your professor after the presentation.

*Allow them to fully offer comments before offering any rebuttals.

*Do not interrupt them while they are commenting on your presentation.

*If they bring up good points you had not considered, acknowledge that with appreciation. Remember, this should not be an exercise in “winning an argument,” but in understanding ideas.

Checklist for Presentations

_____ Have I followed the instructions given by the professor for this assignment?

_____ Have I carefully chosen 1-3 key ideas from the reading?

_____ Can I succinctly identify those ideas without summarizing the reading?

_____ Have I identified my own specific response to each of the ideas?

_____ Can I support my response to each idea with data that is historical, comparative, authorial or from another source?

_____ Do I have a carefully prepared outline?

_____ Have I rehearsed sufficiently?