

## **Class & Video Discussions**

The purpose of class discussions is to increase the students' interest and engagement in the course material. Classroom discussions help students stay focused and will increase their preparedness when they know they'll be called on to participate. Another benefit of discussions is they give you immediate feedback on the students' comprehension as well as insight into their communication and reasoning skills.

An effective way of improving classroom discussions is to give each student a few minutes to think about the topic individually before engaging in either a small group or large group discussion. After presenting the discussion topic, which may come from the assigned readings, from previously assigned thought experiments, case studies, or role plays, present the students with a provocative and interesting question. Give them a few minutes to think about the question on their own before conducting a large group discussion or dividing them into smaller groups for discussion. If you break the class up into smaller groups, be sure each group has a facilitator to lead the discussion. It also helps to give a few simple ground rules to follow. One that is very helpful is that no one in the group may speak twice until everyone has had the chance to speak once. Discussions can also be moved very easily online.

Videos and TED Talks are another great source for stimulating classroom discussions. The BBC 4 Radio station on YouTube is an excellent source of short video presentations on ethical topics. See: <https://www.youtube.com/user/bbcradiofour/playlists> for topics on ethical issues. To scan TED Talks for relevant topics, you can view their playlists here: <https://www.ted.com/playlists>.

Class discussions work best when you have prepared a few good questions to stimulate conversation, to move the conversation forward, to deal with difficult students, and to conclude the discussion. Whether you initiate the discussion with a reading, video, or TED Talk, make sure you have a well-formulated question for students to discuss. Here are a few examples of such questions to have ready to hand. Of course, their relevance will depend on the topic and discussion you are conducting, but you may easily adapt these questions to any context.

### To Stimulate Discussion

- Does anyone have a personal example or story that relates to this topic?
- What makes this topic real for you?
- Do you think this topic is important to most people? Why or why not?
- What do you see as the most important issue or issues with this topic?
- What are the different approaches for dealing with this topic?
- Who should be included in this conversation that is not represented?

### To Keep the Discussion Moving Forward

- What might be the consequences of the different approaches to this topic?
- What is important to the people who support the different approaches? What do they value most in their preferred approach? What's most important to you?
- What concerns people the most about the approaches they disagree with? What concerns you the most?
- What do you see as the tensions between these approaches?
- Would someone identify the values that seem to be clashing?
- What are the gray areas? Where are the ambiguities?
- What are the best arguments for and against the approaches we've discussed?

### To Deal with Difficult Students

- What do others think about this point?
- How would someone make a case against your position?
- How would someone else in the group respond to the concern or point just expressed?
- Thank you. What do others think about that?
- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- Would you give us an example?
- What would be the consequences of doing what you suggest?
- How might your view change if you were (poor/wealthy, straight/gay, white/black, citizen/immigrant)?

### To Wrap-up the Discussion

- How has your thinking about this topic changed?
- How has your thinking about other people and their views changed?
- Can someone suggest areas that we seem to have in common?
- What seemed important to all of us?
- Have we come to some common ground to support certain actions? What is that common ground and what are those actions?
- How can we use what we learned in this discussion?

If you are going to be grading the discussions, here is a helpful grading rubric:

Rubrics for Evaluating Class Discussions

Grading Rubric for Group Discussions:

Excellent: Student provided appropriate comments, was thoughtful and reflective, responded respectfully to other's postings, posted comments related to the discussion topic, and contributed fully to the final conclusion of the group. (Full Points)	Very good: Student provided appropriate comments, responded respectfully to other's postings, posted comments related to the discussion topic, and contributed to the final conclusion of the group. (Above Average Points)	Good: Student provided appropriate comments, posted comments related to the discussion topic, and contributed to the final conclusion of the group. (Average Points)	Fair: Student participated in the discussion, some posts were not related to the discussion topic, made short or irrelevant remarks, and contributed minimally to the final conclusion of the group. (Below Average Points)	Poor: Student responded with minimal effort, posted short or irrelevant remarks, and provided limited contribution to the final conclusion of the group. (Minimal Points)	No marks: Student did not participate in the group discussion. (No Points)
---	---	--	---	---	--

If you want the students to turn in a written overview of what they've learned in addition to the class discussion, especially if it was a video presentation, here are two helpful templates you can use:

### Additional Point Video Presentation

Your name:

Name of video presentation:

List three things you learned from the video presentation you didn't know before:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Answer the following questions with your best reasoned opinion:

- What was the main purpose of the video presentation?
- What was the main assertion (claim) of the video presentation?
- What were three reasons given in support of the main assertion?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- Did you find the reasons believable and persuasive? Why or why not?

List two ideas from the video presentation you found most significant (your two most important take-aways):

- 1.
- 2.

- What relevance does the video presentation have to our lives today?

## Additional Point Form

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Video Presentation:

List three things you learned from the video presentation you didn't know before:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Answer the following questions with your best reasoned opinion:

- What was the main idea of the philosopher or theory discussed in the video presentation?
- What are three things you find attractive about the philosopher's or theory's main ideas?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- What are three things about the philosopher's or theory's main ideas you are critical of?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- What relevance do the philosopher or theory have to our lives today?
- If you could ask the philosopher a question, what would it be?
- How do you think the philosopher would respond to your question?