

Group-Led Discussion Instructions

Overview: Discussion lies at the heart of critical thinking, and critical thinking goes hand in hand with good writing. As active readers and critical thinkers, we have to re-read, rethink, and respond to the ideas presented in a text for a complex understanding of it. By approaching the reading as a writer, you will begin recognizing that published work is never set in stone and that, as Donald Murray states, “the words on the page are never finished.” Similarly, your own writing doesn’t occur in a vacuum as you are always responding or contributing to some kind of conversation, directly or indirectly. Thus, for every major paper this semester, we will have group-led discussions to help connect ideas, question the readings, and (hopefully) inspire interesting paper ideas.

Prompt: Each group will facilitate discussion for **40-50 minutes** in front of the class with a visual aid (a PowerPoint presentation or something similar). This does not mean that you will speak non-stop for the entire time; rather, you will facilitate a meaningful discussion with your classmates. Groups should come with a plan of how they’d like to structure the discussion. This assignment will be worth 50 points (or 5% of your overall grade).

Each group must collaborate on coming up with the questions and the PowerPoint presentation; please do not work independently. Groups should provide roughly 7-10 questions that cover all the readings. Each group will be required to email their questions to me 24 hours before they lead discussion.

NOTE: Those who aren’t leading discussion still need come to class prepared to discuss the reading.

Learning outcomes: Students will fulfill the MWP’s outcomes of collaboration, process, and rhetoric. To come up with well-informed questions, students will read the assigned selections several times and revise the questions with their audience in mind. Working with other students to develop open-ended questions will further enable groups to consider their audience and their purpose in asking such questions.

Tips: Make sure to read the material several times. For open-ended questions that will generate in-depth discussion, avoid “yes or no” and “either/or” questions (for example: “Did you all like Linda Flower’s essay?”). Instead, try coming up with something more open-ended (for example: “How does Linda Flower’s essay help us understand _____?”). Also, although readings will sometimes provide follow-up questions at the end, avoid simply recycling those questions verbatim. You have the freedom to ask about and discuss what you found interesting and, more importantly, *why* you found it interesting.

Feel free to be creative! You might bring in an outside example or play a short clip on YouTube—as long as you explain how it helps us better understand the assigned readings. Above all, the discussion group should demonstrate your understanding of the text and ability to summarize the readings effectively before asking questions.

You will be graded on the following...

1. Awareness of audience: How will you plan to keep your peers engaged in the discussion?
2. Quality of questions: Ensure that the discussion is useful by asking challenging questions, pushing your peers to go beyond the obvious.
3. A demonstrated understanding of the readings: You should understand your assigned readings very well, so give yourself plenty of time to read and re-read them.
4. Ability to facilitate discussion: Don't allow the conversation to slip into irrelevant topics. If it does, make sure to get it back on track!
5. Collaboration: Group members should demonstrate a clear sense of working together. Avoid cutting up the readings among members; instead, every person in the group should be prepared to contribute to the larger goal of the discussion.

Questions to Help You Analyze What You Read:*

1. What is the writer's main point or thesis?
2. To whom is the essay addressed? To a general audience with little or no background knowledge of the subject? To a specialized group familiar with the topic? To those who are likely to agree or disagree with the argument?
3. What is the writer's purpose in addressing the audience?
4. What is the writer's attitude toward the subject of the essay—positive, critical, objective, ironic, hostile?
5. What assumptions, if any, does the writer make about the subject and/or audience? Are these assumptions explicit (stated) or implicit (unstated)?
6. What kinds of evidence does the writer use to support his or her thesis—personal experience, expert opinions, statistics? Does the writer supply enough evidence to support his or her position? Is the evidence reliable, specific, and up-to-date?
7. Does the writer address opposing views on the issue?
8. How is the essay organized and developed? Does the writer's strategy of development suit his or her subject and purpose?
9. How effective is the essay? Is the writer convincing about his or her position?

* Taken from the textbook *Language Awareness* (page 10)