

# PhD Seminar Discussion Presentation Guidelines

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## 1. Your Role: Evaluator, Not Summarizer

Do **not** feel obligated to provide a comprehensive summary of the paper. Everyone has already read it (or should have).

Your job is to help the group **evaluate**, **interpret**, and **make sense of** the work.

People want to hear:

- your perspective
- your judgment
- your interpretation of what matters most
- where the paper succeeds or falls short
- how we should think about it as scholars

This applies especially to conference papers — the audience has already heard the presentation. Do not repeat it. Add value.

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## 2. Core Questions Your Discussion Should Address

A strong discussion typically engages with the following dimensions.

### A. Research Questions

- What key questions is the paper trying to answer?
- Why do these questions matter?
- Are they important, interesting, or consequential?
- How do *you* see their significance (beyond what the authors say)?

## B. Research Design and Approach

- How do the authors attempt to answer their questions?
- Is the research design appropriate and convincing?
- What aspects of the design are particularly strong?
- What concerns or limitations do you see — and why?

## C. Core Logic or Conceptual Contribution

- What is the central idea, mechanism, framework, or model?
- What is the main intellectual contribution?
- Can you clarify or reinterpret it to help others understand it more deeply?

## D. Findings and Conclusions

- What are the main findings?
- Are they credible? Why or why not?
- Do the conclusions logically follow from the evidence?
- How persuasive is the interpretation?

## E. How the Authors Reach Their Conclusions

Sometimes the most valuable contribution you can make is to help others understand the **reasoning process**, especially for:

- analytical models
- formal theory
- complex empirical identification
- multi-step arguments

If the logic is difficult, unpack it.

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## 3. Discussing Conference Papers vs. Published Papers

### When Discussing Conference Papers

You should explicitly do the following:

**1. Start with what you value**

- What is strong, promising, or exciting?
- Why does it matter?

**2. Then move to concerns and suggestions**

- What issues should be addressed?
- What improvements would meaningfully strengthen the work?

**3. Offer value-adding recommendations**

Suggestions may include:

- new analyses
- reframing or repositioning
- theoretical refinement
- additional literature
- conceptual clarification

Your suggestions should be **substantive and useful**, not trivial extensions or impractical requests.

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## **When Discussing Published Papers**

Published papers are typically more polished, but they still have limitations.

- Identify weaknesses or open questions that remain.
  - Do not simply repeat limitations listed by the authors.
  - Provide your own scholarly perspective.
  - When possible, suggest ways those limitations could be addressed.
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## **4. Moving Beyond “Extensions”: Think Future Research Directions**

Many discussants end with “extensions.” This is often not very helpful.

Extensions frequently sound incremental, derivative, or superficial.

Instead, focus on **future research directions**.

Strong future research directions should be:

- **Research-worthy** — capable of generating meaningful new insights
- **Substantive** — not minor tweaks
- **Standalone** — potentially a full study on its own

Examples of good future directions:

- Address an important question the paper leaves unresolved
- Challenge or test the paper's core assumptions
- Examine boundary conditions or alternative mechanisms
- Develop a complementary or competing theoretical perspective
- Apply the paper's methods or concepts in a new domain
- Build a new research program inspired by the paper

Think in terms of **intellectual trajectories**, not add-ons.

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## 5. What Makes a Strong Discussion Overall

A strong discussion:

- ✓ Interprets rather than summarizes
- ✓ Evaluates rather than describes
- ✓ Clarifies difficult ideas
- ✓ Identifies meaningful strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Provides constructive, research-relevant insights
- ✓ Helps the audience think more deeply about the paper

Your goal is to make the room understand the paper **better than they would have on their own**.

Also, I also encourage you to **introduce at least one author with a picture**. So that next time when you meet the author, you can recognize him/her and say hi.

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