

Presentations

Once during the semester you and a partner will present on an assigned reading. You will sign up for these presentations online during the first week of class, so you might have a quick look at the essays before you sign up for one that interests you.

First you will provide a **brief** context presentation on the text and its author. You can discuss biographical, historical, cultural, and/or theoretical context. Present any information that will help the class better understand the perspective and motives of the author, as well as the impact of this text. The presentation should be at least 5 minutes long, and **cannot be any longer than 10 minutes** (5 minutes is perfectly fine). This does not need to be a very formal presentation; you do not need any kind of slideshow, media, etc. However, you **do need** to provide the class with better and more interesting information than what they might glean from Wikipedia.

After the context presentation, you will lead the class discussion for **25-30 minutes**. In order to lead the discussion, you will have discussion questions prepared ahead of time. The amount of discussion questions you prepare depends on the type of questions you prepare. Productive discussion questions direct the class to certain moments or aspects of the text but do not have an obvious answer. They should be neither too general nor too specific. In the extreme, take the following examples:

Question: “Did you like this text?” Answer: “Well *I* like this argument...well *I* like this sentence...well *I* dislike this image...well *I* dislike with this claim...” (While this might incite a conversation that lasts 45 minutes, that conversation will probably involve many speakers discussing many different and unrelated points. It will be hard to keep the conversation on one specific point, and so it will be hard to grasp a very meaningful understanding of the essay)

Question: “What’s the name of the author’s dog?” Answer: “Max.” (This has not been a very productive conversation)

Ideally you want to ask a question that is not easily answered, that opens a specific discussion or debate, and that leads the class into the text itself. This might mean something along the lines of:

“This particular passage seems to be doing a lot of rhetorical and argumentative work in the essay, I wonder how you read these lines and why she might have phrased them that way?”

“He keeps using this term over and over again, but he never really defines it, how do you think he means it? How does that definition change our understanding of his argument?”

“Here, his argument seems to be resting on a certain assumption—what do you think that assumption might be?”

However, not all questions need to be fully directed at a passage or page number. Sometimes you might want to ask a question that requires the class to find examples of their own. This is okay, as long as you give them enough parameters that they can accomplish this in about 30 seconds or so. For example:

“She seems to be using this image a lot. Can you find a moment where this image particularly complicates her argument?”

“This author develops his argument by addressing several counter-arguments. Which do you think is the strongest counter-argument he suggests, and what do you make of his response to that argument?”

As you’re asking these questions, do not feel obligated to respond to every answer; in fact, it’s best not to respond to every answer. Allow the class to develop their own discussion. Your job is to encourage and guide discussion, not to fill up the class time with your own ideas. Try not to answer your own question, at least until all other students have been given a chance to do so. However, feel free to redirect the discussion if things have gone off-course, and jump in with a new question when the current one has been exhausted.

You and your partner are expected to prepare both the presentation and discussion questions together. However, you can divide the presentation up however you would like, with the only rule being that both of you speak. So, for example, one student might deliver the context presentation while the other asks the questions, or each student might take half the context presentation and half the questions.