

Academic Discussions

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1 Introduction

An academic discussion can have a lot of great effects. In an academic discussion, participants will have chances to learn more information about a topic, share their information and opinions, get clarification of a topic, possibly change the outlooks of a topic, gain more practice in public speaking and gain more confidence for the public speaking.

This paper is about to give readers an overview of how to prepare and participate in an academic discussion. In order to be prepared, and to participate and contribute to an academic discussion, participants should focus on four parts:

- Preparation before an academic discussion.
- Observing and listening to other participants.
- Understanding and analyzing other participants' information.
- participating and contributing to the academic discussion.

In order to contribute to a discussion, participants need to finish the first part to be ready for an academic discussion, to observing and analyzing other participants' content during a discussion, and to speak to contribute to the discussion.

2 Preparation Before Discussion

Before an academic discussion, preparation is important. It is nearly impossible for an unprepared participant to make the best contribution in a discussion because the time is generally limited during an academic discussion. For an academic discussion, there are multiple aspects need to be considered during the preparation process.

- The topic of a discussion. Researching the topic of a discussion, and collect enough information and resource for a discussion[1]. Researching a discussion topic brings valuable information. Information can include facts about the topic, data about the topic and previous opinions and ideas about the topic.

- Talking to peers who won't be participants of the discussion. A peer outside of a discussion may have different perspectives and thoughts which are valuable for the discussion.

3 Observing and Listening

Within an academic discussion, participants may choose to speak later. The participants need to decide what they speak based on some information. Information can be gained from two ways, one is listening and another one is observing.

3.1 Listening

Taking enough time to listen to other peoples' speaking is not only because of being polite, listening to others' information will be a crucial step for one's own speaking. Following point are important during listening to others.

- Being attentive and relaxed. Paying attention to the speaker is the most basic requirements for being a good listener. However, a listener doesn't need to stare fixedly to the speaker[4].
- Keep an open mind. When listening to other people, one may have different thoughts about the content of the speaker, such as agreement, or disagreement. Regardless of the thought to the content, it is always rational to allow the speaker to finish the whole flow of speaking without judging easily[4].
- Focusing on others' opinion, their altitude to other opinions, and clarification of the discussion topic. Participants' opinion is a cue for an overview of the discussion, and the clarification of the topic helps the understanding of the topic.
- Try for the feeling of the speaker. Feeling of a speaker may include different modes (such as boredom, interest and etc), altitude, and etc, and these can be great information. This information helps to handle the discussion, as well as one's own speaking. More understanding of other people is a great asset for participants to give more effective speaking[4].

3.2 Observing

In addition to listening, observation of the discussion also helps. In a discussion, observation with good quality can reveal a variety of information.

- Amount of time each person speaks. It can be a reference for the timing control over the discussion.

- Person who dominate the discussion. Information, such as current theme and trend, of the discussion can be derived from who is dominating the discussion and what is the opinion of the person.
- How other speakers contribute to the discussion. Learning about others' speaking styles and methods is a great way to be involved in the discussion.
- Nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues form a considerable part of communication. Observation may tell the mood of people within a face-to-face discussion, such as boredom, irritation, enthusiasm. The eyes, mouth, shoulders and other parts of the body will unconsciously express this information [4].

4 Understanding and Analyzing

In an academic discussion, the information gained from listening and observing other participants can't be directly used to make a contribution to the discussion. In order to utilize the value of gained information, participants need to understand and analyze gained information with their own knowledge. When understanding and analyzing, critical thinking is extremely important.

Critical thinking is active, persistent and careful consideration of opinion or knowledge received[3]. During an academic discussion, participants need to critically evaluate the information received. For example, a participant is not supposed to judge an opinion or information is right because it is supportive of his or her own opinion, and vice versa. The evaluation should be based on reasoning and evidence, such as facts, data and etc.

5 Participating and Contributing to the Discussion

Except receiving information from the discussion and analyzing the information, a participant is supposed to speak to contribute to the discussion. In a discussion, there way different possible ways of speaking.

- Proposing topic or question which is valuable for being clarified and discussed. Such as, "Is Cheesecake should be cake?". This can be a great way to start a discuss[2].
- Speaking an opinion about the topic. The raised opinion should be supported by reasoning and evidence, such as data or facts. For example, participants can indicate that "Cheesecake is a cake" because the majority of people in a survey choose cheesecake is a cake.
- Speaking comments to agree or disagree with others' information. The comments should be constructive and respective. It is recommended to

include enough reasoning and evidence to support the agreement or disagreement. For example, when someone indicates that "Cheesecake is not cake", participants need reasoning and evidence to support or against the point "Cheesecake is no cake".

- Speaking based on others' opinions or information. It is possible for one to explain other speakers' opinion and their information, and add his or her own opinion and information in speaking.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, the above sections are overviews of four aspects needed for contributing in an academic discussion: preparation before the discussion, listening and observing during the discussion, analyzing information from the discussion, contributing a discussion. These four aspects are basic for participating in an academic discussion, and making a better contribution to an academic discussion requires more preparation and more exercise. For a great academic discussion, more skills and aspects need to be involved, such as control overtime during a discussion, the ability to lead a discussion, the ability to cooperate with other participants (such as how to making voice without surpassing others' voices)and etc. Exercise and constant learning will be the panacea for better participation in an academic discussion.

References

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