# ES2660 Panel Discussion Self Reflection Exercise

Use this overall feedback on the panel discussion as an assessment of your skills and ability to express your ideas and points critically, to guide your self-reflection on the key learning points from your panel discussion experience.

**Introduction**

The aim of this assignment was to apply what you have learned about holding an academic conversation that raised provoking questions and explored a specific topic deeply and vigorously. You were invited to apply:

* Barrett’s taxonomy of comprehension levels to mine for meaning in your topic.
* Ennis’ taxonomy of critical thinking skills and dispositions as encapsulated in mnemonic to deconstruct the texts that you read in preparing the content of the discussion.
* Critical thinking to constructing a meaningful discussion.
* Communication skills in exchanging ideas, building on, challenging and developing discussion points, and asking provoking questions of each other. Such skills would include primarily:
  + Precise articulation, characterised by judicious word choice and fluent phrasing – the sort that came from either an extensive vocabulary that could be used well in an impromptu speaking situation OR from having cogitated about various aspects and points on a topic beforehand so that as a critical thinker, you knew why you hold certain views and opinions and have considered opposing views.
  + Informed opinions that are backed by evidence and explained by logical reasoning – ORE = Opinion + Reasoning + Evidence.
  + Depth of knowledge so as to be able to engage at more than surface level for the various points raised.
  + Confidence in developing and defending your stand, able to counter argue where appropriate.
  + Natural and proficient use of nonverbal communication such as eye contact, facial expression to support the impression of confidence and of being engaged with fellow participants.
* Higher order communication skills, such as:
  + Expressing ideas with imagination and wit e.g. in the use of rhetorical devices – analogies, giving apposite examples, metaphors, mnemonics, role playing, setting your discussion as part of a series of pod casts or a vlog.
  + Avoiding fallacies
  + Spotting fallacies and challenging them when spotted
  + Expressing ideas with wit and panache – allowing your personality to shine through e.g. humour, being relaxed, engaging spontaneously, being kind to shyer participants and inviting them into the conversation, intellectual curiosity – listening attentively, asking for elaboration or probing for more information, intellectual humility – accepting justified rebuke or a different POV that is backed by evidence.

Why are these traits useful or good to have? They evidence the oft lauded soft skills needed in the 21st century workplace[[1]](#footnote-1), and which are part of your future proofing.

**Structure and content of the panel discussion**

**Structure**

In this section, it was hoped that you and your team would show your developing CT skills and dispositions. Let’s start with the short list of skills and dispositions introduced in week 1 of the course.

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| 1. Being open-minded. 2. Trying to be well informed. 3. Identifying conclusions, reasons, and assumptions. 4. Defining terms in a way appropriate for the context. 5. Drawing conclusions when warranted, but with caution 6. Judging the credibility of sources. 7. Asking appropriate clarifying questions. 8. Judging the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions, and evidence. 9. Developing and defending a position on an issue (=>constructing/reconstructing arguments). 10. Planning experiments and judging experimental designs (=>imagination and creativity; =>hypothesis). |

In the panel discussion, you would have started with taxon no.10 first, planning an experiment and judging the experimental design. The ‘experiment’ was designing a discussion for four or five participants on a topic of your choice. To choose a topic, you had to be well read and to make the topic interesting to yourselves and your audience, you would need to look for an angle that had some degree of controversy. You would also have needed to divide your discussion time of 20-15 minutes so as to get the most out of the discussion, so you were not covering too wide a scope at a superficial level. As opposed to a more defined focus and to go deep, even raising the final thought provoking question yourselves. More “thoughtful” teams might even ask how to ‘entertain’ their audience and even more thoughtful teams would even have anticipated questions and objections and come up with refutations or extra information as needed.

**So how did your team ‘design’ your discussion?**

Taxon no.9 would be your considered stand and would help you make coherent and cogent contributions throughout.

Taxon no.8 would help you evaluate what was being said to you by other participants and members of the audience, as well as the discussion as a whole.

Taxon no.7 would help you show intellectual curiosity and engagement.

Taxa nos. 1-6 would be mainly to do with the quality of the points and the discussion as a whole.

**So, how did your team do in structuring your discussion?**

**Content**

Evidence should be referenced in the more informal convention associated with discussions, e.g. “a 2015 US study of ride hailing usage” or “2018 MAS figures for fintech uptake in Singapore indicate…”. This is less precise than the in text and end of text referencing expected in formal writing, e.g. Centre for Future Ready Graduates, (2017, p12)…as the in text and the end of text as shown on page 1 as a footnote.

What counts as evidence in a discussion? Examples, analogies, news items, statistics, illustrative anecdotes. Evidence by itself says nothing much, so accompanying evidence is your synthesis and or interpretation – this is worth a lot more. It represents your CT value add.

**So how did your team evidence your knowledge?**

**Discussion frames and discussion behaviour**

Discussion frames refers to the quality of your contributions in exploring the topic and delving deeper into it, raising critical points, sharing insights and grappling with new ideas or controversial issues. Discussion behaviour refers to how you interacted with each other. Did anyone dominate? Did everyone have equal speaking time? Did anyone hold back? Was the discussion facilitated according to a clear outline? Did the moderator keep the peace? Did the devil’s advocate help people see a different perspective or to challenge complacency? Were the participants engaged with each other and did they debate with each other more than narrate prepared points? What was the quality of the engagement with the questions from the audience?

**So how well did your team do in delivering a robust and interesting discussion?**

Overall, at the end of the panel discussion, did the audience learn something about the topic and did they go away, provoke to think more on the topic? One of the ways to ensure at least the key points are communicated clearly is to summarise them at the end, synthesise the main points of agreement and highlight the opposing viewpoints, reiterate the tentative conclusions or possibly but unlikely the definitive conclusion at the end of the discussion time and at the end of the Q and A session. The proper etiquette should also be observed with the facilitator thanking the panellists and the audience.

**So how well did your team do overall?**

**Conclusion**

The panel discussion was a formative assessment, meaning the feedback should be used to inform the next time you have a discussion. This will be for the Oxford Tutorial discussion, where you will have to grapple with each other’s essays, acting as critical friends to each other. This is worth 10% of your CA.

There is also some transference of skills from developing and defending a stand to the Oxford Essay which is also a summative assessment, worth 30% of your CA. As in the panel discussion, for the essay, when you plan the content, it is like designing an experiment. Experiment has a somewhat broader definition than an activity in a lab. It is synonymous with a solution or a proposal to an issue. In your career, you may have to put up concept papers or proposals or write feasibility reports. These are all in effect, essays in disguise.

**So what are the key learning points you can transfer from planning a panel discussion to constructing a written argument, aka essay? Please think about this and send your considered response to your tutor.**

1. Centre for Future Ready Graduates 2017 Report http://www.nus.edu.sg/cfg/sites/default/files/documents/frr2017.pdf

   Formal and informal communication at the workplace , Manuti et al, 2015 http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/doi/10.1111/ijtd.12044/abstract

   Business communication practices from employers perspectives, Coffelt, Baker and Corey, 2016; http://journals.sagepub.com.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/doi/full/10.1177/2329490616644014 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)