Objectives

- Identify the benefits of classroom discussions
- Predict ways to incorporate skills learned today to non-IOR situations
- Implement the groundwork for leading successful discussions in a variety of class formats
- Determine what makes for a strong question
- Solve issues that arise during classroom discussions
Discussions as a Learning Tool

- Why do you use/want to use discussions in your classroom?
  - A = It requires less preparation for you
  - B = It encourages active participation
  - C = Students can practice critical thinking skills
  - D = Opportunity for students to exchange and collaborate ideas
Discussions as a Learning Tool

- What are your goals for the discussion?
- Different goals require different kinds of preparation.
- Potential benefits:
  - Apply concepts
  - Contemplate new material
  - Clarify content
  - Active learning and participation
  - Practice critical thinking skills
  - Exposure to multiple points of view
  - Collaboration or exchange of ideas
Laying the Groundwork

- Prepare the students for discussions from the very first day of class
- Set expectations
  - Participation - grading?
  - In syllabus
  - Verbally
- Establish a classroom community
  - Get to know each other
  - Use students’ names and encourage students to use each other’s names
  - Create discussion guidelines
- If possible, create a physical space that encourages discussion
Online Discussions

- What is your top reason for avoiding online discussions?
  - A = I don’t! I love online discussions.
  - B = I teach/TA a face-to-face class.
  - C = Getting students to participate is like pulling teeth!
  - D = They don’t seem like a worthwhile exercise.
Online Discussions - Key Considerations

- Set clear expectations for students
  - Original post, response post, word count, grammar, evidence/support, engagement
  - Helpful to provide students with advice on proper language and ideas for posing strong questions
- Establish grading criteria
  - Best to grade online discussions
- Think through the role of the moderate/facilitator
  - IoR or TA
  - How active should the teacher/TA be?
- Start discussions with strong questions that offer multiple avenues of response
- Resources:
  - Online Discussions - Tips for Instructors
  - Online Discussions - Tips for Students
Online Discussions - Benefits

- Can be utilized in all types of courses
- Gives students time to compose thoughts
  - Less pressure to respond right away
  - Beneficial for students with social anxiety...
- Increases the quality of responses/discussions
  - Work on writing skills
  - Practice supporting ideas with evidence
- Accessible to students with disabilities

- Resources:
  - Online Discussions - Tips for Instructors
  - Online Discussions - Tips for Students
Large Lecture Discussions

● Make large classes feel small - discussion formats
  ○ Think/Pair/Share
  ○ Small groups
    ■ Have groups report the conclusions of their discussion
  ○ Clickers or polling technology to generate discussion
    ■ Can be used to enhance T/P/S

● Break up discussion with mini-discussions
  ○ Try a 15-20 minute lecture and then a 10 minute discussion, repeat.
  ○ Ask questions throughout the lecture
    ■ Makes lecture interactive and keeps students engaged
Preparing for the Discussion

- In the past, how have you prepared for leading a discussion?
  - A = I don’t. I like to live dangerously.
  - B = I re-read the text or course materials.
  - C = I carefully plan out how I want the discussion to go.
  - D = I prepare some questions, but I’m also ready to see how things progress.
Preparing for the Discussion - Teacher

- Remember to ask, “What are my goals for the discussion?”
- Plan guiding questions
  - How will you kick off the conversation?
  - ... address topics you want to hit on?
  - ... revive a dying discussion?
  - ... wrap it up?
- What is the basis of the discussion?
  - Text or reading assignment
  - Image
  - Video
  - Class lecture
  - Current event
  - Etc.
Preparing the Student for Discussion

- Remind students of expectations
- Provide pre-discussion reading questions
- Short freewriting exercise or quiz
- Ask for discussion questions based on their reading
Types of Conversations

- What kind of conversation do you usually use in class?
  - A = Think/Pair/Share
  - B = Small discussion groups
  - C = Whole class discussion
  - D = Ask questions throughout a lecture
Types of Conversations

- Two person
- Small group
- Whole class
- Teacher-led
- Student-led

- Interleaved into a lecture
- * Centered around a common experience or topic
- * Debate
- * Case-study or problem
- Think-pair-share
- * Small groups
- Conver-stations
- Activity based

Resource: [Creative ideas for discussion formats](#)
Structure the Conversation

- State your objectives for the discussion
- Start with a short activity
  - Respond to reading questions individually in writing or small groups
- Determine the flow of the conversation
  - Do you want to call on students?
  - Have them call on the next person?
  - Let the conversation flow organically?
- Kick off the discussion with a strong question
- It’s your job to keep the conversation on track!
- Leave time at the end of class -
  - Take the last 5 minutes to wrap up the discussion
  - Ask for lingering questions
  - Exit ticket
Asking Strong Questions

- Questions asking for information
- Open ended
  - What’s going on here? What do you make of the situation or example?
- Priority
  - Which issues are most important? Where do you start?
- Challenge
  - Why do you say that? How would you explain? Where’s your evidence?
- Extension
  - What else? Keep going? Therefore?
- Prediction
  - What would happen if...?
- Summary

Source: Harvard Typology of Questions
Resource: Designing Effective Discussion Questions
Weak Question Types

- Generally avoid these types of questions. They often lead to dead-ends, confusion, or awkward moments
  - Simple yes or no questions
  - Too vague, broad, or confusing
  - Fillers
    - Does everybody understand? Any questions?
  - Leading
    - Question itself implies the expected answer
  - Slanted
    - Questions convey a certain perspective and students who disagree might close down
- Also avoid asking too many questions at once.

Source: Designing Effective Discussion Questions
Resource: Discussion Questions that Follow Bloom's Taxonomy
The Facilitator

- What is your role when it comes to facilitating a discussion?
- What are your responsibilities?
- When do you step in and guide conversation?
  - Ask questions
  - Embrace silence
  - Synthesize/clarify
  - Summarize
  - Connect
  - Push the conversation forward
  - Moderate conversations dominated by one or several students
- Avoid shutting down a student’s comment or question
The Dreaded Silence

- How would you handle the dreaded silence after asking a question?
  - A = Ask another question
  - B = Call on a student to respond to your question
  - C = Embrace the silence
  - D = Rephrase your original question
The Dreaded Silence

- Embrace the silence
- If your posed question doesn’t get any responses, try again by rephrasing.
- Allow students to gather their thoughts
  - Consider pausing for a short writing exercise
- Ask students to summarize key points so far
- Direct students towards a sentence, paragraph, graph, quote, etc. and use as a new jumping off point
Potential Discussion Pitfalls

● What is your biggest concern when it comes to facilitating discussion?
  ○ A = Students who talk too much
  ○ B = Students who don’t talk at all
  ○ C = Students who aren’t listening to each other
  ○ D = Conversations falling flat
  ○ E = Other

● When you run into these issues brainstorm solutions with faculty, colleagues, and PIE!
Top Five Resources on Discussion Leading

- Leading Discussions from The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning
  ○ Be sure to click “For More Information” at the bottom!
- The Dreaded Discussion: Ten Ways to Start by Peter Fredrick
- Discussions from the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching
  ○ This website has a ton of great teaching resources!
- Question Strategies from the University of Waterloo Center for Teaching Excellence
- Effective Class Discussions from the Yale Center for Teaching and Learning