

VIDEO HANDOUT: BUILDING DISCUSSION SKILLS

It takes practice for students to develop skills to participate in discussion, and it also takes practice for instructors to learn to lead discussions well. You can build your own discussion-leading skills while you help students build the skills they need to participate actively in discussion. The most rewarding and fascinating discussions happen when you participate with students authentically as fellow inquirers who share a curiosity about our world.

Building Discussion Skills video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90vEVMVsmxl>.

Keep these points in mind when building discussion skills:

- Explicitly tell students they'll be developing discussion skills, such as accurate listening, putting thoughts into words, and taking turns. Take time to explain and model each of these abilities.
- Start students out talking in pairs with routine like Walk & Talk or Turn & Talk, and while paying attention to their skill levels.
- To encourage listening, start by asking students to share what their partner said, and work up to their sharing their own thoughts.
- If you are new to leading meaning-making discussions, don't try a whole-group discussion right away. Practice by leading Walk & Talk and Turn & Talk routines, including mini-whole-group discussions as you debrief questions that partners have talked about.
- When you think you and a group are ready for it, eventually try leading a whole-group discussion, while mixing in some talk in pairs.
- Push students beyond only taking turns to share, by practicing strategies to get an actual discussion flowing, with an exchange of ideas and discussion about each other's thinking.
- Practice asking broad questions, listening, asking follow-up questions, rephrasing student responses, asking others to agree or disagree respectfully, helping everyone feel comfortable participating, and adding bits of content that stimulate further understanding and discussion.
- Use a Discussion Map:
 1. Ask a broad question.
 2. Listen to student responses.
 3. Ask for evidence and probe student thinking.
 4. Ask for agreement/disagreement from other students.
 5. Add content to give students more evidence and/or ask a question that leads back to the main topic.
 6. At the end of the discussion, summarize the main points.
- Model curiosity by seeking out the edges of your own understanding. If instructors are genuinely curious about things they find, and about what all their students think, students will sense this attention, which will make them more likely to participate and feel heard.
- If students ask what something is, rather than telling them immediately, ask: "what do you notice and wonder about it?" Instead of "leading" with the names of objects or phenomena, "trail" with them, to help students' curiosity and learning.
- When students bring up interesting questions, show appreciation for their curiosity, and help them pursue their questions through observation and discussion.
- Be flexible, always searching for what is of interest to the students, their existing ideas on the subject, and how the discussion topic relates to useful concepts.
- Encourage students to address each other (not just you!) and also to consider each other's ideas and to build upon those ideas whenever they can.

Video discussion prompts (discuss any that you find interesting):

- Was there anything in the video that surprised you or that was particularly striking?
- Do you have questions about using strategies shown in the video? What challenges might you face using these with students, and how might you deal with them?
- What are some “next steps” you can take to build your own discussion-leading skills? To help build those of your students?
- What might you focus on to build discussion skills of a group with less-developed discussion skills? A group with more-advanced skills?
- What can you do to get students to move beyond just taking turns sharing, to actually engaging in a discussion, and respectfully responding to each other’s ideas?

REFLECTIVE TEACHING DIAGRAM

Research has found that thinking about teaching as a cycle that involves planning for instruction, teaching lessons, collecting evidence, reflecting, and making adjustments with the goal of improving learning, can all help instructors make the subtle shifts to continually improve their practice over time. You can use this diagram to help visualize the steps in a reflective teaching cycle and then think about how to engage in this type of iterative process.

