



Discussion Prompts and Prods

Prompting Discussion: Especially in large group settings, it is often challenging to “get the discussion going” when posing a question to the room. The following can be helpful:

- Start by asking a few yes/no questions that require a “show of hands.” This gets those present into the act of participating.
 - If not everyone participates, ask for an “undecided” count.
 - Even if there is a clear correct majority response, ask for a volunteer to explain why the answer is correct (after indicating to the room that it is).
 - If there is no clear majority, ask for a few volunteers to explain why they voted the way they did.
 - If no one responds...WAIT...and let the room know you need them to respond.
- Move to a non-yes/no question that is relatively easy...i.e.: “describe” something. Start with one volunteer and then ask for others to add to what was said. Write the responses on the board if possible, so everyone can see their contribution (this encourages more contributions).
- On more difficult content or cases, have students work in pairs first to build confidence.
- Ask the room to generate what might be a good exam question...this all tells what they are having trouble with...and then have the room answer the questions.
- Ask for specific sections of the room that have been quiet to respond.

Keeping Groups on Track: Small group work is a good precursor for the team-based environment of the workplace. However, in the classroom, it is often a challenging to “keep groups on track” and not misuse valuable class time. The following can be helpful:

- *Maintain group size at 5-8.* This encourages participation and discourages social loafing.
- *Establish clear roles & responsibilities.* Everyone in the group should have a “job” even if it is to observe the group process (which is a great learning experience all by itself).
- *Identify a clear desired outcome* (calculate, draw, list, etc.). This signals when the group work is complete.
- *Establish group rules for effective process.* These are conditions that will help learning.
- *Establish comfort.* Ask the members of each group to share something like their birthday to allow them to introduce themselves to one another and set an equal tone.
- *Ask the groups to stop after half the time is elapsed and self-assess* (what are you doing that is effective? What can you do to make sure you are adhering to the group rules?).
- Reinforce positive behaviors (that was a great way of building on previous ideas).
- *Deal with negative behaviors (non-verbally first, then by referencing ground rules).*
- *Avoid the “all report out trap.” Start with one group and ask for additions only.*
- *Foster reflection on the process. Have each group identify one thing that made it work well.*