

## Discussion Group Instructions

You and two or three other students will work as a team to lead one assigned discussion group during the quarter as listed on your syllabus for each week. You must give an interesting and intelligent presentation before many of your peers. This is an awesome and anxious responsibility. When you have finished, however, I guarantee that you will feel a sense of accomplishment that you will remember for the rest of your lives.

The purpose is to stimulate a discussion among the whole class about the assigned readings that pertain to your topic. The discussion topic is listed for each week on your class syllabus. It will be necessary for you to research at the Western Library in order to bring fresh material and ideas to the discussion topic.

Your group has total freedom to design whatever strategies that you believe will best work. Neither the Teaching Assistant or I will veto any of your ideas. However, you are required to meet with the T.A. or me about a week before your discussion group presentation in order to get an objective opinion of what you propose to do. Before you meet with the T.A. or me, you should have a well-developed plan.

Your discussion strategies can vary widely. Be as creative as you want, be controversial, and have fun—even if the topic is serious. Do whatever you think will work well!

### Grading:

You will receive a checklist handout of what I will be looking for during your discussion presentation.

- Although you are required to write a first 2-3 page paper, you will not have to write a final 6-8 page term paper.
- Instead, you will be graded on your discussion group leadership and presentation. Each student in your group will give a brief, "honest" assessment of his or her work and the work of the other members of the group. I and the T.A. will consider these evaluations along with our own perceptions of how much work you put into the presentation. We will then assign a letter grade worth thirty percent of your course grade. (equal to the percentage that you would have been assigned if you had done a term paper).
- Usually, every person in the discussion group will receive the same team grade. But, in some cases, persons who do not pull their weight will receive a lower grade.
- This Discussion Presentation project is worth 40% of your course grade
- Very Important: Discussion Group Packet  
None of this should require extra work, but your group must turn in a Discussion Group Packet:

The discussion group packet must include:

1. A cover sheet with your topic title, course number and section, and list of your team members in alphabetical order.
2. An outline lesson plan of what your group did for your presentation.
3. Everything that you used during your discussion presentation, such as questionnaires, fact sheets, discussion questions, overheads, handouts, videos (the name, not the actual video), slides, etc.,
4. The notes that individual group presenters used, and
5. A sealed envelope from each of you with letter grades and a brief justification of the grade that you have assigned to yourself and the other group members. This packet is crucial, because I have many classes and students. Your packet will trigger my memory of your discussion presentation and help me and the T.A. better evaluate your grade. Give me this packet no later than one week after your presentation. AND, do not give me pieces of the packet over several days. I want a complete finished packet, including your self-evaluations, given to me all at once.

I will expect to see from your packet that you did not rely solely on the internet for your research. You are required to do library research.

If your group believes that a particular student is not taking this responsibility seriously, let me know. I will not hesitate to strike that student from the discussion list and require that she or he write a term paper instead. If they do not then write a term paper, they will receive a failing grade for the course.

## Some Presentation and Discussion Tips:

- VERY IMPORTANT: Make sure that you have a thesis (a theme, idea, or point) for your topic, so that the different parts and sub-topics fit together as a whole.
- It is more interesting if you periodically involve the audience in discussion rather than presenting all of your information and then inviting discussion only at the end of your hour.
- Practice your presentation beforehand - preferably in the classroom in which you will be giving your presentation.
- Speak Loudly!!!!!!!!!!!!!! During your discussion.
- Paraphrase all responses from the audience so that everyone can hear what has been said and feels involved. Otherwise students become alienated from the discussion and bored.
- Remember that your animated presence counts as much as your information content to the success of the discussion. Be lively, engaging, interesting, and funny when appropriate. Do not retreat into yourselves. Remember - It's "SHOW TIME."
- Do not spend your whole time lecturing to the students. Get them involved. But, do not assume that they have done the assigned reading for your topic. You will have to give them enough information and subject content to have an informed conversation.
- You will probably want to do some interactive strategies to stimulate conversation. Some that I have seen work in the past include:
  1. role playing, in which you force the students to take on historical roles.
  2. Court scenes in which a particular historical person or point of view is put on trial.
  3. The use of dramatic media to stimulate thinking, especially if it's controversial.
  4. Simulated T.V. talk shows in which you go out into the audience with a microphone and ask probing questions.
  5. A series of short skits that build toward major points that you are trying to make about your topic.
  6. A town meeting format, etc., etc, etc,—and whatever else your imaginations can dream of.
- However, none of the above strategies should only be used for entertainment. The strategy should have an educational point to it as well and should lead to a class discussion.

## Provoking Discussion:

Stimulating discussion is probably the most difficult task of all. Be brave; you will be rewarded for attempting to involve the class in a discussion.

## More Discussion Tips:

- Lead a discussion by asking thoughtful, relevant questions. Do not ask the obvious. Provide the students with a puzzle or dilemma to resolve. Ask questions that have a considered unusualness or gets at the heart of the matter that you are discussing.
- Share your own confusions with the students; ask them to help resolve questions that you are wrestling with.
- Anticipate what students might answer in response to your initial questions and then have follow-up questions ready to keep the discussion going and take it to even deeper levels.
- Some questions could relate past historical events to student's present concerns.
- Take students answers seriously and be free with your praise for what students have to contribute.
- Again, keep all the students involved by summarizing the input of the student audience.
- Through your voice, body language, and interest, convey to the students that you are sincerely seeking their involvement. Do not send the message that your questions and their involvement are only ritualistic fillers to be quickly finished with.

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