



Class Discussion

What is Class Discussion?

Class discussion is a learning activity in which students form a group to reflect and share their knowledge or to collaborate with each other for solving problems on particular topics. Through interaction and exchange among group members, students can practice a number of practical transferable skills such as logical thinking and analytical skills, communication and interaction skills, arguing and presentation skills etc. Through observing students' responses in class discussion, teachers will gain ideas about their students' learning progress, and also can possibly improve their teaching, course planning and the course curriculum.

Structure of Class Discussion

There are various ways of arranging class discussion in a course. The following approaches are some examples:

Think-Pair-Share (Myers & Paine)

This approach is helpful for students preparing for larger class discussion. At the beginning of the class, students are divided into pairs for five to fifteen minutes. The teacher then poses a question to the class, allows the students a few minutes to think of their response, and then asks them to share it with their partner. Students can then have a joint response to report to the class and open up to a larger class discussion.

Problem solving group

Each discussion group of two to six students is given a problem at the beginning of the class. Students in each group have to discuss and collaborate with each other, and generate the most efficient solutions for the problems.

Presentation and discussion

A small number of students in the class are asked to give a short presentation on a given discussion topic. The rest of the students can understand the basic information and listen to some perspectives on the topic before they engage in the discussion. The information presented in the presentation can be used to help stimulating their ideas and building up their opinions and arguments before going into discussion. After the presentation has finished, students will be assigned into groups for discussion.

The roles of students in a discussion group (Brookfield, 2006):

Individual students are often assigned to some of the following roles in a discussion group. Students can rotate through each role during different class meetings.

1. *Facilitator*: in charge of presenting the basic information to be discussed and posing relevant questions for discussion
2. *Summarizer*: keeps notes of the discussion and provides a brief summary at the close of the discussion
3. *Process observer*: monitors group dynamics and ensures that others participate in the discussion
4. *Evidence assessor*: asks individuals who make a contribution to describe the evidence that supports the assertion



Y	Declarative	CHARACTERISTICS
Y	Functioning	
Y	Timely to Set	
Y	Timely to Answer	
Y	Timely to Correct	
Y	Timely to provide Feedback	
Y	Suitable for Large Class	
	Can substitute with Computers	
	Passive	
Y	Active	
Y	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

P = Possibly Y =Yes

Advantages of Class Discussion

- Encourages students to prepare for class discussion, such as discussion materials
- Encourages students to think and reflect on the discussion questions and issues
- Enhances the development of communication and presentation skills of students
- Provides chances for students to practice the oral and language skills
- To encourage social interaction and contribute to the sharing and exchange of ideas
- Develops group and teamwork, and leadership skills of students
- Provides opportunities for teachers on immediate feedback during the class
- Enhances comprehension skills

Disadvantages of Class Discussion

- If students have opposing ideas, class discussion may create tension among students, and thus inhibits the friendly and relaxing learning
- Motivation and willingness of students to participate in discussion may be influenced by students' background and personality
- Contribution by students may be influenced by class size, group dynamics, and other factors external to the purpose of the assessment

How to design a good Class Discussion Assessment?

1. It is important to plan for a class discussion that requires students to prepare for class and participate in a way that keeps the discussion on track
2. A clear assessment guideline is necessary. Assessment should depend on the quality of a student's contribution to class discussion, instead of assessor's vague impressions
3. Provide students with the opportunity to learn the skills which are being assessed.



4. Try to ensure that the assessment is fair and consistent to all groups
5. The assessor should be open to different views and perspectives given by students and give fair evaluation of their arguments
6. Students whose first language is not English may need a little extra time to understand the questions posed and formulate an answer. Under-confidence in speaking English may also further impede the participation of those from different language backgrounds
7. The teacher have to be well-prepared about the discussion issues and have to listen thoroughly to students' comments
8. The teacher should effectively make use of body language, eye contact, voice and movement to facilitate the learning process of students
9. The teacher have to encourage an appropriate balance of teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction in class discussion

Marking Rubrics

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Preparation for the discussion (individual score):	Student has well-prepared with the course materials, references, and even searched extra resources for the discussion; often cited and referred the resources as evidence to build up arguments and opinions; able to generate and contribute innovative and insightful ideas to the group	Student has prepared with the course materials and references but did not look for extra resources for the discussion; occasionally cited and referred the resources to build up arguments and opinions	Student has only prepared with a few course materials and references for the discussion; did not cite or refer any resources to build up opinions; often repeated other group members' opinions, or reiterated the same point in the discussion	Student did not prepare with the course materials or references for the discussion; showed difficulty in following the discussion; might even give opinions or arguments that are off-topic
Responses to other students in the discussion group (individual score):	Participated and listened carefully to others throughout the discussion; effectively contributed ideas and personal experiences to the discussion; be able to build on others' comments; stimulated the enthusiasm of sharing of ideas of others without dominating the discussion; be competent to handle challenges and questions from others	Participated and listened to others throughout the discussion; kept trying hard in contributing ideas to the discussion; occasionally built on other members' opinions; attempted to stimulate the enthusiasm of idea exchange; satisfactorily responded to questions from others in the class	Being not active in listening and participating in the discussion; occasionally built on other members' ideas and arguments; failed to stimulate others for idea exchange; responded to questions basically, but failed to handle some questions	Being passive throughout the discussion; did not contribute much ideas to the discussion; failed to handle questions most of the time



	in the class			
The flow of the discussion (group score):	There was a clear logical flow from one section to the next throughout the whole discussion; It was very easy for others to follow each point in each section	There was a logical flow in most of the sections throughout the discussion; it was easy for others to follow most of the points in each section	The flow of the discussion was still observed, but with contradictions in some areas; it was a little hard for others to follow each point in each section	The flow of the discussion could hardly be followed and observed; assistance from the teacher was needed in order to maintain the flow of the discussion
Teamwork (group score):	There was excellent collaboration in the group; students respected and complemented each others' opinions	There was good collaboration in the group; students attempted to get everyone involved and complemented each others' ideas	There was little collaboration in the group; not everyone was actively engaged in the group	No teamwork could be observed

Web References and Resources

- Brookfield, S. D. (2006). *Discussion as a way of teaching*. School of Education, University of St. Thomas, USA. http://www.temple.edu/tlc/resources/handouts/discussions/Discussion_as_a_Way_of_Teaching.pdf
- Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. The University of Western Australia. <http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/publications/ITL/1999/4/assessing>
- Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, University of West Florida. http://uwf.edu/cutla/class_discussion.cfm
- Improving teaching and learning: Assessing student participation in class, University Teaching Development Centre, Victoria University of Wellington. <http://www.utdc.vuw.ac.nz/documentation/AssessingParticipation.pdf>
- Myers, W. & Paine, C. Using classroom assessment techniques and collaborative learning techniques. UNM Department of English, University of New Mexico. <http://www.unm.edu/~OSET/SupportingDocuments/Using%20CATs%20and%20CoLTs.pdf>

To Reference these pages

Copy and paste the text below:

Chan C.(2009) Assessment: *Class Discussion*, Assessment Resources@HKU, University of Hong Kong [http://ar.cetl.hku.hk]: Available: Accessed: DATE