

LEADING DISCUSSION

In leading a discussion of an article, book, chapters or other material, your general objective is to help your class better understand, appreciate, or evaluate the material by facilitating a conversation about its substance, form, or style. You should plan a brief agenda that will help the class achieve this goal.

State the objective of the discussion and provide any needed background (on the author or the topic), orientation, or other framing remarks. Keep it brief. Do not give a complete overview and summary of the reading unless you have been asked by your professor not to do so. Assume that your classmates have done the assigned reading. If they haven't, your summary probably won't be sufficient to produce a very satisfying discussion anyway.

Start the discussion. Guide it, keep it on track. Get classmates involved. You can do that by creating an in-class activity or ask them to bring in an item for discussion.

You may want to have some notes for this. It's a good idea to write out the key questions you plan to ask and arrange them in a sensible order. Your questions should stimulate thinking and discussion. In general, avoid asking questions that simply ask students to recite or recall a detail from the reading as a check on whether anyone actually read it. Professors sometimes do that, but it's probably not appropriate to your role. It's reasonable, though, to ask for specific references to support points.

Questions that generate more interesting and engaging discussion ask people to interpret, apply, or extend the author's ideas; to compare and contrast; to make critical judgments of the work; to agree or disagree with positions expressed in the reading or in the discussion; and to suggest historical, practical, or other (in the case of tourism it could be social, racial, or economic) implications. "How" and "why" questions are generally good for stimulating discussion.