

# Student-Guided Discussion

The Student-Guided Discussion framework (SGD) uses three roles in discussion — Discussion Coordination, Discussion Questions, and Textual Resources — to prepare students to work in teams to guide all class discussions during the semester. The SGD is ideal for small upper-division and graduate courses.

The results of a semester-long course that uses SGD include: increased learning, textual authority, clearer conceptual competence, effective communication, and team-based problem-solving.

## How it works

Divide your class into three groups, e.g., blue group, orange group, purple group.

Each group rotates between the three roles: Discussion Coordination, Discussion Questions, and Textual Resources.

So, for example:

- On Monday, blue group does Discussion Coordination, orange group does Discussion Questions, purple group does Textual Resources.
- On Tuesday, purple group does Discussion Coordination, blue group does Discussion Questions, orange group does Textual Resources.
- On Friday orange group does Discussion Coordination, purple group does Discussion Questions, blue group does Textual Resources, etc.

*continued...*

## Tips and Tricks

This works best in a seminar classroom or a classroom set-up where you are in some kind of circle and you are not at the front of the room (there is no need for you to be at the front).

Give everyone white board markers and encourage them to use the board.

Set the tone by having the Discussion Coordination group (not you) begin each class. For example you need to make an announcement, ask them whether you can do so — really emphasize that the classroom is theirs.

If your class is using raised hands or some other method, use it along with them. Raise your hand too. You will be tempted to be the one acknowledging hands, and some students will continue to keep their eyes on you when raising their hands. Gently habituate students to look to the Discussion Coordination Group rather than you.

You will be tempted to intervene in discussion to make a quick correction here and there. Try hard not to give into this temptation. If you wait, you'll see that most often the students will come around to making this correction together on their own. This is a tremendously important skill that students don't usually get to practice.

There will be times that it will be most useful for you to speak at some length on some topic — but do so in response to what's going on in discussion, announce that you're going to do it, and keep it short 5-10 minutes.

I mark (0 or 1) everyone's participation in the process. Typically this is simply based on attendance with the assumption that everyone contributed to preparing for the role of their group for that day. However, I ask students to self-report if they were unable to do so. I specifically say that I want to avoid a situation in which a student or students find

themselves having to report that another student is not contributing. I acknowledge that everyone is going to miss a few days here and there for typical reasons (illness, etc.) and that self-reporting has very low consequences (a 0 in a very large category of assignments) and all it takes is a non-apologetic quick email to me.

You can keep the same groups (e.g., blue, orange, purple) or you can switch them up one or two times during the semester. I asked students to vote (anonymous ballot) on whether they wanted to switch up.