

## MAKING CLASS DISCUSSIONS INCLUSIVE FOR MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

### **Be Clear, Specific, and Flexible in your Expectations for Participation**

Students come from a range of educational contexts, which means that their expectations for class participation will likely vary. Some may be more accustomed to a classroom culture where students are expected to listen and not ask questions (Zhang-Wu 2022). Explain what your expectations are and how students will be assessed for participation. Consider providing multiple ways to participate—small group discussion, [think-pair-share](#), [entry and/or exit tickets](#), synchronous virtual discussions, class notetaker, individual meetings with you, email correspondence, etc. Stephen Brookfield's [Discussion as a Way of Teaching](#) is a helpful resource for developing discussion-based activities across the curriculum.

### **Provide Students with Multiple Forms of Input**

Students benefit from having multiple ways to access and process information. Multimodal lectures and discussions can be especially helpful. For example, when posing a question to the class, displaying it on a projector or whiteboard can help them process the question visually and verbally. If possible, provide students with materials that reinforce class content, such as lecture notes or outlines, handouts, and/or slides. Incorporate not only textual but also visual content such as images, graphs, charts, and/or diagrams to help students remember key terms and other information. Additionally, whenever possible, provide students with discussion questions and/or topics that the class will focus on in advance of course meetings.

### **Regularly Check in with Students during Discussions and throughout the Semester**

Consistent comprehension checks are a helpful tool to ensure that students understand the material. Try to ask open-ended questions (cannot be answered with a simple yes/no). You can also end classes with a minute paper to assess what students understood without creating substantial additional work; these papers focus on one question and give students an opportunity to write their responses. It can be helpful to ask students to provide feedback on the class throughout the semester. Consider having them complete a Google form where they share what topics they understood well, where they have felt confused, and/or what they would like to explore moving forward.

### **Be attentive to the speed, intonation, and clarity of your speech**

When speaking with students, be mindful of how loud, clear, and well-paced your speech is for comprehension. Additionally, instructors may use idioms, colloquialisms, phrasal verbs, subject-specific terms and/or culturally specific language that may be unfamiliar to students; try to be mindful of these and offer brief explanations/clarifications when possible. For example, instead of saying, “we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it”, tell students that question will be answered later in class.

### **Provide support and encouragement**

Contributing to class discussion can feel like a risk for any student; it is an act of vulnerability where students are sharing their voices and ideas while unsure of how they will be received. When students are validated in their contributions, they are more willing to participate. You can do this by thanking students for their contributions, referring to them by their names, connecting their contributions to one another, and/or referring back to their contributions. If a response is slightly unclear, you can ask clarifying questions, elaborate on it, and/or repeat it back to the class.

## Sources

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