

▶ Student Participation Guidelines

The JSGS courses rely heavily on the seminar style. What does a good seminar discussion look like? The ingredients are as follows: each person has read the text and several people have read at least one more item. All have thought about the readings and fashioned their own thoughts and opinions. These preliminary views will have been written down, but no one will read them out loud. There will be points that need clarification, and areas that are a bit of a mystery. Everyone will come with questions, and no one will feel uncomfortable raising them. Seminars work best when, above all, students learn from one another, people change their minds as the seminar goes on, and the group as a whole moves forward together. None of this mutual learning can take place, however, without these two essentials:

1. **DO THE READING AND PREPARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS.** If you don't, then it is impossible for the group to function as a learning tool in itself.
2. **BE WILLING TO ADMIT THAT THERE ARE THINGS YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.** This can be difficult for students who are more comfortable in a lecture situation where it is possible to keep your head down when you don't understand something. But if you keep quiet in a seminar, the whole group process breaks down. So, swallow your misgivings and speak up when you don't understand what the reading means, what the instructor has just said, or what your fellow students are going on about.

If the members of the seminar are to do the teaching and the learning, what then is the purpose of the professor? The professor serves two purposes. First, he or she acts as a resource person, contributing additional pieces of information that help the members of the group understand the questions and develop defensible positions. The professor steps in when the group is stymied or confused on a particular point. Second, the professor helps direct the discussion. She or he follows the steps which are outlined below, advises you when you are getting off track, and otherwise keeps the discussion moving along.

Participation and Classroom Discussion Guidelines

What is participation?

Beyond expressing your own relevant thoughts and experiences, participation means listening to, responding to and leaving room for others in the discussion. Everyone participates differently. Some people don't know what they think until they have what they say. While they can provoke creative thoughts in their listeners, sometimes they can go on, at length, without making much of a point. Others need to clarify the object of inquiry by asking fundamental questions. They remind us that what may seem obvious at first is often worthy of some profound thought. Another type of participator offers concise summary observations, keeping the discussion on track. All these different styles make important contributions to a class.

Respect for others is the key ingredient for participation. The goal of participating in discussion is to talk through interesting ideas, not criticize people's mistakes and weaknesses in expressing themselves.

What should I expect in class discussion?

The following are suggestions for creating a participatory, supportive and open context for our class discussions. As a portion of your grade will be based on participation in discussion, these suggestions are intended to help you structure your contributions

1. Take your fair share of time for speaking but leave room for others.
2. Don't pressure others to speak, but don't cut them off when they start a sentence. Remember that there are different styles of participation.
3. Respect the speaker and the people being spoken of or for. Be inclusive and modest in your statements. Remarks that stereotype other people or express prejudices by gender, ethnic background, national origin, ability, age etc. are objectionable and should be challenged.

4. Be patient with one another and tolerant of slip-ups. We all have false assumptions and exhibit unintentionally hurtful opinions at times. If something offends or puzzles you, ask for clarification first, before you challenge it. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt.
5. Anticipate being challenged sometimes. Potentially contentious social categories can be so fundamental to understandings of our world that we are never going to be absolutely perfect. The way to challenge objectionable remarks is to question the viewpoint or analysis, not label the speaker. People can re-think statements more easily when they are not identified by what has been said or labeled as racist, sexist or homophobic etc.
6. Understand that everyone has a different level of comfort in sharing their personal opinions and experiences and respect their position. And, if you feel compelled to repeat more personal observations outside of class, please protect the speaker's identity!
7. Accept that everyone speaks and acts only for themselves. Don't expect others to give 'official' opinions of groups with which they are identified.
8. Expect that you will make mistakes. Everyone else will too, including the instructor. Mistakes are often the key points for learning.
9. Express respectful disagreement with anything you feel should be questioned, including things put forward by the instructor. Try to frame your interjections in the form of a question.
10. Be courteous – arrive on time, excuse yourself when you leave, give your full attention to the person speaking.
11. Bring your sense of humour to the classroom. Use it!

Evaluation and marking

Participation Evaluation Guide: Note that it is possible, even likely, that individuals will not be in the same category on every dimension, or all the time. There will be good weeks and weeks that are a bit more difficult. You may be excellent in some things, getting better in others. This is a guide, not a rule.

Attendance	Discussion	Reading
Always	<u>Excellent</u> : leads debate; offers carefully reasoned answers to the questions; takes care not to dominate; asks questions; helps others in non-obvious ways	Always reads beyond the text; connects readings to questions; intelligently uses readings to inform the discussion
Always/almost always	<u>Very Good</u> : willing to offer answers; for the most part, makes thoughtful comments and asks helpful questions; a frequent contributor	Often reads beyond the text; provides competent analysis of text and readings, frequently connecting them to the questions; responds well when prompted by others
Frequent	<u>Good</u> : has a basic grasp of the concepts and occasionally offers sound answers to the key questions; argument is sometimes faulty or poorly supported; may be uncomfortable asking questions or helping others	Displays familiarity with text reading but has difficulty forming a critical assessment and relating the reading to the topic questions
Not frequent enough	<u>Somewhat Poor</u> : remarks in class marred by misunderstandings of key concepts; seldom contributes effectively to answering the questions; digresses in unhelpful ways	Actual knowledge of material is unclear and is overshadowed by improvised comments and remarks

Weights: Each syllabus and faculty member will assign a weight for participation (up to a maximum of 25% of the total course mark) and any specific requirements.