# Tips for Developing Engaging Discussions

1. Ask open-ended questions. (What was the most difficult thing about …? What’s wrong with this example? How is this course going?)
2. Facilitate critique sessions on assignments/projects. Let students practice giving each other feedback. (Give ground rules for civility.)
3. Utilize YouTube videos and other visual media to prompt discussions and contextualize what they are learning.
4. **In the classroom:**
   1. Plan student-centered review sessions (pass the “mic”). Compile a list of what students want to review most. Let them take turns using their notes to offer up what they know about the concept and then allow others to contribute to review discussion.
   2. Facilitate a close-reading discussion when introducing a complex concept or when students are struggling with an equation, theory, or concept. Students conduct a detailed analysis/interpretation of a small piece of text to break down concept.
   3. Utilize the learning-centered Socratic Method to challenges students to develop their critical thinking skills and engage in analytic discussions on concepts, theories, and issues.
5. **Online discussions:** 
   1. **Provide specific instructions and expectations.** Set clear expectations regarding appropriate behavior (netiquette) to ensure that the online discussion is a safe place. Have a goal and clear guidelines about instructor and student participation including consequences for poor behavior. Instruct students to follow standard communication rules, avoid sarcasm, and be respectful. Give format parameters, expected length of response, posting due dates, whether responses to others is required (and how often), etc.
   2. **Engage students.** Mix it up and provide variety. Provide a grade. Make it fun.
   3. **Develop effective discussion questions.** Vary questions and aim for higher order thinking skills that encourage students to apply and synthesize the information. Utilize Bloom’s Taxonomy. Link discussion questions to learning outcomes.
   4. **Personalize Discussions.** 
      * Create an introductions discussion forum in the first week so students can get to know you and each other. Respond to everyone to model how you want them to relate to one another.
      * Use media to illustrate a point. Attach photos, images, videos, links, etc.
      * Read all of the posts. You don’t have to respond to all posts, but you should read them.
      * Respond to students with a question, an affirmation, or feedback. Recognize what they bring to the discussion, which shows encouragement and that you value them.
      * Periodically, ask students how a particular discussion is working. What’s working/not working for them? What could be improved? When you ask, be sure to acknowledge and respond to their comments.
   5. **Use a variety of discussion formats.**
      * **Scenarios/case studies:** Provide a scenario or case study with options to respond to so they can connect to the core concepts. You can also assign individuals or groups to a role and have them respond to the scenario from that position.
      * **Brainstorm:** Participants come up with possible solutions to a problem that meet the criteria defined by the group.
      * **Fishbowl:** In a fishbowl, a subsection of students participate in a discussion. The students who are not "in the fishbowl" reflect and come up with responses to the fishbowl discussion.
      * **Jigsaw/Piece of the Puzzle:** Each member of a group has an expertise or part of a solution to an issue at hand.
      * **Think-Pair-Share/Peer Instruction:** Participants to learn and synthesis their knowledge about a topic and teach it to another student or give each other feedback.
      * **Debates:** Divide students into teams for a debate. As a group, each team will synthesize its argument for or against something and post it to the class discussion. Then, each team can construct a rebuttal to the other team's argument.
      * **Simulations:** Provide a brief video simulation and then have students select the best option and say why it’s the best option utilizing the unit’s content to back up their answer.
      * **Small Group Discussions:** Work collaboratively to solve a problem. Students moderate the discussion.
      * **Bookend:** Instruct students to do their initial post at the beginning of the week/unit and complete a more analytical discussion at the end of the week/unit.
      * **Guest Speaker:** Invite a guest speaker to host a discussion, or videotape a guest interview.
   6. **Face a challenge?** This is a process. Keep trying new strategies. Trial and error will help you develop meaningful discussions. If a discussion is dragging, reframe or restate the question. If nothing seems to work, ask the question, “We seem to have some difficulty with this question, why do you think that is?”

## Discussion Resources

1. 6 Interactive Classroom Activities For College Students <https://tophat.com/blog/interactive-classroom-activities/>
2. The Big List of Class Discussion Strategies <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/speaking-listening-techniques/>
3. Tips on Leading an Effective Discussion [https://tep.uoregon.edu/workshops/teachertraining/basicskills/  
   onlinebeginnings/involveddiscuss.html](https://tep.uoregon.edu/workshops/teachertraining/basicskills/onlinebeginnings/involveddiscuss.html)
4. 28 Critical Thinking Question Stems for Any Content Area <https://www.teachthought.com/critical-thinking/28-critical-thinking-question-stems-content-area/>
5. Liberating Structures <http://www.liberatingstructures.com/>
6. 10 Strategies for Personalizing Online Discussion Forums by Wiley Education Services <https://edservices.wiley.com/strategies-for-better-online-discussion/>
7. Structuring Discussions: Online and Face-to-Face by Maryellen Weimer, PhD. <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/structuring-discussions-online-and-face-to-face/>
8. Generating & Facilitating Engaging & Effective Online Discussions by University of Oregon Teaching Effectiveness Program is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. <https://tep.uoregon.edu/technology/blackboard/.../discussionboard.pdf>