

Strategies for Structuring Discussions¹

Discussion Format	What is it?	Benefits	Challenges
Socratic Method	A question is posed, and a student is “Cold called” to answer without first asking for volunteers. The instructor remains with that student for several follow-up questions, while often playing ignorant or devil’s advocate to encourage students to explain their full logic, before moving on to another student with a different question prompt.	Can motivate students to prepare for discussion. Can allow for including a variety of students, including those who wouldn’t normally raise their hand to speak.	Requires creating a supportive classroom environment in which students are comfortable sharing that they don’t know an answer immediately. Instructor needs to feel comfortable talking through not yet fully formed answers with students.
Popcorn	After answering a question, the last person to speak nominates someone else to answer.	Relatively simple way to involve many students and puts onus on students to choose someone else to speak.	Instructor needs to know when time to move on to another question.
Think, Pair, Share	After a question is posed, students are 1) provided a set amount time to determine their response and are often prompted to write their response 2) placed in small groups to share their responses with one another 3) invited back into the larger group for full discussion.		
Circle of Voices	After a question is posed, everyone is provided a set amount of time to determine their response. Students are then placed into small groups (4 or 5) and given instructions to first have each member share their response without any interruptions or responses from others.		

¹ Some strategies adapted from Brookfield’s and Preskill’s *The Discussion Book: 50 Great Ways to Get People Talking* (2016)

	After everyone in the group is shared, they then focus on a more open-ended discussion.		
Frames	Participants are provided a fill-in-the blank style paragraph that includes questions and follow-up on rationale. After a set amount of time to write answers, everyone is placed into a small group and instructed to first read through what they wrote in their Frames paragraph. After everyone has read, they are asked to focus a discussion.		
Stand Where You Stand	Different spaces in a classroom are designated as “Strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, and strongly disagree.” After a statement is displayed (on the board or screen), participants are asked to move to the part of the room that represents their response. Depending on the size, they can then be prompted to discuss in their small groups or as a larger group.		
Snowballing	After a question is posed, people are provided a few minutes of silence to think of responses. They are then put into pairs to share their responses. They then join with another pair to share common responses, note differences, and questions raised. That group then joins with another and repeats until the full class is reunited.		
Chalk Talk	A question is written on the center of the board or on a slide. Everyone is invited to write responses, for a set amount of time, to the question. When not writing, people are invited to draw lines connecting points to one another or writing questions or responses to others.		

	The group then discusses by clustering comments and/or noting questions raised.		
Nominating Questions	Small groups engage in a discussion of a topic or question. One person volunteers to record questions that come up. As they conclude, the group chooses one or two questions that came up to share with the full class. Each group then adds their questions to a list (board or electronic document). Each person is then invited to vote for the question they most want to discuss as a full class.		
Jigsaw	A topic is first broken down into five or six subtopics. Small groups of four or five form around each subtopic. Each of these groups is tasked with doing research to become the experts in that subtopic. After discussing together, they then disband to form new groups, comprised of one person from each previous expert group. Thus, the final groups have one expert in each subtopic. They then share their finding with one another to discuss the larger topic.		