

HIS & AMS LEADERS DISCUSSION-BASED TEACHING

How to Create good Discussion Questions for your SI Sessions

- 1) Good discussion questions are not answered by "yes" or "no." Instead they lead to higher order thinking (analysis, synthesis, comparison, evaluation) about the work and the issues it raises.
- 2) Good discussion questions call for more than simply recalling facts or guessing what the teacher already wants to know, but are open-ended, leading to a variety of responses.
- 3) Good questions recognize that readers will have different perspectives and interpretations and such questions attempt to engage readers in dialogue with each other.
- 4) Good discussion questions depend on a careful reading of the text. They often cite particular scenes or passage and ask people to look at them closely and draw connections between these passages and the rest of the work.
- 5) Good discussion questions are useful to the students. Good questions can help to clarify passages or issues students may find difficult. They highlight particularly key passages, points, or arguments.
- 6) Good discussion questions make (and challenge) connections between the text at issue and other works, and the themes and issues of the course. Draw questions back to the larger themes of the class.
- 7) Ask small, detailed questions (like "what's the argument for this conclusion?") before large, abstract questions (like "how does this compare with what so-and-so said?").
- 8) Ask interpretative questions (like "what does the author mean here?") before evaluative questions (like "is the author right about this?"). Let your earlier questions lay a foundation for your later questions.
- 9) Be flexible about your list of questions. If the discussion is going well, go with the flow, but always be ready to bring it back into line when it wanders away from the discipline, or becomes pointless.
- 10) Be respectful and appreciative of participation at all times, but don't be afraid to disagree with a comment. At the same time, try to avoid getting into a 2-way argument. Be ready to ask, "What do other people think about this?"

Think back to discussions you had as an UNDERGRADUATE. What made those discussions SUCCESSFUL? What characteristics did the instructor have that led to a successful or memorable discussion?

What about an instructor who was UNSUCCESSFUL? Or a “bad” discussion? What characteristics resonate from that experience?

What challenges have you faced in leading discussion?