

WHAT MAKES A GOOD DISCUSSION QUESTION?

As the title suggests, discussion questions are meant to foster discussion of a particular reading(s) and/or theme. Discussion questions are not fact-based or information questions. Instead, discussion questions require analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and critical thinking. In other words, it should not result in a simple “yes/no” or clarification answer.

Although you don’t necessarily have to be able to answer your own question, you should think in advance about the kinds of answers your question may elicit in class.

Here are some types of questions with examples that tend to facilitate thoughtful, sustained discussions. Although these are good examples, they are not an exhaustive list of all good discussion questions:

<i>Analysis</i>	Questions using: Why; How would you explain; What is the importance of; What is the meaning of; Example: Why does Rousseau so emphatically believe in the concept of the “General Will”?
<i>Comparison</i>	Questions using: Compare; Contrast; What is the difference between; What are the similarities between; Example: What are the similarities between Paine’s call for revolution and Abbé de Sièyes’ attack of the first and second estates?
<i>Interpretation</i>	Questions using: What does [Author] mean by [word]?; Why would [author] use [blank] as evidence? Example: Some historians argue that newspapers are our best way of understanding what the early American population was thinking at the onset of Revolution. But, what are other, perhaps more reliable, sources we could look at to understand popular consciousness at the time?

Discussion questions are supposed to reflect your thoughtful reading and analysis of the text. In addition to fostering discussion during class, it’s also a way that you’re proving to your professor that you have done the reading and engaged with its arguments, ideas, and sources.

If you struggle with creating discussion questions, see your professor or UTF.