

Guide to Discussions

Small group discussion is one form of active learning, which rests on two assumptions: learning is an active (not passive) endeavor and people learn in different ways. It draws on personal experience, “real life” learning. Small group discussion is also less formal and models the workplace environment.

Goals for discussion in this course include:

- Work in small groups to explore the ideas and concepts embodied in course readings
 - Reflect on individual learning
 - Gain different points of view
 - Learn by teaching others
- Learn about peer interests and goals for in- and post-course networking

Groups work best when we know one another’s names and a bit of background. Reintroduce yourselves the first week or two or when you are in a “new” group.

Decide how your group will proceed with each assignment – in other words, discuss the process.

There are many roles to be played in small groups, and most are shared roles:

- Devil’s Advocate/Skeptic – looks for logical flaws in argument or takes an opposing view for the sake of full discussion
- Gatekeeper – ensures that each member of the group provides input (has a voice in the discussion)
- Initiator – suggests new ideas
- Recorder – maintains the record; may be “minutes” format or highlights of consensus points
- Reporter – the person who shares results with the entire class
- Summarizer – the person who summarizes points of a discussion, including consensus and dissent
- Time-Keeper – the person who keeps an eye on the clock

Qualities that enhance discussion (inside the classroom, outside the classroom – face to face or electronically)

- Be courteous
- Actively read and question the assigned readings
- Build your ideas on what others say
- Question opinions but show respect for opinions that differ from your own
- Be credible: provide evidence for your claims
- Be responsible: stay on topic
- Listen actively
- Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard by all
- Strive for understanding