

Class Participation: Making Contributions that Count

Participating in class doesn't come easily to everyone. Some students feel comfortable speaking up in class, asserting their ideas and opinions, and taking center stage. Other students find it harder to hold the floor. But if the aim of class discussion is to learn from others and allow them to learn from you, lots of contributions count, including questioning, listening, and responding. Your discussion leader values these contributions, too.

- Ask a question that encourages someone to **clarify or elaborate on a comment**.
- Make a comment to **link two people's contributions**.
- **Explain that you found another person's ideas interesting** or useful, and describe why.
- **Build on what someone else has said**. Be explicit about the way you are extending the other person's thought.
- **Paraphrase a point** someone has already made and build on it.
- **Summarize several people's contributions**, taking into account a recurring theme in the discussion.
- **Ask a cause-and-effect-question** — for example, "Can you explain why you think it's true that if these things are in place, such and such would occur?"
- Find a way to **express appreciation for the insights you have gained** from the discussion. Be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better.
- **Disagree with someone in a respectful and constructive way**. You might reflect the comment back to the speaker to indicate that you have listened well. If possible, point out what is interesting or compelling in someone's comment before explaining why and how you disagree.