

## Haverford Writing Center Tips for Participating Effectively in Classroom Discussion

A central element of a liberal arts education is the discussion and debate of ideas with your fellow students, both inside and outside the classroom. Below are some tips for participating effectively and happily in a class discussion.

**Prepare** for class. As you read, make notes of ideas and questions you'd like to bring up in class. Even in a lecture class, there is usually time for questions. In a seminar, the class is often organized around student responses to the reading.

**Listen** well. Your task as a class participant is not only to speak, but also to listen. Your contributions to the discussion will be more relevant and useful if you listen attentively to what others are saying and respond directly to their ideas.

**Acknowledge** the arguments and contributions of authors and of your classmates. It's often useful to begin by saying something like this: "In our reading for class today, scholar x argues that gender is not a stable identity category. Susan just gave some great examples of gender change and transition in humans. I'd like to add some examples from my biology class of gender change in other species."

There are many ways to contribute to a discussion. Here are a few:

**Question:** Bring up questions you had about the reading, film viewing, lab work, or other preparation you did for this class.

**Clarify:** Ask your instructor or a fellow student to clarify a point they made.

**Support:** Explain why you agree with a point that someone else has made, adding a new piece of evidence or a supporting idea.

**Challenge:** Respectfully explain why you disagree with a point that another participant has made, offering counter-evidence or a different way of thinking about this point.

**Complexify:** Add a new idea that builds on an idea that another class participant has offered, or add complexity and nuance to an idea under discussion.

**Connect:** Explain how ideas that others have brought up are related to one another.

**Create next steps:** Near the end of a class discussion, offer ideas for how the class might follow up on the discussion in a subsequent class.

Acknowledgments: Many of these discussion categories are drawn from the online discussion format on the website Serendip: <http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/oneworld/>