

How to Create Good Discussion Questions for Your Seminar

- 1) Good discussion questions are not answered by "yes" or "no." Rather 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 remembering facts or guessing what the teacher wants to know. They are open-ended, leading to a variety of responses.
- 3) Good questions recognise that readers will have different perspectives and interpretations. 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 passages 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 simply and clearly stated. They do not need to be repeated or reworded to be understood.
- 6) Good discussion questions are useful to the students. Good questions can help to clarify passages or issues students may find difficult. They help students understand cultural differences that influence their reading. They invite personal responses and connections.
- 7) Good discussion questions make (and challenge) connections between the text at issue and other works, and the themes and issues of the course.
- 8) Ask small, detailed questions (e.g., "What's the argument for this conclusion?") before large, abstract questions (like "how does this compare with what so-and-so said?").
- 9) Ask interpretative questions (like "what does the author mean here?") before evaluative questions (e.g. "is the author right about this?"). Let your earlier questions lay a foundation for your later questions.
- 10) 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.
- 11) Be respectful and appreciative 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?"