

How to Ensure That Your Discussion/Seminar is Effective?

- 1) Don't assume that discussions lead themselves, or that your fascinating subject matter guarantees success.
- 2) Do not simply ask questions and hope that someone answers them.
- 3) Plan the discussion. What topics do you want to cover? In what order? What will you do if nobody says anything?
- 4) Use your own experience in good and bad discussions as a guide.
- 5) What tends to silence people? What kinds of questions are intimidating, off-putting, unanswerable, patronising? What kinds invite good discussion? How do you build on previous comments and help the class to do so?
- 6) You need to have answers to every single question you raise. (Note: See 7)
- 7) You need not necessarily have answers to every question you raise, if you ask good questions, know where in the text to look for answers, and have a plan for leading a discussion that might discover answers.
- 8) Be creative! Do something different. Make it interesting. Use small groups, use the board, use a computer, use props, and use dramatisation. Use your imagination. There's lots of room for creativity in a seminar.
- 9) (Try to make sure that your innovations enhance, or at least don't detract from, the content.
- 10) It's hard to discuss conclusions, but it's easy (and fun and useful) to discuss arguments for conclusions.
- 11) You don't have to be experts who lecture or who have all the answers. If after a while you feel under pressure to keep leading the discussion, then something has gone wrong. Back out of it rather than give in to it. This should be a discussion.
- 12) Remember all the bad discussions you have had to sit through. Don't repeat those same mistakes!
- 13) In both the presentation and discussion portions of the seminar, address the class, not the teacher.
- 14) Do not expect the teacher to instantly bail you out of a bad discussion. There is some instruction in living with the consequences of poor preparation, backing out of a bad question, or dealing spontaneously with a tired or unmotivated class.
- 15) Make a few notes during the discussion, so that you can competently summarise what has been said at the end of the seminar.
- 16) Tie the seminar up with a quick recap of what was accomplished during your time leading the class in its academic endeavour.