

Lead a Group Discussion

Description

One way to demonstrate what you have learned about a topic is to lead a large or small group discussion. By actively talking with others and drawing out their ideas, you will practice communicating what you have learned and hear alternative points of view.

Planning

1. Decide on a subject area and topic to use as a basis for discussion. Talk with your teacher about whether this is better taught through a small- or a large-group setting.
2. Prepare a simple outline of the major and minor points to cover during the discussion. This could include definition of terms or describing concepts, problems, points, events, or situations.
3. Write a series of questions to ask during the discussion.
 - a. You might want to start with some simple “recall” type questions in which people are reminding each other of what happened or what the situation was. (What was the era of the dinosaurs? How many were there? When did they become extinct?)
 - b. Then, you might ask open-ended questions such as “What caused that?” “Can you tell us why you think that?” “What was the effect of that?” These questions are more challenging and will get your group thinking more deeply about your topic. You will want a balance of questions to keep everyone engaged.
4. Consider using one of the following strategies to engage the discussion participants.
 - a. *Discussion Guide Strategy:* Before the discussion takes place, consider giving to each student in your group a Discussion Guide that includes space to record
 - Definitions of key terms
 - Personal reactions to a concept
 - Questions that may be discussed
 - Important opinions on the topic
 - b. *Human Graph Strategy:* The discussion leader prepares five different posters and places them around the room. Each poster has one term: *Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Strongly*

Disagree, or *Disagree*. Next, the leader presents other students with a series of controversial or challenging statements on a given topic. The students think about each statement carefully and then physically move to that part of the room with the sign that best describes how they feel about the statement. The leader then asks each group of students to explain its choice. As the discussion progresses, students may move from one sign to another, if the discussion gives them new insights and changes their minds.

- c. *Assessment Strategy*: Prepare a rating scale for discussion participants to use in judging your effectiveness as a discussion leader and their effectiveness as a discussion member. List the criteria that the participants are to rate. You and your teacher should also rate your performance.

Assessing

1. After the discussion, write a paragraph answering these questions (1) What have I learned from today's discussion? and (2) What did I contribute to today's discussion?
2. The leader can analyze these and determine what students learned from the discussion.
3. What went well? What other questions might have been effective to include?
4. Determine how each of the discussion strategies you used worked for or against you as the discussion leader. What would you do differently or better next time?