

TEACHING THE GRADUATE SEMINAR

TOPICS

- 6 Tips for Graduate Seminars
- Leading Interactive Discussions
- Conducting a Writers' Workshop

6 TIPS FOR GRADUATE SEMINARS

I. ESTABLISH LEARNING GOALS

- Clearly establish learning goals for a seminar.
 - Faculty often do this for undergraduates, but mistakenly think that a graduate seminar should be more free-flowing or organic.

2. HAVE STUDENTS SET CLASS DIRECTION

- When appropriate and feasible, work with the students to set the direction of the class.

3. LEARN ABOUT STUDENTS

- Ask students to write a short “intellectual autobiography” or at minimum, a 60-word biography.
 - This is a deeper form of the first day questionnaire that is used in undergraduate classes. Some graduate students are fresh from undergraduate experience, while others are older with a variety of experiences.
 - It is helpful for both the instructor and the other students to understand the variety of backgrounds in the class.

“At no level—least of all at the level of graduate education—do I think of my primary mission as the conveying of information that can as easily be read in books, presented on tapes, or called up from databases. I am always aiming to teach how to do something, to teach a mode of action. On the level of graduate seminars and the advising of dissertations, the formulations of the questions themselves and of appropriate methods for answering them become the principal focus of attention for student and teacher alike.”

[Anthony Newcomb](#), Distinguished Teaching Award Winner, 1989, UC-Berkeley

4. DON'T LECTURE – HAVE STUDENTS DO THE WORK

- Even if the material is new to most students, don't lecture in a seminar.
 - Require students to do background reading so that the time can be spent in discussion and analysis.
- For some topics, assign a presenter and a respondent, students who will be responsible for kicking off the discussion.

5. SITUATE COURSE IN CONTEXT OF PROGRAM

- Make sure that students understand the context in which this course is set.
- Surveys have indicated that graduate students, even those who have been in a program for several years, do not understand the processes involved in a graduate program.
- Help them understand the question: How does this course fit into my program, and how will what I learn/do in this course help me complete the program and complete the culminating experience?

6. FACULTY AS TEACHER, MENTOR, ADVISOR

- Consider the various roles of the faculty member.
- In any graduate seminar, the faculty member is not only teacher, but also frequently student, as well as mentor and advisor.

LEADING INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

“Let students be involved as much as possible during class. They enjoy it and it keeps them on their toes as they never know when they will be asked to solve a problem!”

~ Pamela Monaghan, Graduate TA, Sociology

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

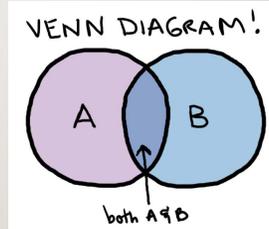
- Create a physical environment that is conducive to discussion. Make certain everyone can hear.
- Start class with a review of the last discussion to refresh students' memories and lay the groundwork for the current class session.
- Do not hurry to fill the silence.
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Do not rely solely on volunteers for discussion. Assign weekly discussion leaders.
- Understand that some students are uncomfortable speaking up in class.
- Mix whole-class with small-group activities to engage all learners.
- Welcome inadequate or incorrect answers; respond positively by using them to help students move in the right direction.

POSING QUESTIONS

- Prepare a list of potential questions you would like to ask your students.
 - You are not limited to these questions or do not have to ask all of them.
- Craft questions that might elicit many responses.
 - Good questions have one characteristic in common: they all have multiple respectable answers.
- Craft "how" questions.
 - Long-term memory of key concepts often occurs when students are encouraged to explain how something functions.
 - EX: math problems, scientific experiments, analyzing the plot of a literary work or strength of an argument

POSE COMPARATIVE QUESTIONS

- Ask students to compare and contrast various aspects and examples of the material.
- Similar to Hegelian model of thesis + antithesis = synthesis, meaning that when concepts are defined by their similarities and differences, their definition becomes more complete.



POSE CONNECTIVE QUESTIONS

CONNECTIVE QUESTIONS EXAMPLE: RITES OF PASSAGE

- Encourage students to link examples, facts, theories, etc. that are not necessarily part of the assigned materials, but could enrich the discussion of the topic.
- Connective questions are especially useful in interdisciplinary courses.
 - Questions may draw upon students' personal experiences and link to theories and research.
 - This fosters experiential or emotive connections to the material, making it more memorable.

INTEGRATE CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY APPROACH

- Case studies are appropriate for information analysis, decision-making, or problem solving.
- Case studies must provide enough information to elicit analytical thought, but not so much that solutions are obvious.
- Use small groups to work on one or more case studies; circulate among groups to facilitate the process.
- Over the semester, make case studies more complex and challenging.

The image shows a SWOT Analysis diagram and a Case Study Worksheet. The SWOT diagram is a 2x2 grid with 'Internal origin' on the left and 'External origin' on the right. The quadrants are: Top-Left (Green) 'S' Strengths (Helpful to achieving the objective), Top-Right (Red) 'W' Weaknesses (Harmful to achieving the objective), Bottom-Left (Blue) 'O' Opportunities, and Bottom-Right (Purple) 'T' Threats. The Case Study Worksheet has three numbered sections for identifying a case, describing it, and addressing it.

AVOID BEGINNING YOUR DISCUSSION WITH A TOUGH QUESTION

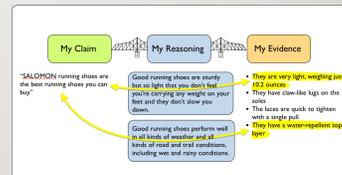
- Use Bloom's Taxonomy to set up a list of questions.
- Benefit/Risk Analysis is a Comparison/Contrast Model.

QUESTION	TYPE
What five to ten scientific discoveries or technological inventions of the last 100 years do you think have had the most impact on people and history? (positive or negative)	Knowledge Comprehension
For one of your discoveries/technological inventions: In what ways has the impact been positive? In what ways has the impact been negative? (consider both personal and societal impact)	Application Analysis
For the same discovery or invention, consider both the benefits and the risks. Overall, is the discovery/ invention worth it? (consider both personal and society)	Synthesis Evaluation
What scientific discoveries or technological inventions seem possible at this time that you feel should not be pursued? Why?	Creation

POSE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

ANALYZING ARGUMENTS

- Require that students use their critical thinking skills when analyzing an argument, research claim, or interpretation.
- If a student vocalizes an answer, ask another student to evaluate that response.
- If you do this periodically, students should not only come prepared for class, but also be attentive during class.



Five Categories of Claims

Claims of FACT

Is it real? Is it a fact? Did it really happen? Is it true? Does it exist?

- Global warming is occurring.
- Women are just as effective as men in combat.
- Affirmative action undermines individual achievement.
- Immigrants are taking away jobs from Americans who need work.

Five Categories of Claims

Claims of DEFINITION:

What it is? What is it like? How should it be classified?
How can it be defined? How do we interpret it? Does its meaning shift in particular contexts?

- Alcoholism is a disease, not a vice.
- We need to define the term family before we can talk about family values.
- Date rape is a violent crime.
- The death penalty constitutes “cruel and unusual punishment.”

Five Categories of Claims

Claims of CAUSE: How did this happen? What caused it? What led up to this? What are the effects? What will this produce?

- The introduction of the computer into university writing classes has enhanced student writing ability.
- The popularity of the Internet has led to a rise in plagiarism amongst students.
- The economic boom of the 1990s was due in large part to the skillful leadership of the executive branch.

Five Categories of Claims

Claims of VALUE: Is it good or bad? Beneficial or harmful? Moral or immoral? Who says so? What do these people value? What value system will be used to judge?

- Doctor-assisted suicide is immoral.
- Violent computer games are detrimental to children's social development.
- Dancing is good, clean fun.

Five Categories of Claims

Claims of POLICY: What should I do? How are we to act? What policy should we take? What course of action should we take to solve this problem?

- We should spend less on the prison systems and more on early intervention programs.
- Every person in the United States should have access to federally-funded health insurance.

CONDUCTING A WRITERS' WORKSHOP

TIPS FOR WRITERS' WORKSHOP - I

- Have students exchange their abstracts or section of their research proposal.
- Model the method you want students to use to diagnose and respond to classmates' work.
- Ask for two general things:
 - What are strengths?
 - What are areas of needed improvements?
- Provide a rubric and focus on only 1-2 elements of the rubric per writer's workshop.
- Be specific on what you want students to critique.
- Insist that students be respectfully and critically engaged.

TIPS FOR WRITERS' WORKSHOP - 2

- **Frequency of Use**
 - Most instructors hold them the day a first draft is due, in order to facilitate the revision process.
 - Some are held periodically as students are assigned different sections of a paper.
 - Some use them more frequently early in the term, when student writers are most in need of instruction, and then taper off as the term goes on.
- **FTF vs Online vs Independent**
 - Require reading prior to class, focus class time on critique, return papers for review as homework
 - Critique individually or in small groups
 - Do it all online and visible to all