



TIPS FOR IMPROVING CLASS PARTICIPATION

Before Class

- Read assignments **actively**, not passively: write questions or arguments in the margins.
- Ask the instructor for study question if they're not already provided, or for some indication of priority in the readings.
- Ask the instructor to link lectures to the readings if s/he doesn't already do so.
- Ask the instructor to leave lecture notes or transparencies on reserve in the library (Especially helpful for international students having trouble understanding in class.)
- Visit the instructor or TA if you're concerned about your participation: getting to know them better makes it easier to talk in class.
- Join a study group and practice discussing key issues.
- Discuss a few key issues with a roommate or friend.
- Write out a few relevant questions and try to find a way to include them in class.

During Class

- First, and most importantly, think more about your responsibility to contribute to the group's learning process than about how everybody might be judging you.
- Try introducing your classroom remarks with a relevant "preface" that explains how it fits into the discussion: e.g., "I wonder if we could go back to Jim's comment about X, since I think we need to consider x/y," *or* "Even if we accept Kate's perspective, shouldn't we also consider x?" *or* "Could we revisit the question of x? I don't think we considered all the options."
- Alternatively, ask a question instead of feeling the need to make a brilliant comment: e.g., "What do you think Mr. Smith's assumptions were when he acted as he did in the case?" *or* "Could you explain what you meant by x?" Remember, if **you** are confused, you're almost certainly not the only one! You do the group a service by asking a relevant question.
- Introduce your comment with a structural frame to make it sound more impressive: e.g., "I have two responses to that situation—(a) xxxxx and (b) yyyyyy," *or* "Well, I have mixed reactions—one the one hand, xxxxxx, but on the other, yyyyyy, *or* "I can think of three reasons to explain her decision—(1)xxxx, (2)yyyyy, and (3)zzzzzz."
- Encourage other less confident students by following up their comments with a supportive response that expands on their insights. Then hope they'll do the same for you some day—or even arrange such support in advance.

After Class

- Read over your notes and edit them by adding headings and subheads in another color ink to highlight the key ideas. Then add questions based on the gaps or unexplained concepts and hope there's a chance to bring up such gaps in the next class.
- Talk to other students in the class to get their reactions. If you feel your reactions are shared by others, it's easier to share them in class.
- If your class participation continues to be minimal, ask the instructor or TA about setting up a class chat group. Many students feel more comfortable participating by email and these chat groups are becoming increasingly common.

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