Group Discussion Skills

Multilingual Student Support (MSS)

Camosun College

Contents

Why all the group discussions?

Students taught with small-group learning:

- achieve higher grades

- learn at a deeper level

- retain information longer

- are less likely to drop out of school

- acquire greater communication and teamwork skills

- obtain valuable practice that simulates future workplace teams

(Oakley, et al, 2004, p.1)

Group work = soft skills

Students are not born with the skills required for high-performance teamwork. Employers in all industries are looking for **soft skills:**

- Collaborate & communicate effectively

- Have strong self-motivation, project management, and problem-solving skills

- Take responsibility and navigate different attitudes/ beliefs

- Maintain respectful working relationships

Intercultural Considerations

Cultural perspectives vary around

- Individual vs. group priorities
- Punctuality and time management
- Direct or indirect communication styles

Please see other MSS learning modules for more information:

- Group Work: Tips for Success
- Cultural Challenges in the Classroom
- Intercultural Awareness

Have a plan to deal with conflict before you start (*What are the consequences of not participating*?)

⚠️ If you feel ignored, disrespected or unsafe, talk to your instructor.

The nature of the task
(Why is my instructor making me talk so much?)

Instructors use group discussion for a variety of purposes:

- To brainstorm ideas

- To shift the energy of class

- To pique interest in a topic and to encourage relationships

- To allow students to share ideas to relate to a topic in the class (help elicit existing knowledge or beliefs)

- To provide feedback to instructors on student comprehension (listening for gaps in knowledge to address)

- To identify a solution to a problem

- To assess communicative ability and knowledge of a topic (e.g., seminar leader)

discussion

Getting Started

Getting started

Introductions

If you are new to the class, learn each other's names first! Take a minute to get to know each other.

- So, what's your name?

- I'm Thomas. What are your names?

- Make a joke? So...did anyone catch that? What are we doing?

Establishing goals

- So... we should figure out...

- So just to clarify, <instructor name>, wants us to ….

- So, we need to …

- From my understanding, we should come up with …

- Am I correct in that we need to ….?

Examples of establishing goals in different subjects...

- **So, we should figure out a** good topic sentence for each paragraph example? (ENGL)

- **Just to clarify, (instructor name) wants us to** create a manga style depiction of Batman, but if Bat "man" were a woman, and we can only use graphite? (ART)

- **So, we need to establish** the chemical equation for the rusting of iron? And describe how it is different from steel? (CHEM)

- **From my understanding, we should come up with** three examples of why the battle of Stalingrad proved the Blitzkrieg strategy was a failure? (HIST)

- **Am I correct in that we need to** examine and discuss the patient's previous health history first, before recommending the next phase of treatment? (HHS)

Questioning & Giving Opinions

Questioning: When you don't understand
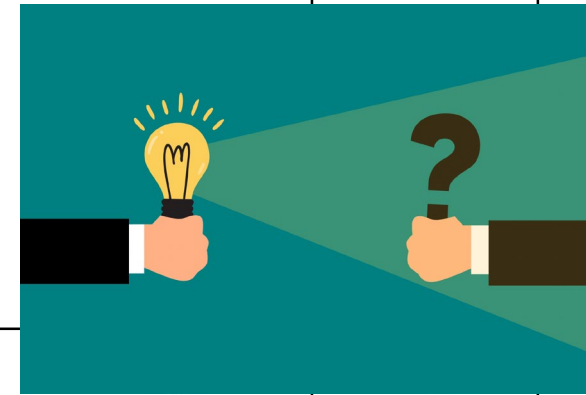
Repetition

- Could you repeat that, please?

- Could you say that again please?

- Could you explain that please?

- Would you mind saying that again?

- There's been another what?

- I'm sorry, I didn't quite follow what you said about ...

Clarifying

- Would I be correct in saying that ...?

- Correct me if I'm wrong, but ...

- When you say ..., do you mean ...?

- So, what you're saying is ...

- If I've understood you correctly, you're saying that... ?

- Excuse me, what does _____ (word) mean?

- Are you with me? Are you following me? Is that clear?

Check in with your audience while speaking!

Questioning: Asking for more information

Questioning phrases to help you promote fluency in a conversation:

- Can you explain more about …?

- Could you tell me more about …?

- Could you give me an example of …?

- Can you explain that in more detail?

- How does that work?

- What do you mean by that?

- What's an example of that?

- What's the difference between ___ and ___?

*Note: You can use **can** or **could.** Could is slightly more polite and focuses on the possibility rather than the ability, but can is also acceptable for requests.

Giving Opinions

You may want to express a strong, neutral or tentative opinion. Students often rely on "*I think*" all the time! Expand your vocabulary and create a professional image by using some additional phrases:

Giving Strong Opinions	I firmly believe that…	I'm absolutely convinced that…
	There's no doubt in my mind that…	I'm certain that…
Giving Neutral Opinions	I think that…	In my opinion…
	As I see it, …	As far as I'm concerned, …
	From my point of view, …	From my perspective, …
Giving Tentative Opinions	It seems to me that…	I would say that…
	As far as I'm able to judge, …	I think it would be fair to say that…

Maintaining the Conversation

Interrupting

Sometimes you need to jump in with a great idea, go back to what you were saying or delay an interruption. How you do this and the tone you use will affect your group's mood and progress.

Interrupting	Taking the floor	Commenting	Going back	Holding the floor
• May I interrupt for a moment? • If I may interrupt for a minute, I'd like to … • Sorry to interrupt, but… • I hate to interrupt, but …	• Could I come in at this point? • If no-one objects, I'd like to add something… • Could I say something about…? • I have a point to make here.	• I wonder if I could comment on the last point? • Before we go any further, may I point out that …	• As I was saying… • Coming back to what I was saying…	• Perhaps I could return to that point later on… • If I might just finish… • If you would allow me to continue…

Expanding ideas

Sometimes you want to elaborate on something just said. You can use these expressions to build on your group member's ideas or your own:

- I think it was interesting that …

- I noticed that …

- I was wondering if …

- _____ is a good example of _____

- Can you elaborate/expand on that?*

- It depends on what you mean by …

- Wouldn't it be a good idea to … ?

Synthesizing Ideas

The ability to synthesize each other's words into pros/cons is similar to summarizing.

What did they say?

Can you rephrase or summarize their main ideas and then move the conversation forward?

If you are translating in your head, you are summarizing or paraphrasing into your own words.

Agreeing

Agreement can have a range of reactions. You might LOVE someone's idea, feel more neutral about it, or only agree with some of it.

Strong Agreement	I completely agree.	I'm in total agreement.
	I agree entirely with your point of view.	I'm exactly of the same opinion.
Neutral Agreement	I agree.	I think we're in agreement on that.
	I think you're right.	I think we can accept your position on that.
Partial Agreement	I would tend to agree with you on that.	I agree in principle, but…
	By and large, I would accept your views but…	Although I agree with most of what you've said, I find it difficult to agree with your point about…

Disagreeing

Softening Strong Disagreement	Frankly, …	To be quite frank, …
	To put it bluntly, …	With respect, …
Strong Disagreement	I totally disagree with you.	I don't agree at all.
	You're completely mistaken.	I disagree entirely.
Softening Neutral Disagreement	I'm afraid…	I'm sorry, …
	With respect, …	I respect your opinion, of course, however…
Neutral Disagreement	I don't completely agree with you on that.	I really can't agree with you on that.
	We'll have to agree to disagree.	I'm not totally convinced that …
Tactful Disagreement	I agree up to a point, but…	You have a point there, but…
	I understand your point, but have you considered…?	I can see your point, but surely…

Reflecting (wrapping up):

At the end of your time for discussion, try to wrap up the conversation with these phrases:

- To sum up, there seems to be …

- Well, if I could just sum up the discussion, I think ….

- Briefly, the main points that have been made were...

- To summarize, I think we are in agreement on …

Summary

Group discussions are a huge part of Canadian education.

Don't be shy and take advantage of the opportunity to speak.

Prepare for class discussions by growing your use of common expressions.

Always clearly identify the goals of the discussion.

Remember to ask lots of questions.

Try to clarify and interrupt if necessary.

Don't be afraid to disagree politely, the end goal is always progress.

More Resources

Camosun Lib Guides:

- Student Learning Success: Group work

- Assessment: Group Work

Online resources:

The Language of Meetings (pdf version of book)

Discussions (University of Minnesota)

5 Ways to Buy Time in Discussions

Thank you!

Let us know what you think!

https://forms.office.com/r/XBGwtE3P6i

Reference

Goodale, M. (1987). *The Language of Meetings*. Thompson.