



Teaching Tips

- Set the stage.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Use the 10 second rule.
- Be flexible!
- Stay on task.
- Don't say no.
- Provide options.
- Guide students to answers.
- Pick a spokesperson.
- Provide examples.
- "I don't know" is OK.

- **Set the stage.** Students feel better if they understand what your agenda is right away. This prevents students from spending precious class time trying to “uncover” your agenda instead of focusing on the concepts you want to cover. It is equally important to be explicit about what are not your goals. For example, in this particular case, the goal of SHARE is not to change opinions but to inform students of the facts.
- **Be enthusiastic.** Stay engaged the entire class period. This is particularly important when the class feels like it's dragging or struggling to discuss. Students will reflect your level of enthusiasm and engagement.
- **Use the 10 sec rule.** The 10 second rule, that is. Always pause 10 seconds after asking a question before probing further for an answer. Don't rush to fill the quiet space with words! Give students time to think about what you've asked, formulate an answer and raise their hand. Waiting 10 seconds also indicates to students that you will wait for them to participate rather than just offering the answer if no one quickly jumps to respond. If after 10 seconds you still have no responses, rephrase the question or step back and ask a simpler question that students may feel more comfortable answering.



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- **Be flexible!** No two discussion-based classes are alike. Allow the discussion to lead you in what you cover. For example, if students mention the fact that rats should be used for research because there's so many overpopulating the earth or dogs should be used if they're taken from the pound because they are going to die anyway, take the opportunity to discuss where laboratory animals come from. Topics like this are relevant to the overarching concepts of the class but not explicitly covered unless students initiate it. Seize the opportunity to discuss what they are interested in and thinking about!
- **Stay on task.** Being flexible is important but it is also very easy for discussion-based classes to get out of hand. Keep a general outline of the class goals or major concepts you want to cover and make sure you keep to your list. When discussions start to expand take control by asking probative questions that get you back on track or politely interrupt and explain to students that this can be discussed further if there's time at the end of class.
- **Don't say no.** Try not to tell students “no” or that their response was “wrong” when answering your questions. Your job as discussion facilitator is to create an approachable environment where everyone feels comfortable speaking their opinion. Students may be less likely to respond to your questions if you tell them outright that they are wrong. Instead, try being more affirmative while also redirecting the discussion in the direction you were hoping by saying things like “okay, but what about . . .” or “that wasn't what I was thinking of but good point, what about . . .”
- **Provide options.** Before polling students, always provide them with a list of the possible answers (e.g., What is your opinion about the use of animals for research? The options are for, against, or undecided). Providing students with a list of the possible answers before they respond means you'll have more participation and more accurate responses from your audience. Likewise, by providing an undecided option like in the example above, you provide students with the option of not taking one side over another, which also may increase accuracy and participation.



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- **Guide students to answers.** Lead students to the answers you're looking for by probing with questions. For example, when reviewing the scientific significance of the case study you may want to cover the following concepts with the students: 1) caffeine is highly used so understanding it is important, 2) understanding the effects of a drug on memory could help us understand the mechanisms behind how we remember things, 3) understanding caffeine's effects on memory may aid us in identifying risk factors or treatments for diseases that affect memory like Alzheimer's Disease, dementia, PTSD, etc. Use probative questions like the ones listed below to get students to provide the answers you are looking for rather than simply stating the concepts yourself.
 - Why do we care what caffeine does to the body?
 - What if caffeine has negative effects on memory? Does that mean anything for the general public? What if it has positive effects?
 - Do you think it is important to understand how any drug might affect memory? Why?
 - Why would someone be interested in understanding how a drug might affect memory? For fun? How would it benefit human health?
 - What kinds of diseases currently exist that affect memory? What are some common and currently uncurable diseases whose symptoms include impairments in memory (forgetting)? What about those whose symptoms include too much remembering?
 - Besides treating a particular disease could a drug that affects memory (like caffeine) be important for any other aspects of disease? What if drinking caffeine made a person more or less likely to develop certain memory-related diseases? Would that be important to know?
- **Pick a spokesperson.** Assign individuals to be the spokesperson for their group and call on specific groups when looking for answers. Even if the initial person you assigned doesn't end up being the official spokesperson, by assigning a spokesperson in the first place you indicate to the class that you expect a single member of each group to convey what was discussed. Likewise, by calling on specific groups to answer questions you eliminate time spent waiting for a volunteer to answer and ensure participation from many of your students instead of the few outspoken ones.



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- **Provide examples.** When discussing opinions do your best to play devil's advocate and survey the rest of the class for their opinions in response to a particular students' viewpoint. First, reinforce the student's statement with phrases like "good point" or "that's right . . ." and expand in the affirmative on what has just been said. But, then encourage further discussion by asking the class if they all agree or provide an example that challenges the most recent statement.
- **"I don't know" is OK.** One of the worst things you can do as an instructor is make up an answer to a question. It only takes one student who knows you are wrong to lose credibility. Prepare appropriately but feel free to say I don't know if the circumstances arise. Follow up with informed opinions or educated guesses but be sure to reiterate to students that you're not sure what the answer is. Importantly, follow up with the class the following day with the answer to their question (whether you are a guest speaker or the regular instructor).