

Preparing to Lead Class Discussion

Here are some suggestions to help you to prepare for the seminar meeting you will be running. While you are reading the book, write down the following (these are often called "reading notes"):

- What you did NOT understand while reading. What questions about background information do you have? What additional information does a reader need in order to fully understand the text?
- What you find especially interesting or striking.
- What you think are the most important points in the reading.
- Look at the table of contents and think about how the book is organized. What is the author trying to convey or convince her/his audience of? Usually each chapter has a main idea, theme or point.

Either while reading or after you finish the book you can begin the research process:

- Start with reference works such as a dictionary or encyclopedia, or the internet, and look up missing information.
- Look for reviews of your book on the internet and in on-line databases (such as the library's Expanded Academic, accessible from www.library.ucsb.edu).
- Read the reviews. What points do the reviewers make that you did not notice? What other books do they mention?
- Get some of those books and skim them to find relevant information and supporting or diverging viewpoints and explanations.
- Perhaps prepare a DISCUSSION PAPER (handout for your audience)—see below.

Preparing a Discussion Paper (or write on the blackboard)

There are three main goals of a discussion paper:

1. to give your audience background information that is important but not supplied by the main text,
2. to make explicit what you think the author of the book is trying to argue or accomplish, and
3. to suggest connections between this book and other books, people or events.

It should thus contain the following three elements:

1. Factual orientation. Summarize the missing background information. This might take the form of a timeline, biographical summaries, definitions of terms, foreign words, etc.
2. A list of points you think the author is trying to make, with the main pieces of evidence s/he musters to make each point.
3. Questions for discussion. It is often good to use quotations from the text. (Refer to page numbers, or type in.) These questions/quotations can be integrated with no. 2.