

Leading a Discussion Section

Before the start of the semester:

You will want to talk with your teaching team so that you'll **share consistent standards** and ensure that you have the resources to teach effectively:

- **Add/drop:** What is the procedure for adding/dropping students?
- **Meetings:** How often will the teaching team meet together?
- **Grading:** What is the process like? What is your grading rubric? How will you communicate grading standards? Late work policy? Regrades? Extra credit?
- **Goals:** What are the goals for discussion sections? Labs? Are you supplementing, facilitating, reviewing, teaching, moderating, or all of the above?
- **Feedback:** How would the teaching team like to communicate students' feedback on the lectures with one another? Does the instructor of record want to observe the discussion sections?
- **Classroom:** Does it have enough seats, and can you arrange them to suit the teaching method you'll be using more often? If not, what can you do to improvise?
- **Resources:** What other instructors have taught this course before and can give you information about student expectations, their level of knowledge and potential pitfalls of the course? Which administrative assistant in the department can help you?
- **Roster:** Check out your roster online to get a sense of how full the class is, how many students are on the waitlist, etc.
- **Practice:** A great deal of anxiety can be relieved by trying out your lesson in advance. Ask a friend to listen or simply talk in an empty room to work out the quirks.

Your first day(s) of discussion:

- **Make a strong first impression.** Arrive early, post important information on the board (class name, agenda, etc.), begin on time, show students you care.
- **Establish and explain an email policy.** How will email be used (i.e, what questions types of questions are best addressed in this mode)? How quickly will you be able to respond to student inquiries (e.g., 24 hours to respond)?
- **Establish policies that set clear expectations.** Tell students what will be expected in terms of attendance, grading, participation, assignments, late work; announce office hours and allow time for student questions.
- **Establish your credibility.** Share your qualifications with your students by discussing your research interests and teaching experience (in and out of the classroom). Identify the value and importance.
- **Explain why your course is important in general and to you.** What will students gain from the course?
- **Establish participation guidelines.** As a class, set guidelines for classroom interaction and discussion. Set the tone for active student participation. Start on the first day. Use icebreakers to get to know your students and for them to get to know each other. Let them

[See the lecture section](#) for more information on how to deliver interactive lectures and/or problem solving sessions within your discussion.

Center for Research on Learning and Teaching in Engineering, University of Michigan, 2020

Leading a Discussion Section

know you expect and want verbal participation. Remember you may need to use 3-4 different kinds of encouragement to get them talking.

[See the lecture section](#) for more information on how to deliver interactive lectures and/or problem solving sessions within your discussion.

Center for Research on Learning and Teaching in Engineering, University of Michigan, 2020