

**Effective Classroom Discussion**  
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**I. Some Preliminaries**

- A. What is a discussion?
  - “Socratic method” as a catchphrase
- B. Discussion is fundamental
- C. Why it matters

**II. Cautions Against Bad Practices in Discussions**

- A. Teacher does all the talking
- B. Teacher prompts students with easy or obvious questions.
- C. Rather than conducting a discussion, the teacher creates a series of one-on-one interactions between teacher and individual students in the room. Everyone else idles.
- D. Misgivings about “participation points”
- E. Excuses teachers offer to justify bad practices

**III. Some Practical Ideas and Fruitful Practices**

Idea 1: Get all the voices out early on

- Read a selection aloud
- From US Supreme Court practice of deliberation: nobody can speak twice until everyone has spoken once

Idea 1: Lead with an exit task

Idea 3: Break into small groups

Idea 4: Inner and Outer Circle Discussions

**Discussion Feedback Form**

**Name of Observer:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Discussant Observed: \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**A. Rate the discussant** (circle the appropriate number)

<i>How well did the discussant you observed...</i>	Poor	Average	Excelled
come prepared? .....	1	2 3	4 5
speak audibly? .....	1	2 3	4 5
speak comprehensibly? .....	1	2 3	4 5
stay on topic? .....	1	2 3	4 5
offer reasons and evidence for their claims? .....	1	2 3	4 5
raise good questions that advanced the discussion? .....	1	2 3	4 5
engage the text? .....	1	2 3	4 5
engage what other discussants said? .....	1	2 3	4 5
take initiative and chime in? (was not a wallflower) .....	1	2 3	4 5
allow other discussants to chime in? (was not domineering) .....	1	2 3	4 5

**B. Rate all the discussants**

1. Name the discussant who best met the criteria above? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What was the most interesting idea brought up? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What question asked, point made, or idea introduced helped you most to further your own grasp of the topic? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. If you were to write an essay on this selection, what thesis statement would you advance? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_