

Leading a Group Discussion

Overview of leading a group discussion

In a group discussion, the teacher and all of the students work on specific content together, using one another's ideas as resources. The purposes of a discussion are to build collective knowledge and capability in relation to specific instructional goals and to allow students to practice listening, speaking, interpreting, and agreeing and disagreeing. The teacher and a wide range of students contribute orally, listen actively, and respond to and learn from others' contributions. Teachers work to ensure students are positioned as competent among their peers, that patterns of interaction are respectful, and that the collective work of the group uses the strengths of and benefits each student.

Advancing justice through leading a group discussion

The free and fair exchange of ideas is foundational for democracy. This requires the ability to share, justify, and defend one's ideas and to listen attentively and respectfully to the ideas and perspectives of people different from oneself. In classrooms, students practice the skills of reasoned argument, debate, and collective knowledge-building toward common goals. Group discussions provide opportunities for students to make sense of complex ideas together and support one another to speak and listen in ways that advance the classroom community and common good. Group discussions run the risk of reproducing patterns of inequity in classrooms, so teachers work to identify and disrupt these patterns in all areas of the discussion, from selecting a task that will make space for a wide range of student contributions to concluding in a way that positions students as capable.



Decomposition of leading a group discussion

Table 1: Areas of Work and Techniques for Leading a Group Discussion

Areas of work for leading a group discussion	Techniques for leading a group discussion
Preparing	• Identify the content point of the discussion. • Select a discussable task or text. • Anticipate student thinking. • Consider whose thinking might be overrepresented in the discussion and adjust the task to be open to multiple perspectives. • Set up independent or small group work with task or text. • Monitor student work. • Identify students to share thinking in whole group with attention to who and what is represented.
Framing	Launching • Tell students the goal. • Activate prior knowledge (if necessary). • Pose an open-ended question or issue related to the content point. • Review norms for discussion (as necessary). • Efficiently engage students in the discussion. Concluding • Support students to remember or make sense of content. • Take stock of where the class is in the discussion. • Acknowledge student competence.



Areas of work for leading a group discussion	Techniques for leading a group discussion
Orchestrating	• Encourage and support students to participate. • Elicit multiple ideas. • Probe students' thinking to clarify and expand student ideas. • Orient students to the contributions of others. • Attend to whose ideas are being attributed and highlighted. • Ensure that students are attending, listening, and responding to the ideas of others. • Support students in connecting ideas. • Make strategic contributions. • Use moves such as redirecting, revoicing, and highlighting to keep the discussion on track.
Recording and representing key content	• Determine what content to record and in how much detail. • Decide whether to attach student names to ideas. • Attend to the accuracy of records and representations. • Decide when to use student informal language and when to support the use of conventional academic language. • Record in ways that are clear, organized, and visible to the class. • Use language and/or representations that support student understanding and participation.



Visual representation of leading a group discussion

Discussion enabling	Discussion leading			
• Selecting a task • Anticipating student thinking • Setting up the task • Monitoring student work	Framing	Orchestrating		Framing
	Launching	• Eliciting • Orienting	• Probing • Making contributions	Concluding
	Recording and representing content			
	Maintaining a focus on the instructional point			
Seeing and disrupting patterns that reproduce inequity				

