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ABSTRACT

Based on research on verbal behavior and the relationship between teachers' verbal responses and student achievement and success, this document discusses the role of teacher language in motivating students and provides examples of classroom techniques that aid learning. The first section reviews ways in which teachers' use of language can facilitate student achievement, highlighting specific phrase constructions from the most facilitative which focus on feelings to the least facilitative which give advice or evaluate. The second section discusses the importance in a critical-thinking classroom of providing intensive, structured student interaction, examining the principles of collaborative learning, the value of group learning and methods for designing collaborative tasks, the teacher's role in collaborative tasks, and techniques for creating an interactive classroom. The third section focuses on the language used in asking questions in the humanities, illustrating proper word choice for knowledge-, comprehension-, application-, analysis-, synthesis-, and evaluation-oriented questions. The fourth section describes the following 10 types of questions used in classroom discourse: open-ended, diagnostic, information-seeking, challenge/testing, action, priority and sequence, prediction, hypothetical, extension, and generalization questions. The final section provides sample group tasks, including four separate classroom activities ("Genesis Creation Stories," "20th-Century Backgrounds," "The Parthenon, Part-to-Whole," and "Dante's Encounters with the Damned") and a sample discussion worksheet for Virgil's "Aeneid." (MAB)

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Resources for  
"Asking the Right Questions:  
Teacher Talk and Critical Thinking"

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**FACILITATIVE RESPONSE:  
TEACHER TALK AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

Research on verbal behavior indicates that certain verbal responses are perceived as more caring, empathetic, and understanding. According to Witmer and Wyrick in *The Teacher as Facilitator*, "there is a relationship between the way a teacher is perceived by the students and the amount of self-initiated work they [students] report doing."

In other words, the way teachers talk is more than a matter of establishing rapport with students. Using facilitative responses in classroom interactions actually enhances the conditions for student achievement and success.

Most facilitative

**Focus on feelings**

*"You're feeling confused about the differences between..."*

*"You're confident about the essay, but feeling anxious about the test."*

**Clarifying and summarizing**

*"If I understand you correctly, you're saying..."*

*"Let's see, you believe ... but she's saying..."*

**Questioning**

*"What makes you think that?"*

*"How...?"*

**Reassuring and supporting**

*"Don't worry, I'm sure you'll do all right..."*

**Analyzing and interpreting**

*"The reason you dislike this painting is because..."*

*"You're thinking that this character..."*

**Advising and evaluating**

*"Why don't you try...?"*

*"The thing to do is..."*

*"If you looked at it this way, you'd see..."*

Least facilitative

## Facilitative Response and Classroom Discussion

Certain teacher responses serve to motivate and sustain classroom discussion. By using these responses, teachers shift the focus from their own expert knowledge and opinion to student thought

and ideas. These responses also enhance rapport among the class and encourage the risk-taking that discussion requires.

### **The linking response**

Links student through the teacher's observations about feeling or content, or both

*"You're agreeing with Elaine that..."*

(links content)

*"Both of you are feeling confused about..."*

(links feelings)

*"All three of you are attracted by the picture's..."*

(links feeling and content)

### **Simple acknowledgement**

Provides closure to a student's statement or idea, while also recognizing the contribution.

*"Thank you for sharing that..."*

*"All right..."*

*"I appreciate your telling that story."*

### **Open questions**

Open questions have several possible correct or appropriate answers, in contrast to closed questions, which direct students to a particular answer. Students feel less risk in responding to open questions and are encouraged to develop more thoughtful answers.

*"What do you like most about...?"*

instead of

*"Define..."*

*"What can you tell us about...?"*

instead of

*"What are the three causes of..."*

*"What might happen if...?"*

instead of

*"What happened when..."*

### **Focus on feelings**

[See reverse side]

### **Clarifying and summarizing**

[See reverse side]

## CLASSROOM INTERACTION

To practice critical thinking, students need to participate in the discourse of the discipline--to think, speak, and be listened to as they participate in the discipline's particular mode and inquiry. Students will not get enough practice just by talking to the instructor. Thus a critical-thinking classroom needs to provide opportunities for *intensive, structured interaction* among students.

### **The principles of collaborative learning.**

The most direct way to create classroom interaction is to adopt the principles of *collaborative learning*. In collaborative learning, the teacher designs a learning problem or task, and then assigns small groups of students to address the problem collaboratively. Students are typically instructed to reach a consensus on an issue, or to create a group product. The purpose of the collaborative learning is to enhance learning and achievement by encouraging student interaction and cooperation.

**The value of group learning.** Students engaged in structured group work are typically talking, rehearsing ideas, probing judgments, empathizing, listening, questioning--in other words, practicing the skills of critical thinking. Research in colleges and universities indicates that collaborative learning enhances the mastery of content for most students. Even more dramatically, collaborative learning improves students' attitudes toward the course and the discipline. They not only learn more, they like what they are learning more.

### **Designing collaborative tasks.**

Collaborative tasks can range from elaborate to very simple. Ideally, students should be given *clear, explicit instructions* in writing. Teacher may have already *modeled* the task or procedure that students are asked to perform. The task should be clearly related to the goal of the course, and--even more effective--related to subsequent tests. Finally, a task should require some form of *consensus or agreement*, even if the group ends up

agreeing that they can't agree.

**The teacher's role.** The teacher's role is most important in designing the task. Once groups have begun work, the teacher should do no more than unobtrusively monitor the process. The groups need to resolve problems themselves. When groups are finished, it is important spend some time processing their results. The focus should be on what the groups discovered, not what the teacher knows or thinks.

**The interactive classroom.** Whether by small groups or whole-class discussion, teachers can do much to create an interactive classroom. Chet Meyers suggests some basic rules for consistently encouraging student interaction:

*Begin each class with a controversy or problem.* Instead of "We're going to cover this..." begin with "Here's the question we want to answer."

*Use silence to encourage reflection.* A reflective pause in your own discourse tells students that "I'm thinking about this, and so should you." Pauses after teacher-initiated questions encourage student responsibility; a teacher should resist the temptation to fill the silence or answer the question for them.

*Arrange and use classroom space to encourage interaction.* Move chairs, have students face each other, form a semi-circle or circle. During lecture, move to different parts of room, or teach from the back and have students write on the board.

*Create a hospitable environment.* Teachers should invest some class time in learning students' names, asking about other classes, inquiring about students' lives outside college or sharing something

about their own. These informal interactions offer a chance to use facilitative responses (see p. 1-2 of this resource packet). "Questioning" in this resource book). It may seem like schmoozing, but studies indicate that this kind of hospitality pays off in higher student achievement.

**For further reading:**

Christensen, C. Roland, David A. Garvin, and Ann Sweet. *Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1991.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Collaborative Learning and the `Conversation of Mankind.'" *College English* 46.7 (November 1984): 635-652.

Hill, W. F. *Learning Thru Discussion*. Rev. ed. London: Sage, 1969.

Meyers, Chet. *Teaching Students to Think Critically*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.

## ASKING QUESTIONING IN THE HUMANITIES<sup>1</sup>

### KNOWLEDGE-ORIENTED ...

<i>Words</i>	<i>What they ask</i>	<i>Example</i>
Define	Give the exact meaning of the topic, including its general type and limiting qualifiers	Define Marx's concept of alienated labor.
Illustrate	Give one or more examples of the topic, relating each example to the topic	Illustrate the baroque style in art with examples from different artistic media.
Summarize	Condense all the main points of the topic into a brief account; reduce without changing	Summarize Freud's theory of the unconscious.
Trace	Identify a series of important steps in a history, developmental process, or other sequence of happenings	Trace the rise of Christianity in the ancient Roman world from the birth of Jesus to the Edict of Milan.

### COMPREHENSION-ORIENTED ...

<i>Words</i>	<i>What they ask</i>	<i>Example</i>
Compare	Show how two things are both alike and different.	Compare Bernini's <i>David</i> with Michelangelo's.
Contrast	Show only the differences between two things.	Contrast the Wife of Bath's views with traditional medieval attitudes toward women and marriage
Describe Discuss	Tell about or talk about in detail, emphasizing primary or important features.	Discuss the fundamental beliefs of the Protestant Reformation.
Interpret	Explain the meaning of the topic as you see it and provide evidence to support your point of view.	Interpret the symbolism in Picasso's <i>Guernica</i> .
Relate	Show the connection(s) between two things, especially as one affects the other.	Relate the Crusades to the decline of feudalism and the rise of medieval cities.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Elaine P. Maimon and others, *Writing in the Arts and Sciences* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981).

## APPLICATION- AND ANALYSIS-ORIENTED ...

<b>Words</b>	<b>What they ask</b>	<b>Example</b>
Analyze	Break down the topic into its parts and explain how the parts relate to each other and to the whole topic.	Analyze the structure of Beethoven's Third symphony.
Explain why	Tell the main reasons why the topic happened or happens; give causes to account for effects	Explain why Athens lost the Peloponnesian wars.
Justify Prove	Give reasons to show why the topic or assertion is true.	Justify, from a modern painter's point of view, the lack of a "subject" in much modern art.
What would happen ...?	Based on what you have already learned, determine the probable outcome of a hypothetical situation.	What would happen if Picasso's <i>Les Femmes d'Alger</i> were submitted today to a local arts committee for funding?

## SYNTHESIS- AND EVALUATION-ORIENTED ...

<b>Words</b>	<b>What they ask</b>	<b>Example</b>
Agree or disagree	Express either a positive or negative opinion about the topic; support your opinion with evidence or criteria of judgment.	"The Romans contributed little to classical culture, borrowing almost entirely from the Greeks." Agree or disagree, referring to specific examples of Greek or Roman culture.
Evaluate	Make a judgment about the worth of a topic or the truth of a statement. You may make both positive and negative judgments, but also indicate the relative weight of good and bad points.	Evaluate the contribution of non-Western art to European modernism.
Critique Criticize	Break the topic into its parts (analyze); explain the meaning as you see it (interpret); make a judgment about its worth (evaluate).	Critique the Ibsen's attitude toward marriage and the family in <i>A Doll's House</i> .
Could ...?	Argue whether the event might have happened or the topic might be true. Give a yes-or-no opinion, with reasons for your thinking.	Could a young person today follow Candide's philosophy of "cultivating one's garden?"
How would ...?	Determine the probable result under the circumstances provided.	How would an Athenian from fifth-century Greece react to the buildings of downtown Orlando?



## A TYPOLOGY OF QUESTIONS<sup>1</sup>

Open-ended questions:	"What are your reactions to the reading?" "What did you have the most difficulty with?" "Where should we begin?"
Diagnostic questions:	"What is your analysis of the issue?" "What conclusions do you draw from these findings?"
Information-seeking questions:	"What do you see as the principal causes of the Reformation?"
Challenge (testing) questions:	"What makes you believe that?" "What are some reasons for you to make that conclusion?" "What arguments might be made from the other point of view?"
Action questions:	"What could be done to implement this philosophy in politics?"
Questions on priority and sequence:	"Given the state's limited resources, what is the first step to be taken? the second? the third?"
Prediction questions:	"Given its development so far, what direction do you think this trend will take in the next ten years?"
Hypothetical questions:	"What do you think would have happened if Lenin had lived to age sixty?"
Questions of extension:	"What implications does your point about the French Revolution have for modern revolutions?"
Questions of generalization:	"Based on the examples that you've considered, what are the three dominant features of the baroque style in art?"

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from C. Roland Christensen, "The Discussion in Action: Questioning, Listening, and Response," in R. Christensen, ed., *Education for Judgment: The Artistry of Discussion Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1991).

## SAMPLE GROUP TASKS

### ***GENESIS CREATION STORIES***

In groups of three or four:

1. Review the creation story assigned to your group: Gen. 1-2:4 (P story) or Gen. 2:5-3:24 (J story).
2. Answer these questions about the assigned story:
  - a. What is the order of creation?
  - b. How are human beings created?
  - c. What command does God give to humans?
3. As a group, agree on the fundamental human question or problem that this story addresses. State this problem or question in the form of a question.

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***20TH-CENTURY BACKGROUNDS***

1. In assigned groups complete library research on one of the following background topics for the 20th century:
  - a. Military technology used in World War I
  - b. the Russian Revolution
  - c. the Spanish Civil War
  - d. the Great Depression
2. Summarize your research in a 400-500 word report and include bibliographic reference to your sources.
3. Be prepared to relate your research in class discussion to the following art works or social phenomena:
  - a. Dada
  - b. W. B. Yeats' "Second Coming"
  - c. Picasso's *Guernica*
  - d. the rise of Adolf Hitler

(adapted from Carol Foltz)

### **THE PARTHENON, PART-TO-WHOLE**

1. In small groups, examine and discuss the part of the Parthenon assigned to you:
  - a. floor plan and exterior construction
  - b. pedimental sculptures
  - c. Doric frieze
  - d. cella (Ionic) frieze
  - e. deviations from regularity
2. Be prepared to describe orally your assigned part and its relation to the whole building.
3. In a sentence, state how your part of the Parthenon embodies the "classical ideal."

\* \* \* \* \*

### **DANTE'S ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DAMNED**

1. In small groups, review and discuss the canto of the *Inferno* assigned to your group:
  - a. Paolo and Francesca (Canto 5)
  - b. Ulysses (Canto 26)
  - c. Ugolino (Canto 33)
2. Be prepared to re-tell, in your own words, the story recounted by the character.
3. In your group, come to agreement about:
  - a. the mortal sin for which this character has been condemned
  - b. why Dante admires or sympathizes with this character

**VIRGIL'S AENEID  
DISCUSSION WORKSHEET**

Read Virgil's *Aeneid* as assigned and complete Parts I and II of this worksheet *before* you come to class. You may use additional paper. Use a different color of ink for what you write in class. You will be evaluated on the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of your reading notes in Parts I and II.

**PART I WHAT THE READING REALLY SAYS**

- A. Summary: In several sentences, summarize the action of the *Aeneid* as you understand it:
- B. Dramatic Characters: Describe the five most important dramatic characters. Document by quoting significant speeches and citing specific actions. Give page reference to the text.
- C. Major Themes and Ideas: Define here the major themes and ideas (at least three) of this reading. State each theme as a concise idea and underline. Document each theme with several brief quotations from and page citations to the reading.

Encouraging/Asking/Stating uncertainties/Pausing/Listening/Comparing/Summarizing/Timekeeping

As soon as you finish Part I, re-read your notes and begin to reflect on the assignment. Star or circle important points or points that it would be most profitable to discuss, either because you do not understand them or they are important to Part II.

**PART II WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THE READING**

- A. Questions Compose several (at least three) questions about the text, questions that cannot be answered by simply reading the text. As models, use the questions of *comparison*, analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation on the study guides.
- B. Connections Connect this text to something you already know (another story, a picture, an idea, a personal experience) and briefly *explain* the connection.
- C. Major Theme: On Further Reflection Reflect in more detail on one of the themes that you described in Part I. Consider such questions as: Where else has this theme appeared in your experience? What new understanding have you gained in reading this assignment?
- D. Personal Integration and Application How do the values represented in this reading these stories confirm or conflict with your own values? In what ways can the ideas and values in this text be applied to situations that you face?

**PART III ANALYZE AND DISCUSS THE READING IN GROUPS.**

Using the constructive discussion roles at the top of this sheet, discuss the reading in groups. Make additional notes or comments on Part I and II using a *different color ink*. Complete Part IV at the *end* of the discussion period.

**PART IV SUMMARIZE AND EVALUATE YOUR DISCUSSION GROUP.**

A. Group Summary Summarize the main points of agreement and disagreement in your group.

B. Group Evaluation Evaluate the performance of the group and the roles played by its members.

**GROUP DYNAMICS**

	Yes	?	No
Discussed important questions thoroughly	—	—	—
Everyone participated	—	—	—
Leadership functions were distributed	—	—	—
Overall focus on resolving uncertainties and comparing insights	—	—	—

C. Roles Check the roles you played; circle roles observed in others.

Positive Roles

Initiating  
Asked for information  
Gave information  
Asked for reactions  
Gave reactions  
Restated or clarified  
Gave/asked examples  
Summarized discussion

Gatekeeping  
Timekeeping  
Encouraging  
Tension release  
Useful pause

Dysfunctional Roles

Sidetracked to own area  
Interrupted others  
Monopolized discussion  
Put-down  
Irrelevant stories, etc.  
Apologizing  
Withdrawal  
Premature evaluation  
Failure to listen

D. Individual Summary Briefly, state the most important thing you learned in this discussion. For you, what is the most important question or problem that remains unresolved?

Adapted from W. F. Hill, *Learning Thru Discussion* (Sage, 1969) and Craig E. Nelson.