



How to Lead a Discussion

A group discussion is a planned conversation between three to 10 people on a selected topic, with a trained discussion leader. The purpose is to express opinions and gain information on the topic and learn from the other group participants.

Group discussion is an effective way to

- Share ideas and broaden viewpoints
- Stimulate interest in problems
- Help participants express their ideas
- Identify and explore a problem
- Create an informal atmosphere
- Get opinions from persons who hesitate to speak

Preparing for a Discussion

Preparation is important to the success of any event. A discussion is no different. The following things encourage a good discussion to happen:

- The preferred seating arrangement is a circle, semicircle, U, or hollow square. All these formations allow everyone in the group to see one another.

- Make the room as comfortable as possible. Check the ventilation and lighting.
- Have paper and pencil ready to record main points.
- Start and end the discussion on time.
- Encourage informality and good humor. Permit friendly disagreement on the point under discussion, not among personalities.

Guidelines for a Discussion

If you participate in a discussion, the following guidelines will help you contribute effectively to the group:

- Be an active part of the group.
- Work to solve common problems.
- Discuss completely, but do not argue.
- Contribute ideas related to the subject of the discussion.
- Ask questions to clarify ideas.
- Be clear and brief.
- Listen and learn.
- Write down good ideas.

Leading a Discussion

If you lead a group discussion, the following guidelines will help you distinguish your role as the leader versus a participant:

- Help the group feel at ease. See that everyone knows everybody else.
- Give everyone a chance to talk. Let the person talking remain seated. More people will participate, and those talking will feel more at ease.
- Don't allow anyone to monopolize the discussion. Interrupt the "speech maker" tactfully, and lead the discussion to another person.
- Call on individuals who seem ready to talk rather than going around the circle.
- Direct rather than dominate the discussion by easing yourself into the background when the group gets into the swing of it.
- Be sure the discussion is of interest to all the participants.
- Keep the discussion on track. If it gets sidetracked, bring it

back to the main subject by suggesting more important points that need to be covered in the time allotted.

- If you feel that some important point is being neglected, mention it.
- Summarize periodically. Stop occasionally to review the points that have been made.
- Stick to the time limit. If there isn't time to cover the subject sufficiently, mention this in your evaluation, and take action to correct this before the next group discussion.
- Keep spirits high. Encourage ease and informality. Let everyone have a good time. Don't let the discussion drag or become boring.
- Quickly summarize the conclusions in such a way that everyone will realize the important facts brought out in the discussion.