



Session

PARTICIPATING IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS

At the end of this session, international students will:

- Feel confident to participate in groups
- Have expanded their knowledge of phrases they can use to support discussion in groups
- Be able to debate from a point of view

How and when to use this material

This session builds on the introductory session on **Preparing to participate in lectures and seminars**. In this session, lecturers encourage students to use specific strategies and opening phrases to respond to questions based on a video, shown in the session. An example video and questions are provided, although it may be more appropriate for lecturers to use their own material linked to their unit teaching. Students practise taking and arguing a stance, and linking these activities to how to prepare for seminars.

The first Student Activity is in two parts; some lecturers might prefer to introduce the second part of this activity later in the semester because it deals with debating skills. Depending on the level of skills in the cohort, some lecturers might prefer to skip Activity 2 and just give out the associated handout instead.

Introduction

In seeking to encourage students to take part confidently in group discussions and seminars, the session presents students with specific strategies and opening phrases that will lead them to engage more spontaneously in discussions through a series of increasingly more difficult steps.

Seminars, group discussions and spontaneous oral interactions in English are unfamiliar ways of learning and communicating for many Chinese students, and sometimes seem like a threatening environment. To familiarise themselves with why, lecturers may find it useful to read the following Briefing Notes:

- **Participating in seminars: Notes for lecturers**
- **Understanding the concept of face and how this impacts the interactions of Chinese students within the Australian university context**
- **Developing skills in turntaking, discussion and critical dialogue: Information for lecturers.**

Lecturer input

Point out to students that it is highly likely that each unit of their course will require some form of group interaction as part of a seminar (even if it is as an online discussion forum). The following extract from a unit guide is a typical example of the expectations of lecturers (see attached **Slide: Extract from a masters unit guide**):

'Small group and interactive teaching and learning activities'

Small group and interactive learning and teaching are an important part of the university experience. Interactive learning and teaching involves a collaborative process which facilitates communication between learners and educators. In this way, as a student, you are able to take ownership of your learning through active participation by answering questions, contributing to discussions, and explaining your thinking, reflections and evaluations to the class. There will be numerous opportunities throughout the semester for you to engage in group discussions, to examine your own professional work experiences or previous study experiences, and explain these to your colleagues in relation to theory in practice, and to develop in groups solutions to communication problems, especially through case study analysis.'

(Extract from masters unit guide for Strategic Communication)

Explain that seminar participation is about talking and sharing what you are thinking. In the main it is not used for students to just receive more information and take notes, although some seminars have a time when students are rostered to present on a topic which may not have been dealt with in lectures.

Note to Lecturer

Before beginning the activity, ensure that you have printed out multiple copies of the attached **Handout 1: Useful phrases for group discussions**. Ideally, print out onto cards.

If you are working with a multi-cultural cohort, it is best to start by putting groups together based on their nationality or common language until they become more confident about interacting with groups.

As the semester progresses, change the groups so that they are more heterogeneous. This stops the formation of cliques and also supports cross-cultural communication and the exchange of ideas.

Student activity 1: Watch and discuss Media in Sport video (note activity is in two parts)

- Divide class into groups of 4-6 (not any larger as it is easier to not participate, or in some cases harder to get a word in if there are more than 6 people).
- Hand out two (different) phrases to each person, such as an agree and a disagree phrase, from the set of phrases in the attached **Handout 1: Useful phrases for contributing to group discussions**. *Note that students should not receive the full Handout at this stage, just two different extracts of your choice.*
- Explain that they are going to watch a television news item relevant to their unit. A suggested example is the below ABC story about sports sponsorship.
- Before playing the video, have a general discussion about the topic. For example: the differences between advertising and sponsorship. This ensures that students are clear about what sponsorship is before watching the video.
- Watch 'Media Watch ABC – Media in Sport' (length: 3.23 seconds)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID3UQu16cVo>
- Once students have heard the segment, tell them that they now have an obligation to do something. Ask them to take two minutes to discuss in their group the below Focus Questions about the video (see also attached

Slide Focus Questions). *Note that focus questions act as a guided discussion activity and enable the group to stay on task.*

Focus questions about the video 'Media Watch ABC' for a short group discussion

1. What have students heard previously about corporate sponsorship and the media that has been confirmed in this video segment?
 2. Do they know of any sponsorship campaign in sport or entertainment in China?
 3. What do they think will be the most attractive sports or sporting events for corporate sponsors in five to ten years' time?
 4. Do they have any ideas or strategies for local sports clubs either in Australia or in their own country that could be employed in order to attract corporate sponsors?
- Each person has to try to make a contribution to the small group by using the two phrases they have on their card.
 - After 2 minutes, pass their card to someone else and then resume the conversation based on the new phrases on their new card (repeat).
 - The lecturer should now draw this part of the discussion to a close by perhaps noting that sponsorship can be used as a means of gaining media coverage or highlighting any creative ideas/suggestions for local sports clubs. Consider how or if there are differences between the examples of sponsorship in China (question 2) and sponsorship opportunities in Australia (question 4).

Part Two of Activity1

- Now ask students to make notes in two columns FOR and AGAINST the use of sponsorship in sport. (At this point, it may be helpful to show the video again. Note, however, that the video does not present an argument but, hopefully, thoughts will occur to students on the benefits or disadvantages (to sport, media, and businesses) of sponsorship from their own experiences or media reports.
- Working in their group, students should compile a group A3 sheet with two columns representing ideas FOR and AGAINST the topic, whilst using the 'useful phrases' sheet.
- Each person has to contribute to the discussion by using at least one of the phrases they have on their card during the discussion.

- After 2 minutes, pass their sheet to someone else and then resume the conversation (repeat).
- Lecturer then asks for a volunteer from each group to take a FOR or an AGAINST position, by drawing on the materials from all the groups. Each person has a backup person who assists them, if necessary. FOR presents one idea and AGAINST counters it (assisted by second person if necessary). Repeat 3 times with a new person (pair) beginning each time.

Provide students with the attached full set of phrases in the **Handout 1: Useful phrases for group discussions**. This will be useful as a future resource to encourage practice in participating.

Lecturer input: Activity summary

- Explain that students' group discussions - as well as essay assignments - benefit from putting forward both sides of an argument, or by looking at a topic or issue from different points of view.
- Ask students to spend a couple of minutes writing down what they thought was most difficult about speaking out in a group and what they think they might do to become more proficient. Suggest that they look at this note from time to time to remind themselves of this useful strategy.
- Remind students again about preparing in advance for seminars:
 - review previous lecture/seminar notes
 - do the set readings and make notes
 - think about and make a note of a question to raise or an experience to share with the group

Student activity 2: Ways of contributing to discussions

Give out the attached **Handout 2: Ways of contributing to discussions** and work through the tips on the handout. Alternatively, summarise the first part and leave students to read and reflect in their own time on points 1-6. As a reminder, the handout is repeated here:

Handout 2: Ways of contributing to discussions

Generally the plan of action is like this:

- While you are listening to a speaker, try to link your own ideas to what is being said so that you are prepared to add your contribution.
- When the speaker is beginning to wind down, start to move forward in your chair—look as if you want to say something.
- Start to speak immediately the other person stops.

Whatever you say is valuable, and everyone's opinion should be respected. As an international student, your experience of other cultures and viewpoints is often very interesting to the group.

People may agree or disagree with your idea. Discussing ideas (even arguing) is often a productive way of developing new ideas. So, if someone disagrees with you, that's probably a good sign! It means you've given people something to think about!

You can contribute to a discussion by:

1. Giving an example to illustrate what someone else has said.
2. Agreeing, but adding some suggestions.
3. Comparing what has been said to something else you know about (perhaps something you have read).
4. Disagreeing—and giving your reasons.
5. Asking a question.
6. Introducing a new topic.

(Extract from <http://www.canberra.edu.au/studyskills/learning/seminars>)

Finally, provide students with the attached **Student briefing note: Developing skills in turn-taking, discussion and critical dialogue: Information for students.**

Student activity 3: Personal glossary

Students to add new / key vocabulary / phrases to their personal glossary from their learning in this session.

Each student to share one phrase with the whole group.

Note to lecturer

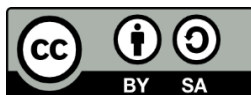
The creation and ongoing development of a personal glossary enables students to build a working vocabulary - with definitions - for important, unfamiliar or frequently encountered concepts, idioms and metaphors that will be useful during their study of media and communication.

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Additional materials and resources are available from
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

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