

The background of the image is a blurred photograph of a classroom. Several students are visible, some sitting at desks and others standing. A woman, likely a teacher, is in the center background, smiling and looking towards the students. The overall atmosphere is positive and collaborative.

ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

HONORS WORKSHOP

THE HONORS PROGRAM DIFFERENCE

Honors classes are different than any other classes you'll find on campus.

They are **small**, capped at 15 students so that you can have an increased connection with professors and other students. You'll form meaningful connections that will be the foundation for a collaborative learning environment.

Classes are **interdisciplinary**, so you get a multi-faceted approach to complex topics and real-world issues. Often, they bring together disciplines that might seem unrelated at first, sparking creative connections and new approaches.

Most importantly, Honors classes are **discussion-based**, creating spaces where you can learn from others, and allow others to learn from you. Hearing multiple perspectives and talking about the ideas you are engaging with is a key element in these classes.

This workshop will provide you with helpful tips and strategies to help you contribute meaningfully to class discussions.



TIPS TO GET STARTED

- **Prepare to contribute** by studying class materials and writing out your initial thoughts beforehand. Our workshop on annotation on the Honors website can help you to begin sketching out your ideas.
- **Engage with the topics** beyond the conversation. Do extra research if you're interested, explore the context of the materials, connect the discussion to other texts and media, and reflect on how your thoughts have shifted (or stayed the same) after the discussion. Consider how the ideas you are discussing can apply to your life outside of a class setting.
- **Ask questions** that encourage someone to clarify or elaborate on their comments.
- **Build on others' ideas.** Be explicit about the way you are extending the other person's thoughts, making connections, and adding your perspective. Instead of simply saying, "I agree," expand on why you agree and what additional points can be added to the current conversation.
- **Notice tensions**, whether they are between different people's ideas or within your own thinking. Are there points during the discussion where you find your own ideas shifting, or areas where you disagree?
- **Disagree respectfully** and in a constructive way. Point out what is interesting or compelling in someone's comment before explaining why and how you disagree.



- **Summarize contributions**, taking into account recurring themes in the discussion. For example: "It seems we have heard variations on two main points of view; on the one hand..." This can also help to identify particularly powerful concepts as they are highlighted by the group.
- **Take notes** during discussions. What perspectives that are brought up by others had you not considered before? What ideas in the discussion stand out as particularly compelling to you? Notice the ways that both the conversation and your thoughts develop as new ideas are brought in.

- **Listen to understand**, not to respond. Often, during discussions, we are so worried about planning what we're going to say next. Instead of composing a reply as other people are speaking, take the time to give attention to their ideas before responding. Consider what they are saying and how their comments integrate or diverge with your own thoughts, ideas, and what is currently being discussed.



SELF-ASSESSMENT

Take some time now to think about your experience with discussions. Based on the strategies we have provided and what you know of yourself, can you identify any areas that you excel in? Any that you are aware need practice and attention? Write your reflections, noting strengths and areas for improvement.

APPLICATION

Once you've reflected on your discussion experience, take your ideas into practice. In the next class discussion you participate in, go into the conversation with one or two of those areas for improvement in mind. For example, if you know that you don't often voice your disagreements during a discussion, use this as a focal point in the conversation. Beforehand, you might try to anticipate areas of potential disagreement and consider how you would address them.

As with so many things, the key to developing this skill is to practice, and practice with intention. Enter discussions with a clear focus on the areas you want to enhance. Use each conversation as an opportunity to engage more deeply with course content, connect with others, and widen your perspective.

Come back to this workshop at different points to assess how your skills in academic discourse are evolving. You may identify new areas for growth, and be surprised by your progress and unexpected strengths.

