

**Facilitation Assignment Guidelines:**

On the day you facilitate, bring to class three focused discussion questions on a handout for the class. This handout should feature your name, the date, and the reading(s) under consideration. If you make reference to particular quote/passages, please provide the page numbers.

On the day that you facilitate, please come prepared to briefly share your perspective on the text (what interested you as you read?) and to launch us into discussion with your questions.

**The week after your facilitation:** You will submit to me a 1-2 page (single spaced) reflection piece that lists your discussion questions, an explanation of how you created them (what inspired them?), and an assessment of how well you feel they worked (or not) during the previous week's discussion. If you had to revise them, would you? If so, how? If not, why not?

**Guidelines for Discussion and Facilitations****Participating in Discussion**

- Be prepared: Read the material beforehand, bring it with you to class and have a few questions in mind (or written out) that you would like to contribute. These questions can relate primarily to the text(s) for the day, but you can also broaden them to include connections to lectures and to previous works we have discussed.
- The class is your audience: Don't just address comments or questions to me—a genuine conversation requires that we all acknowledge each other as participants. If you find yourself focusing on one particular person when you talk, make an effort to look around at the rest of the class.
- Discussions work best when they are egalitarian and balanced: focus your comments. The purpose of seminar discussions is to grapple with questions, issues and texts and to test out different ideas and approaches to them in a group environment. It is not to showcase the knowledge one brings into the classroom so much as it is to take that knowledge to a new level. Please be thoughtful of others and work to include everyone in this ongoing process.

**Preparing for Facilitation**

- Read and review the text several times: once to get a mental map of the reading; once to get the gist of the argument; and once to find your questions. Take notes in the margins: Underline, star, jot down questions. Take a break. Think about the pieces of the text, phrases, expressions, moments that tweak your instincts or that bother you. These intuitions and "feelings" are the ends of intellectual threads that you may want to excavate.
- Linger over passages that are unclear or confusing, as well as those that strike you as particularly helpful. Why do those passages set off your instincts? Relate those passages to the whole text: how is this piece of the text part of a larger context?
- Contextualize the writing: who wrote it; what is their discipline; what else have they written; what is the/are the central arguments; who is the writer in conversation with; what

are some key passages; what are some key terms; what did you not understand? Make your discussion question(s) simple, straightforward and jargon-free.

- It helps to prepare a handout with your questions, so that the class follows your line of inquiry. Remember to proofread your work so that you catch grammar and spelling mistakes.
- Make your questions open-ended, i.e. not answerable with fact or by direct and immediate reference to the text.
- Make sure your questions do not rely on information the rest of the class doesn't have, OR give the class enough information and background to be able to engage the question. Make sure the question is answerable to start with, i.e., is not vague and does not rely on facts or assumptions not addressable within the confines of our class conversation.
- Make reference to the text with quotes or page numbers: direct the class to look at a relevant passage, read it together out loud, and drill down into the writing and sentence structure itself to get at the problem you are looking at.
- Questions about "experience" or "responses" or "feelings" tend not to be helpful questions – try to step back from personal responses and instead focus on the intellectual shape of the ideas and argument.
- Often we are tempted to ask the "what about" question: e.g., what about the people who are excluded from this theory? Although not an unreasonable question, asked in this manner this is not really a sophisticated question because it doesn't open up conversation. The only answer to "what about" is: they aren't there. More productive is to ask: how do such exclusions facilitate certain conclusions, problems or paradigms, what are these paradigms and what happens when we consider this theory in a broader context? What would this theory look like if re-written from a different point in history, different assumptions about political economy, etc.?
- It's not the worst idea to make sure you have some thoughts about how to answer your questions before sending them on to your colleagues. However, sometimes you are just really stumped and need to work through this question with your classmates. That's okay too.
- Sometimes the question you write is simply the jumping-off point for more developed questions on the part of the class. That is fine! The point is to catalyze inquiry, not perform mastery.
- Don't fear silence—people often need time to think and bring themselves to speak. Give them that time, and build from the first responses into a larger discussion.

Finally: when you don't get it, you don't get it. Ask for help from the professor or your classmates, and feel free and supported in bringing your "I Don't Get It" questions to class. We will all profit from these acts of intellectual humility and generosity.

\* These excellent guidelines are adapted from those developed by my colleague Dr. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, Associate Professor of English, Pomona College