

Class Participation Assessment Guidelines

This document offers guidelines to students for assessing their own class participation. Class participation, at its best, helps the participant learn more because a readiness to participate creates more engagement with what is going on, and gives the student opportunity to get questions answered, make sure you understand, and to test and play with ideas. It also gives students practice in the extremely important skill of engaging in public discussion. Class participation at its best also helps all the other students in the class learn because all students, through their questions and comments, have something to offer for others' consideration. It also livens up a classroom, increases the number of voices, and makes things more interesting. Class participation at its best also gives the instructor important opportunities for fine-tuning and focusing teaching, inclining what is going on toward student interests and needs, and getting feedback. A skilled instructor knows how to facilitate class discussion so it ultimately is coherent, to the point, and worth its time and effort.

Class participation at its worst is irritating, boring, stilted, a waste of time, and feels like being in the dentist's office without anesthesia. It gives some people an opportunity to whisper not very interesting questions, others to make long annoying speeches, others to talk with apparently no preparation for the class. An unskilled instructor lets a few people dominate the discussion, can't manage what is going on, allows discussion to degenerate, and leaves everyone wondering what the point was.

The point of class participation is to make a difference in the quality of teaching and learning – to have a positive impact. It is not to talk the longest, to assert without listening, to talk with nothing to say just for the sake of speaking. Thus, the assessment is based on the *quality and impact* of participation.

Almost everyone who completes a university degree will have a career in which being able to speak in public effectively is important. Further, as a citizen and member of your community, being able to speak in public effectively is important. Even at this stage of education, some individuals are still uncomfortable speaking in public. If this is you, please come see the instructor as soon as possible to find strategies and tactics for moving forward.

Guidelines for Evaluating Participation

Outstanding Contributions: Contributions in class reflect excellent preparation, which usually means reading thoroughly (or doing other required preparation) and reflecting on the material in advance. Ideas offered are always substantive, provide one or more important insights. Contributions took the discussion in a useful and constructive direction. The student may make contributions that could be characterized as brave efforts to synthesize material in new ways, pose and answer difficult questions, bring in creative ideas which, if well-based and well-reasoned do not have to be 100% "right" all the time. Challenges to others are well-substantiated, clearly and persuasively presented, and civil. If this person were not a member of this class, the quality of discussion and the opportunities for learning would be diminished markedly.

Good Contributions: Contributions in class reflect thorough preparation, which usually means having done what is required. Ideas offered are generally substantive, are relevant to the discussion, and contribute substantively to the direction of the discussion. The contributions are good and worthwhile, but don't strike out in new or "brave" directions. Challenges to others are generally well-argued, often persuasive, and civil. If this person were not a member of this class, the quality of the discussion and the opportunities for learning would be diminished.

Adequate Contributions: Contributions in class reflect satisfactory preparation, which usually means having done enough of the preparation to be on track. Ideas offered are generally useful but don't offer new directions or perspectives. An adequate contribution is unlikely to challenge others' ideas, but if it does, it is fairly well substantiated, somewhat if at all persuasive, and civil. If this person were not a member of this class, the quality of the discussion and the opportunities for learning would be diminished somewhat, at least for some people.

Non-participant: No contributions to speak of except for perhaps a minor clarification question. There is not adequate basis for evaluation. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would not be changed.

Unsatisfactory Contributions: Contributions in class reflect inadequate preparation. They may be unrelated to the discussion and suggest that the contributor did not do the reading or other preparation. Ideas offered are seldom substantive, provide few if any insights, and almost never a constructive direction for the class. They may be irrelevant to the discussion. The contributor may speak in a manner that is regardless of other participants: e.g. in an uncivil manner, at undue length, or challenging others in a manner that is unsubstantiated or ad hominem. If this person were not a member of the class, valuable air time would be saved.

Virginia Sapiro, Boston University, 2017

This set of guidelines is adapted from a set I encountered developed by Professor John Tyler of Brown years ago who said he obtained the, from Professor Richard J. Murnane at the Harvard Graduate School of Education who, in turn, learned them from someone else. None of us has any idea where they originally came from, and each of us has amended and altered them.