

SPEAKING UP IN FRESHMAN SEMINARS

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN DISCUSSIONS

These seminars offer first-year college students a wonderful opportunity to try out their ideas in an accepting environment. Students may be shy about participating in discussions— even talking informally with you, the faculty member. To create a welcoming climate:

1. Learn students' names and their interests.
2. Ask interesting questions about your topic that relate to students' experience and indulge their responses.

*Said one observer to a senior faculty member after the class he dominated,
"I think the students want a chance to talk."*

3. Give students questions to think about ahead of time to prepare for discussion.
4. Encourage them to listen respectfully to each other, to disagree politely, and to direct their comments to each other, not just to you.

*In discussing a contemporary political topic, one lecturer invited her students to
"Listen with the possibility of being changed, speak with the possibility of being heard."*

MEETING STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF CLASS

Some students say faculty seem rushed and unwilling to talk informally outside of class. Encourage them to meet with you individually and otherwise to chat.

One seminar leader tells his students that he knows they have a “freshman adviser,” but they may consider him one too.

Experience-based learning and joint explorations outside the classroom are particularly successful. Show students your lab or take a class-related trip together.

*One professor takes students to his research lab at Woods Hole. Another takes students to the new Harvard Art Museums for discussion in the galleries.
(Please send requests for funds for field trips to the Freshman Seminar office.)*

MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO SPEAK AND GIVING IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Seminar leaders have been concerned about inelegant habits of student speech that you “like, hear a lot in your seminar?” If your students are to give in-class presentations, you may make the group aware of such habits by asking:

1. Do you raise your voice at the end of a statement (and make it sound like a question)?
2. How often do you say "like" and "you know" (and can this be minimized)?

*One physics professor sent a comedian's riff on speech patterns to his students in order to begin raise awareness of this topic, Def Poetry, Season 2, “Like-You Know”,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCNIBV87wV4> – very funny!*

More questions?

For assistance with additional questions or for further guidance, please contact us at the Freshman Seminars office:

For questions related to finances or policies:

Ofrit Liviatan, Director

617-495-0770 - oliviatan@gov.harvard.edu

For questions related to payroll or teaching assistants:

Toni Trainor, Department Administrator

617-496-3993 – atrainor@fas.harvard.edu

For questions related to classrooms, reimbursements, field trips, and general procedures:

Nina L. Duncan, Program Coordinator

617-495-1523 - nlduncan@fas.harvard.edu