**What are some good ways to facilitate a discussion?**

* Students *must* feel comfortable talking to each other. To encourage this, generate a warm climate at the beginning of the course.
* Consider the physical set-up in your classroom. Can students see each other, or are they sitting side by side in rows facing the front of the room? Is it possible to create a circle or a semi-circle?
* Establish criteria for a good discussion at the beginning of the course. Spend a few minutes letting the students generate these criteria themselves. (One GTF had each student introduce themselves by completing this sentence: "When I am in a small group discussion, I usually...)
* Make your students responsible for bringing good issues for discussion to class.
* Listen well. Respond in a way that indicates that you *heard* and *understood* the question or the comment. Validate questions by either expanding on or challenging them, and encourage students to challenge *you*.
* Allow enough time for discussion. Good discussions take some time for warm-up, reflection, and maximum input.
* Give students time to respond. A few seconds can feel like a century, but students need that time to process the question.
* Warm up your audience. Use review questions from the last session or even a non-related current event to get people in the mood. Sometimes controversial events or issues will jump-start a discussion. Go around the room and let every student comment.
* Present material as problems to be solved, and encourage the consideration of multiple solutions. For example: "Let's consider all the ways we might determine the period in which to place this artifact." --or-- "There are lots of ways this story can be interpreted. Let's see if we agree or disagree with the critics."
* Tell the students in advance what the discussion topics will be.
* Let students work in groups of three or four. Assign them a discussion topic and give them five or ten minutes to put together a response. Let them decide how to present their thoughts to the class.
* Prompt students with a variety of questions that require different levels of thinking.
  + Some questions can be answered with information from general experience or from basic knowledge of the discipline.
  + Some questions require that students explain the relationship between different ideas, using this to form general concepts.
  + Some require students to apply concepts and principles to new data and different situations.