



# Enhancing small group discussions

Teachers Talking

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# Why are we talking about enhancing small group discussions?

- Students say they want more engagement
- Students have experiences to share and enrich course topical coverage & application
- Conversation is an effective learning and retention tool
- Serves as an important feedback mechanism for faculty
- Honors individually meaningful course content engagement and student differences in speaking comfort
- Oh! And the pandemic's effects.....

## Why don't they talk?

“[Students] reported high levels of financial and emotional stress; nearly half of undergraduates said mental health is a “challenge they’re facing in their educational journey.”

Alonso, InsideHigherEd, 2/12/23



## Why don't they talk?

"Studying pandemic impacts on learning, researchers found 95.7% of students reported moderate or severe mood disorders, affecting learning capacity. They rated learning interruption a 7.6/10 on average. Increased fear, stress, and decreased happiness all contribute to learning losses two years after the pandemic started.

Hu K, Godfrey K, Ren Q, Wang S, Yang X, Li Q. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on college students in USA: Two years later. *Psychiatry Res.* 2022 Sep;315:114685. doi: 10.1016/j.psychres.2022.114685. Epub 2022 Jun 15. PMID: 35872401; PMCID: PMC9197567.



## Why don't they talk?

“Undergraduate students are struggling to stay engaged in class—and they believe that material more directly connected to real-life issues could help solve the problem..”

Alonso,

InsideHigherEd, 2/12/23

# Scaffolding for enhancing student discussions:

- Start small and with lower-stakes topics
- Assign roles for discussants (i.e. time keeper, task-master, summarizer, spokesperson)
- Give parameters/expectations for the discussion (i.e. lay out questions you want students to explore, a solution or action you want them to achieve/arrive at, and make that visible so they can follow the steps as they go)
- Remember the goals for your discussions (will help you choose which kind of discussion to use and whether or not everyone achieved the lesson goals via the talking!)

# Strategies for enhancing student discussions

- Clarify the role of discussion
- Use a variety of group set-ups/student assignments to
- Give students a small number of specific and expected outcomes as well as guided focus (when needed)
- Include movement, creative tools, and different ways for students to demonstrate understanding
- Create specific tasks and goals as outcomes
- Actively manage discussion disparities or inequities

## Resources and favorites discussion methods:

- Cult of Pedagogy: [Big List of Discussion Strategies](#)
- Silent discussions
- Fishbowl with back channel
- [Assessed conversations/oral exams](#)
- Leaderless group discussions
- Visual representation of content highlights
- [Walk and Talk](#)
- Inner/Outer Circles (or Two Circles)
- Four Corners
- [There are literally dozens more: check with your go-to teaching resources, colleagues, or discipline-focused faves \(like Kathy's<sup>11</sup> The Scholarly Kitchen\)!](#)



**Let's discuss!**