

How to Prepare for a Seminar

The crucial element of a seminar discussion is the discussion itself. You may be used to sitting in a class in which students contribute verbally, but this is a little different. Basically, you are all working together to better understand the reading you have just done. Everyone should participate, because everyone has something to offer.

Here are some general tips to follow during a seminar:

Be Prepared

- Read the homework assignment. Even if you do not understand all of it, you should be familiar with it.
- Take notes or highlight what you think are important parts of the reading. You may want to read them aloud during the seminar.
- Make a list of discussion points that you want clarification on, and/or questions.
- Go to class prepared to start the discussion with a question or statement that you think will elicit a good response that will lead to discussion (even though you may not be asked to start the class).

The Discussion

- Everyone should participate. Even if you are a shy student, you should try to "be heard." Not contributing is unfair to you and to fellow students.
- Try to keep the discussion flowing. Even if you have a prepared list of questions, if someone has just said something interesting and you have something to add, do so. If that person has just said something that you do not understand, ask him or her to clarify. In other words, even though you may have prepared for the class a certain way, you have to adjust to what happens in class.
- Everyone is a leader. If the discussion wanes or you think that a particular topic has been all talked out, volunteer an idea for changing the direction of the discussion.
- Be polite. Try not to cut people off or interrupt. The discussion will generally be students stating thoughts that will be more than just a sentence or two. Let that person say what he or she has to say. On the other hand, if someone is going on for far too long on a tangent, it is your job to keep the discussion moving. Politely bring the conversation back with something like: "I'd like to respond to something you said earlier about..."
- Be patient. Since every person thinks a little differently, you may hear things repeated in different ways. This is good and may lead to better understanding or even new ideas.
- Monitor one another. If a classmate leans over and whispers to you during the discussion, don't partake. Whispering is rude. If you think someone else is impeding on the discussion with his or her behavior, perhaps by interrupting someone else, tell the person who interrupted that you want to hear out the last person.