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**10 Benefits of Getting Students to Participate in Classroom Discussions**

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Participation is one of those workhorse instructional strategies—easy to use, straightforward, expected, and often quite successful at accomplishing a number of learning goals. It’s good to remind ourselves of its many different uses, especially on those days when getting students to participate feels like pulling hens’ teeth.

1. **Participation adds interest**—It’s hard to maintain students’ focus and attention when all they hear is the professor talking. It helps to hear another voice as well as an answer or another point of view.
2. **Participation engages students**—A good question can pique their interest, make them wonder why, get them to think, and motivate them to make connections with the content. This benefit is magnified when teachers play a bit with the question, when they repeat it, write it on the board, and don’t call on the first hand they see.
3. **Participation provides the teacher feedback**—When students answer or try to explain, teachers can see the extent of their understanding. They can correct (or help the students correct) what the students haven’t got right or don’t see quite clearly.
4. **Participation provides the students feedback**—When teachers ask questions or otherwise seek student input over a topic, they are letting students know something about the importance of certain ideas and information.
5. **Participation can be used to promote preparation**—If an instructor regularly calls on students and asks questions about assigned reading or what’s in their notes from the previous class session, that can get students (at least some of them) coming to class prepared.
6. **Participation can be used to control what’s happening in class**—If a student is dozing off, texting, quietly chatting, or otherwise not attending to what’s happening, that student can be called on or the student next to the offender can be asked to respond.
7. **Participation can be used to balance who’s contributing in class and how much**—In the vast majority of cases, it is the teacher who selects the participant. If teachers will wait patiently and not always select the same student, if they look expectantly to others and confirm verbally and nonverbally the value of hearing from different people, they can influence who speaks and how much. Participation even helps teachers control how much they talk.
8. **Participation encourages dialogue among and between students**—Students can be asked to comment on what another student has said. A question can be asked and students can be invited to discuss possible answers with each other before the public discussion.
9. **Participation can be used to develop important speaking skills**—In many professional contexts, people need to be able to speak up in a group. They may need to offer information, ask questions, or argue for a different solution. People don’t learn to speak up in a group by reading about how to do it—it’s one of those skills best developed with practice. And it’s one of those skills that develops better with feedback. If participation is being used to teach students this public communication skill, they will need feedback.
10. **Participation gives students the opportunity to practice using the language of the discipline**—Most faculty have spoken astronomy, accounting, psychology, gerontology, political science, whatever the field for years, and they’ve forgotten how much of the language is new, different, and difficult for students. Participation gives students the chance to practice using a different vocabulary.