GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION LEADING

In preparation for your DISCUSSION, you should prepare an outline and/or notes so that you can argue a position on a topic(s) related to your readings. You should make sure that you can transmit effectively information from the articles you have read. Your goal in the presentation is to share all the materials you have read with the class, and to involve the class in the process that you have completed so that they can understand your arguments.

Step One: Take responsibility.
You are signing up for leading discussion on a particular day, with particular readings. You have a fairly good stretch of time (at least 1 week, in some cases, several weeks) between the sign-up time and your scheduled time for presenting. You can select a single article to focus your discussion around; you are NOT RESPONSIBLE for all articles assigned that day. However, I NEED TO KNOW WHICH ARTICLE YOU PLAN TO FOCUS ON AT LEAST ONE CLASS PERIOD BEFORE YOUR DISCUSSION LEADING. This means that you need to read the materials for the class you plan to lead discussion well in advance of the class meeting.

You are responsible for reading and understanding the materials so that you can present the readings effectively. I encourage you to meet with me to review any article that you do not feel you could present effectively.

Step Two: Organize the materials for presentation.

Once you have selected an article for review and discussion, do the following:

1) Organize in a brief and compelling fashion the major highlights of the article. Sift out the important points from the less relevant. Reports are most often criticized because they are not sufficiently selective -- that is, much unnecessary material is often presented.

2) Ensure that the fundamental problem of the article is clear. Be certain that the significance of the problem is presented. State how this relates to your own position (which should be the central issue of your presentation).

3) After you have presented the assigned material, you should evaluate it. Note its strengths and its weaknesses.

Step Three: Consider how to push the class beyond the readings.

In addition to this review and evaluation, present or engage the class to do one of the following:

a) A research proposal to test a hypothesis stated in the article.
b) A contradiction (but document it) to information offered in the article.
c) A different interpretation or conclusion than that offered in the article.
d) A new example of the use of a principle or generalization developed in the article.
e) Relate both new and assigned material to previous readings/discussion in the course.
f) Propose a new model or theory based on your evaluation.

Step Four: Consider visual aids, handouts, group dynamics, use of computers and the WEB book.

Once you know what you want to do with your selected article, and what kind of activity you want to use in class, consider the pragmatics of the presentation. Some problems in the past that have cropped up that students did not think through sufficiently before presenting are listed below.

When do you need visual aids to help guide the class through a definition/list of characteristics/list of questions/etc? Can the class read your visual aid? Font size?
Do you plan to write on the board? Will we all be sitting there watching the back of your head for 10 minutes while you write something complicated (and in silence) on the board? Do you need to break up the group into smaller groups? Rearranging people takes at least 5 minutes to accomplish. It takes another 5 minutes to get them to get back together. If you have 4 groups answering a question, each, serially, getting answers from the 4 groups will take 5 minutes per group, or 20 minutes total. So, the act of breaking up a group into 4 smaller groups to do something, and then to report back to the larger group, is going to take 30 minutes + any time needed for the mini-groups to actually do some discussing (i.e., 15 minutes for them? A total of 45 minutes). How will this work with your presentation? If you want the class to look up facts in a book, see how easy it is to accomplish this on your own, first. Thumbing through 100 pages of a text to look for an example is typically, a) boring, and b) not very useful, and c) a waste of time. If there are particular examples for the class to look up, get the page numbers and provide them.

We can use the computers in class to review a part of the web book at any time! Please use this function to review graphs, etc in your presentation.

Grading the Presentation

I will evaluate the clarity of your presentations. The basis of this evaluation is your review and evaluation of essential materials as listed in this handout.