

## **ACCS Conference Workshop**

### **Cultivating Conversation:**

#### **Using Feedback & Grading to Improve Seminar Discussions**

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TTWBAT apply principles of assessment and feedback to improve seminar discussions.

#### **Workshop Procedure**

1. All participants assess discussion samples 1 and 2 (pg. 5). Which is the better discussion and why? Individually, then pairs (1 min.). Full group (1 min.)
2. Some participants (group A) read 'what are seminar discussions?' (2), 'why have seminar discussions?' (2-3), and 'how do we use assessment and feedback to improve student learning and discussion?' (3-4). Each will write one each of: 'I notice', 'I wonder', and 'It reminds me of'. They will participate in a 5-7 min. mini-discussion of these readings.
3. The rest of the participants (group B) will read through 'Harkness discussion daily grading sheet 2020-21' (7), and 'Harkness discussion feedback' (8). They will assess the discussion and offer feedback.
4. Group A participates in a mini-discussion (5-7 mins) of the material they read. They'll ask questions, make reference to documents, make connections, etc.
5. Group B will assess the discussion and offer feedback. I'd <sup>?</sup>suggest focusing on one or two participants in the discussion, using the 'daily grading sheet' (7).
6. Following the discussion, Group B completes the 'discussion feedback' (8) form for the participant(s) they followed. Group A should read through 'daily grading sheet' (7) and 'Harkness discussion feedback' (8). Group A can do the 'Harkness discussion self-assessment' (9).
7. As a full group, discuss what specific feedback we would have given to the 'students' in the discussion, from the feedback form.
8. Presenter will then lead the full group through 'how do we use assessment and feedback to improve student learning and discussion?' suggestions and the documentation:

- discussion guidelines (6)
- grading sheet, feedback form (7,8)
- self-assessment (9)
- feedback tracking and goal chart (10)
- assessing students outside the discussion (11)

### ***What are seminar discussions?***

1. Seminar discussion is an approach to student-driven classroom discussion. It is similar to other kinds of Socratic methods, with the major difference being that the teacher is not in the place of Socrates asking a series of leading questions taking the students to inevitable conclusions by a route they are unlikely to be able to later reproduce. Instead, the goal is for students to do the important work of thoroughly preparing to discuss and then taking the lead in carrying out the discussion.
2. Seminar discussions are not free-flowing, anything-goes times of sharing thoughts or feelings. Rather, the teacher selects readings or other content that address the important curricular topics of that unit and provides students with discussion questions to guide their preparation. Once prepared, students then engage in a monitored and more or less guided discussion of those questions, and others that they bring to the discussion, as well.
3. Some seminar discussion formats (e.g., Harkness) were not originally developed within classical or Christian context, so the assumptions about education and reality in other schools lead their teachers to take a much more hands-off approach than we do. We are not asking students to construct their own version of reality (even if they can defend it from the text) but to engage in a thoughtful search for and discussion of truth. This is not constructivist, progressive education but equipping students with the ability to discuss important ideas.

### ***Why have seminar discussions?***

1. Improved student learning and content retention through more active engagement and involvement. There is no place to hide at the seminar table. Students learn more of what they have to explain to others, and having to explain exposes potential ‘understanding by recognition’.
2. Students do more of the work during class. (Never work harder than your students!)
3. Improved development and application of tools of learning (focused and thoughtful reading, understanding, applying previous learning, evaluation, discussion, listening carefully, supporting position using evidence, presentation, etc.).
4. Reinforcement of school culture of student engagement, involvement, requirement to understand and take responsibility for learning, etc.

5. Promotion of Portrait of a Graduate preparation: What do you want them to be able to do ten or fifteen years from now? We're preparing students for life as reading and discussing adults by giving them the tools and practice in discussing ideas with others. This prepares them for life-long learning and engagement with others around ideas (university, home, church, vocation, citizenship).

6. Immediate opportunity for assessment and feedback. Seminar discussions are an outstanding means of checking for understanding.

### ***How do we use assessment and feedback to improve student learning and discussion?***

#### **Prepare students well, in advance, for discussions**

1. Provide modeling and guidance for students early in the process.
  - develop and review with students a clear set of criteria for what makes an excellent discussion
  - begin early (6<sup>th</sup> grade) with fishbowl, small-group mini-seminars, etc.
  - perhaps role playing as a staff with students as observers
  - practice with students how to connect comments
  - teach students to *ask* good questions.
2. Provide pre-discussion preparations:
  - guided note taking or review guide (or model: I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me of...)
  - small group mini-discussions (prime the pump)
  - brief pre-discussion written responses

#### **Use discussions as a means of formative assessment**

1. Remember the purpose: students should do most of the thinking and talking. Feedback should guide them toward more focused participation (including preparation, as needed.)
2. Remember that seminar discussions are essentially extended formative assessments. We are merely checking for understanding—discussions should not be a regular crisis in the lives of our students. Nothing will kill the joy of interesting and thoughtful discussion like the pressure of performance. This is practice!
3. Connect student feedback to the discussion criteria.
4. Student feedback should be specific and descriptive.
5. Student feedback should be timely—weekly is a good target, if using discussions frequently.
6. Students should track their progress and set goals for future discussions. We want them to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

7. Students should self-assess their participation and progress, as well.
8. Make sure students *not* in the discussion are actively engaged in following the discussion and are required to demonstrate this.
9. Don't neglect writing. Students (in humanities) should write frequently. Discussions should support the writing. Written assignments (generally summative) are another means of assessing the success of discussions.
10. Seminar discussions are a means of formative assessment. And yet along with the feedback I give a small grade, as well—I know that this is heretical to some degree, but my defense is that the *focus* is on the specific, descriptive comments on the feedback form that students will track and set goals from. And the grade provides an incentive to prepare, as well as giving us the tangible gradebook items administrators crave—but perhaps one might object that this appeals to their lower nature.

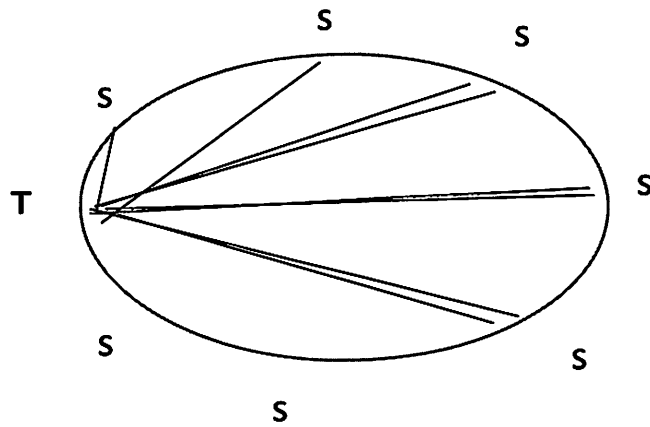
*Potential issues in assessment and grading*

- It is important to keep clear records of the discussion in order to make grading as objective as possible. Track each discussion in some way (chart the table, speaking time, running commentary, etc.)
- I've used spiral-bound notebooks to track discussions and then later filled in the daily grading sheet. This provided me with a written record of the discussion in case there were questions later about the grades.
- I give frequent reading note quizzes, generally open-note to encourage keeping up with notes-taking and to provide a gradebook balance for those few students who do not do as well in discussions (yet).
- These provide a formative assessment opportunity, as well. I use frequent exit passes, admit slips, graphic organizers, etc. to check for understanding. Discussions are one of many ways to assess learning.

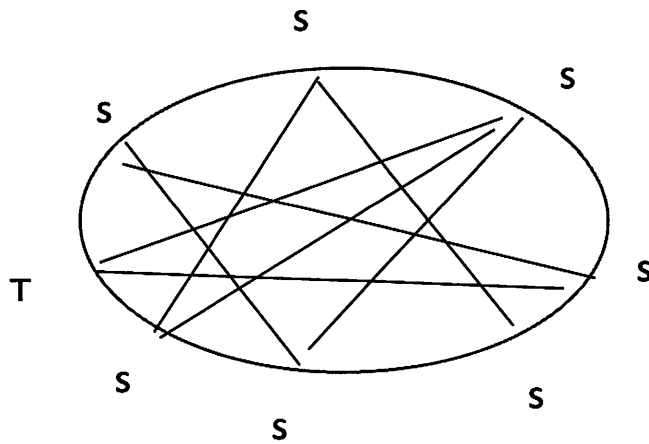
My general process is:

- chart the discussion
- fill out daily grading sheet and gradebook entry
- give weekly specific, descriptive student feedback
- students self-assess and set discussion goals
- students pair-share their goals

Seminar Discussion Sample One



Seminar Discussion Sample Two



## Harkness Discussion Guidelines

1. Only those who have prepared (e.g. have done the background reading) may participate
2. Do not raise hands during the discussion
3. Direct comments and questions to other students, and not to the teacher (unless asked to do so)
4. Everyone at the table must participate, though not necessarily equally
5. Refer frequently to the source/text/problem frequently
6. Support your comments by reference to the text
7. When you ask questions not on the reading guide (which you should!), be sure that they seek to get at the meaning of the text or the importance of the topic.
8. Ask clarifying questions, if needed
9. Connect your responses to previous comments whenever possible, rather than merely giving your own isolated opinion
10. Connect your responses to previous learning whenever possible
11. Summarize and restate frequently.
12. Take turns—allow everyone to have an opportunity to speak.
13. Keep the discussion on topic, but move on when it is clear the topic needs to change

	AH	AHb	ML	OL	NL	NO	EP	RS	MU	OV	AW
Total (10)											
<b>Prepares:</b> Comments reflect preparation and thought  <i>Knowledge (define, recall, describe)</i> <i>Comprehension (explain, generalize, give example)</i> <i>Application (use, apply, predict)</i> <i>Analysis (compare and contrast, infer, break down into parts)</i> <i>Synthesis (combine, explain connections, revise)</i> <i>Evaluation (assess, critique, justify)</i>											
<b>Supports:</b> Refers frequently to the <u>text</u> or problem											
<b>Wonders:</b> Ask <u>questions</u> that seek to get at the meaning or importance of the topic Asks clarifying questions											
<b>Connects:</b> Connects discussion to previous learning/reading											
<b>Reviews:</b> <u>Summarizes</u> and restates frequently											
<b>Invites:</b> Allows others to have an opportunity to speak											
<b>Collaborates:</b> <u>Connects responses</u> to previous comments whenever possible (rather than merely giving an isolated opinion)											
<b>Collaborates:</b> Directs comments and questions to <u>other students</u> and not to the teacher											
<b>Collaborates:</b> Keeps discussion on topic but is willing to move on when it's clear the topic needs to change											
<b>Collaborates:</b> Tone and attitude is conducive to cooperative discussion											

## Harkness Discussion Feedback

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Way to Go!	Ways to Improve
<b>Consistent participation</b>  <b>Thoughtful participation</b> -knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation  Consistent text references  Frequent and thoughtful use of text  Keep asking good questions  Keep connecting responses to previous learning	<b>Silent much or all of the time:</b> <b>difficult to tell if you've prepared</b>  <b>More frequent participation needed</b>  Refer more frequently to the text  Ask questions to get to meaning of the text or to clarify the discussion  Connect responses to previous learning and reading  Direct comments to other students Stay on topic Find a way to engage/involve quieter students

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### Harkness Discussion Self-Assessment

Name \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Text \_\_\_\_\_

Circle all that apply:

**I was silent most or all of the time: it was impossible to tell if I prepared**

**I was minimally involved in discussion: it was difficult to tell if I prepared**

**I was consistently involved in discussion**

I made frequent references to the text

I need to refer more frequently to the text

I connected my responses to previous learning and reading

I need to connect my responses to previous learning and reading

I asked questions to get to meaning of the text or to clarify the discussion

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Goals for the next discussion:

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Goals for the next discussion:

Harkness Feedback Tracking and Goal Chart

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Topic(s)	Grade	Key Rubric Phrases	Goal(s) for next time

## Assessing Harkness Discussions and Preparation

### Outside the circle:

1. Notes on discussion; transcript of discussion; with commentary, as able
2. Note each item as it is discussed, and fill in what may have been missed
3. Follow individuals and their contributions
4. Assess certain discussion areas
5. Chart the discussion—connections between speakers
6. Time the comments
7. Respond, react (in writing) to discussion as it's happening

## Assessing Harkness Preparation/Participation

1. Notes on discussion; graded weekly, with weekly, specific feedback
2. 'Quick quizzes' on reading notes; use to review previous notes, also; record last three composition book reading notes entries
3. Write brief summary of the discussion (paragraph), post-discussion
4. Student self-assessment and goal sheet
5. Write briefly on questions before discussion; then again after; revise before turning in
6. Give discussion questions ahead of time, students come with written answers
7. Students briefly discuss questions in small groups (to 'prime the pump')
8. Consider assigning one grade to entire group on occasion in order to encourage more balanced participation (alert students in advance)
9. Spend time coaching individuals and groups on improving discussion skills
10. Write weekly!

## Harkness Discussion

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_

A large vertical oval is centered on the page. To its left and right are several horizontal lines for taking notes. On the left side, there are 8 lines. On the right side, there are 8 lines. Above the oval, there is one line. Below the oval, there is one line.

+ - question or comment that probed the important meaning or issues in the text; T- text reference; C- connection made to previous learning; √- comment that moved discussion along