

Techniques for Facilitating Group Discussion: How to handle silence

Silence is a form of student feedback. Your students will benefit when you use that feedback to adjust your teaching.

 **Are you asking
GOOD QUESTIONS
that encourage discussion?**
See our handout on *Effective Questioning*.

Introduce novelty or variation

- Adjust amount of visual support accompanying discussion.
- Alternate the type and format of student response (i.e., volunteer, randomly chosen by name, choral response, show of hands, etc.).
- If appropriate, increase the difficulty of the questions to require greater engagement.
- Adjust vocal tone, pitch, volume.

Give students time

- Wait (for at least 8 seconds) so students can develop their thoughts.
- Repeat or rephrase the question for students who didn't hear the question.
- Give students some time to write about the topic before continuing discussion.
- Have students discuss the answer with a partner or in small groups before discussing the topic as a whole class.

How to handle SILENCE

Offer prompts

- Give a hint.
- Provide part of an answer.
- Ask a simpler or more open-ended question.
- Demonstrate the reasoning involved, then ask students to apply the same logic on a different question.
- Invite students to use a learning support for assistance (e.g., notes, text, peer).

Offer praise or encouragement

- Acknowledge student contributions.
- Show students that risk-taking is valued more than the correctness of answers.
- Develop a sense of classroom community. See our handout on *Creating an Environment for Learning*.

Model

- Model your own thought process on a topic by saying it out loud, including mistakes. This is a particularly good technique to use at the beginning of the semester to familiarize students with the academic thought process in the discipline.