

## Hints for Guiding Successful Classroom Discussion

- With the help of your students, devise rules for discussion early in the semester. Ask for consensus for the final set of rules.
- Summarize the discussion periodically.
- Pay attention to how students are situated in the class. Feel free to rearrange them or their chairs, if possible.
- Consider assigning roles for the discussion. For instance, students can bring lead-off questions to class. They also can serve as discussion guides and summarizers.
- Consider asking students to present a position without regard to – or even counter to – their original positions.
- Discuss the discussion process itself. Invite the class to comment on whether the topics, questions, and process of the discussion were useful learning mechanisms. A one-minute paper might be appropriate.
- Employ small-group discussion. A representative from each group can speak for the group to the larger class.
- Don't allow discussion to devolve to the personal. Devising rules at the beginning (our first step) should help avoid this possibility or at least help you get the discussion back on track.

**Example of a Discussion Task** – Your group needs to identify the four best arguments for outlawing or for mandating the death penalty. Begin by sharing your views and making a list of all the arguments you can identify. At this point, don't evaluate or criticize the arguments proposed. Put your energy into helping each other identify and communicate ideas. When your list is relatively complete, review it and select the four best arguments. You have 15 minutes.