# The Teaching and Learning Center logo featuring a blue tree with gold leaves and the words Teaching and Learning Center Reading Discussion Structure

Prepare students for a class discussion using this simple questioning structure. Although typically based on reading material, you can use this structure to develop a discussion based on any previously reviewed material such as previous lecture material, a video, a piece of art, etc.

## Preparing the Questions

* First Question: A question that everyone can answer without fear of being wrong
  + This question is usually a “how do you feel?” or “what was your favorite part?” type of question.
  + Examples:
    - Which part of the material resonated with you and your perceptions of our discipline?
    - What was the most surprising part?
    - Which section stood out to you as important or was new learning for you?
    - How did you feel about a particular passage?
* Second Question: The answer is right there in the material OR you are putting two pieces of information together
  + This question can be answered with basic recall and a little bit of critical thinking. In this question, you are getting them to recall key facts from the material.
    - What did the author of this piece say we should do as a result of \_\_\_\_?
    - What are some important elements of \_\_\_\_\_ that we must consider?
    - The author said \_\_\_\_\_ and also said \_\_\_\_\_\_. How are these two things related?
* Third Question: A question that requires critical thinking to answer – making connections to the world at large or to other content in the course.
  + This video said we should be both merciful and just. What are some potential points of conflict between those two?
  + Earlier in the semester we learned about Constructivism. How does our new concept of Essentialism compare? Are there some good similarities there?
  + We just read about the need to hold students accountable. How does that relate to our professional dispositions as social workers? Is there, perhaps, a social worker-specific approach to holding students accountable in a classroom environment.

## Asking the Questions

Instructors often become impatient when asking questions, which leads to quick answers (from the instructor) with little wait time. To prepare strong thinkers, instructors should wait patiently for an answer to come from the students. When first using this guide, plan for about five minutes for each question. Wait calmly and patiently for a student to respond. Repeat the question only if necessary.

## Responding to Student Responses

The point of a discussion is to get students to talk to each other. They will, often, interact mostly with you as the instructor. The best way to cause that interaction is through your responses. You will likely start with something like, “Thank you for that response. Someone else?” This helps students know that you are interested in what they are saying. If you jump on that response with your own thoughts, you will encourage them to continue to try to interact with you rather than their peers. (Statements like, “I like that response because. . .” is an example of a response that will keep students engaging with you instead of with their peers.)

You may also want to use responses such as “Tell me more about what you just said” and “Can someone else build on that? What else could be said about that?” These responses signal to students that they should be listening carefully to each other and responding to each other. Over time, this will build class discussions that are rich and engaging.

## Preparation

Use the examples from above as guides to create your own questions for the upcoming discussion that you are leading.

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| Topic or Reading Material: | |
| Question 1: Open Answer |  |
| Question 2: Right There |  |
| Question 3: Making Connections |  |