

**Teaching Creatively and Effectively with ORC:
Classroom Activities and Daily Assignments to Nourish Discussion**

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Pair-share / Sentence Completion Exercise: With a neighbor, complete the following sentence: “The technique or activity from today’s CILA lunch that seems most promising for my own teaching is _____?”

I. Reasons to include pre-assignments to enhance discussion in classrooms

- A. *Assessment* (for students and teachers)
 - 1. Students don’t know what they don’t know until they try to express what they know (in both writing and oral communication).
 - 2. Teachers get a clear sense of where everybody’s level of understanding is
 - 3. To foster exploration and experimentation with ideas, I give points simply for completing the exercise (rather than letter grades), and I make these “daily participation points” a portion of their overall grade.
- B. *Participation preparation:* helps diminish the “I don’t have anything to say,” the “I get nervous speaking in public” and the “I didn’t do the work” situations by creating thoughtful and prepared students
- C. *Diversity:* Fosters understanding and respect for differing perspectives, both in responding to written material and sharing responses with classmates

“Tales from the Trenches” / “Circle of Voices” Exercise: In a group of 3-4 people, share a story of the most successful conversations you have had in one of your classes—or perhaps a story of something that didn’t work as you had hoped! Reflect: what can we take away from these experiences?

II. Sample of Types of Assignments (drawn and adapted from Stephen D. Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999]).

- A. *Question Log:* Have students make a list of the questions that arise as they read the text. When finished reading, have them review the list and star the top three questions they are interested in. In class, then have students share their question logs with one another and discuss how others understood the passage in question.
- B. *Paragraph Summary and Analysis:* Have students write a paragraph summary of the author’s thesis, and three to four sentences evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the argument. In class, students compare and contrast their readings/evaluations with the readings/evaluations of classmates.
- C. *Quotes to Challenge and Affirm:* Have students identify and write out two quotes from the assigned reading: one to challenge and one to affirm. (A variation of this exercise asks students to find the quotation that best captures the main argument). In addition to fostering attentiveness to the text and critical thinking skills, sharing these with others (in small groups or large class discussions) is an engaging way to open discussion and get focused on important aspects of the reading.
- D. *Author Interview Questions/Letter to the Author:* Ask students to imagine that the author of the assigned text will be in class, and to write questions that they would like her to answer. Alternative: have students write a letter to the author with questions and responses.

Small Group Discussion Exercise (with or without role playing): What are some practices to utilize when facilitating a discussion on controversial topics? What are some practices to avoid?