



Participating Effectively in Class

Ask a question

- Asking a question is a great way to contribute to the discussion and collective learning. Participating in class does not exclusively mean answering questions or sharing new insights. Some courses consider multiple forms of participation, including blog posts and other asynchronous activities.
- Frustrated that you have done countless hours of reading and your class participation does not reflect that? As you read or complete assignments before class, write down your questions. Bring those questions with you to class. Your professors want to know what material is confusing or intriguing to you.

Talk with your professor

- If you are having trouble participating in class, visit your professor's office hours or schedule an appointment with them to talk about your concern. Attending office hours is one way of engaging with the course. Your professor may have advice and can support you as you work to engage in the course. Sometimes it is easier to talk in class after you have talked one-on-one with your professor.

Keep in mind that...

- Everyone is often mostly thinking about themselves, so your classmates are likely focused more on themselves than on you. You may feel a lot of pressure on what you say and how it sounds, and you may feel added pressure related to your identities and experiences. Try to not let a fear of saying something less-than-brilliant stand in your way of saying something. Your perspective is valuable.
- It is not too late to start participating in class, whether you are six weeks into your first semester or in the midst of your junior year. It can feel like the longer you wait to participate in class, the more pressure you feel to say something brilliant. Try to break the ice with a question (see above!) and try to say one thing in one class as a starting point.
- If you tend to participate very actively in class discussion, take pauses to listen to others allow space for others to join the discussion and share their perspectives. Active, attentive listening is an important part of class participation.

While this info sheet offers some thoughts, the interpersonal and identity dynamics around participating in class are more complicated than this brief description. To discuss, you can reach out to a [SAM](#), a [student dean](#) or your professors.

This info sheet was developed by the [Office of Academic Success](#), including the [SAMs](#). The advice is based on a [Participating Effectively in Class Workshop](#) that has included more than 20 Swarthmore professors over several years. Contact [us](#) if you have ideas or questions.