SPEAKING UP IN FRESHMAN SEMINARS

PARTICIPATING IN DISCUSSIONS

These seminars offer first-year college students a wonderful opportunity to try out their ideas in an accepting environment. Students may be shy about participating in discussions— even talking informally with you, the faculty member. To create a welcoming climate:

1. Learn students’ names and their interests.

2. Ask interesting questions about your topic that relate to students’ experience and indulge their responses.

Said one observer to a senior faculty member (after the class, which he had dominated): “I think the students want a chance to talk.”

3. Give students questions to think about ahead of time to prepare for discussion.

4. Encourage them to listen respectfully to each other, to disagree politely, and to direct their comments to each other, not just to you.

In discussing a contemporary political topic, one lecturer invited her students to “Listen with the possibility of being changed, speak with the possibility of being heard.”
MEETING STUDENTS OUTSIDE OF CLASS

Some students say faculty seem rushed and unwilling to talk informally outside of class. Encourage them to meet with you individually and otherwise to chat.

One seminar leader tells his students that he knows they have a “freshman adviser,” but they may consider him one too.

Experience-based learning and joint explorations outside the classroom are particularly successful.

Show students your lab or take a trip together to a museum.

One professor takes students to his research lab at Woods Hole. Another takes students to the whaling museum in New Bedford for a reading of Moby Dick. (Request funds for expeditions from the Freshman Seminar office.)

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO SPEAK

Seminar leaders have been concerned about inelegant habits of student speech that you “like, hear a lot in your seminar?”

If your students are to give in-class presentations, you may make the group aware of such habits by asking:

1. Do you raise your voice at the end of a statement (and make it sound like a question)?
2. How often do you say "like" and "you know" (and can this be minimized)?

A physics professor sent a comedian’s riff on speech patterns to his students in order to begin raise awareness of this topic.

GIVING IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS

If you ask your students to give oral presentations, lead class discussions, or engage in debates you may ask the Bok Center’s specialist on speaking instruction to offer concrete strategies. Email Sarah Jessop at jessop@fas.harvard.edu to schedule a meeting.