



Ways to Improve Your Class Participation Experience: Suggestions from Students

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1. Some students recommend speaking up in class at the very beginning of the semester. By doing so, you set an example for yourself early on that you will speak in the class.
2. Speaking up at the very beginning of that day's class helps because then you might not compare yourself to the comments of other students.
3. Make a connection with your teacher outside class. This way you can feel like someone knows you and is on your side as you speak.
4. Try sitting in the front of the class and focusing your attention on someone who feels safe, such as your instructor or a friend.
5. Ask the instructor if there are other ways you might participate besides speaking in class, such as sending a comment or question via email before class.
6. Choose the class in which you *most* want to try to participate rather than thinking you have to make these changes in *every* class and all-at-once; for example, this can be a class you feel more comfortable speaking in or a class in which you want to begin to speak.
7. Prepare a question or comment before class, and/or practice out loud to yourself or with a friend.
8. Have some strategies ready to calm yourself down before you prepare to speak: breathe deeply; try giving yourself a pep talk such as, "I can do this" or "what's the worst that can happen" or "I'll survive, even if I feel embarrassed" and "I have something to offer to the class."
9. Remind yourself of your *own* reasons for choosing to speak up. For example, "I want to learn more" or "I'll feel good about myself if I speak up."
10. Keep in mind that most people listen for the main point rather than attending to the sentence construction; most people will not notice if your grammar is not completely correct or if the idea is not perfectly expressed.

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11. Revise your expectations of your participation. For instance, instead of thinking that you need to have an original idea or your comment has to be perfectly formulated, try focusing on your efforts to learn or even simply on the goal of participating more.
12. The below phrases can be helpful as ways to start a contribution to the class discussion:
In other words...
Could you elaborate on that?
I'd like to add...
There's another point that we haven't considered yet.
Returning to an earlier point...
This might mean...
I'm not sure that...
I'm afraid I must disagree because...
I agree because...
This does not include, for example, ...
13. Be sure to reinforce and reward yourself for speaking up and participating in class. For example, say "I did it!" or do something nice for yourself. Even if, in time, you hope to do more, it's important to acknowledge and celebrate each achievement.
14. Other ideas????

Selected Resources

Check the Bureau of Study Counsel's website for links to articles and handouts at <http://bsc.harvard.edu/onlineresources>.

Antony, M. M. & Swinson, R. P. (1998). *When perfect isn't good enough: Strategies for coping with perfectionism*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Ben-Shahar, T. (2009). *The pursuit of perfect: How to stop chasing perfection and start living a richer, happier life*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Graff, G. & Birkenstein, C. (2009). *They say/I say: The moves that matter in academic writing* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Pauk, W. & Owens, R. J. Q. (2005). *How to study in college* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Sonbuchner, G. M. (1991). *Help yourself: How to take advantage of your learning styles*. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Bureau counselors are available to consult with you about this topic or other things that might be on your mind. Call 617-495-2581 or stop by at 5 Linden Street to schedule a time.