This handout will help you optimize classroom discussion and conversations. Although every class will have its own conversational dynamics, there are certain strategies you can apply before, during, and after the discussion to improve your participation and learning outcomes.

**Before Class Discussion**
- Make sure you do the reading! That can include skimming and actively reading the document.
- Take note of points of agreement or disagreement with the author. Mark important examples.
- Mark passages or ideas that you don’t understand. Confusion can encourage asking questions, which are important for class discussions.
- Make notes of talking points and questions that you can bring up.
- Review your notes right before class. You can even practice asking questions or raising your points out loud.
- Make sure you take care of yourself before class, are well-fed, and have water to sip on in class.

**During Class Discussion**
- Be a good listener by considering what your classmates are saying and tailoring your responses to their questions and concerns.
- Show you are actively listening through your body language (nodding your head, eye contact) and by responding using sentences like, “You seem to be saying ..., I think that’s interesting and makes me think of...”.
- Take notes on what your classmates share and listen to respond.
- Remember that quality is greater than quantity. Sharing a few insightful thoughts and questions is better than monopolizing a whole conversation.
- Remember that other people are probably feeling shy and nervous too, and that’s okay!

**After Class Discussion**
- Take a few minutes after class to review your notes and reflect on the discussion.
- If you think that your participation in the discussion could have been better, brainstorm a plan for the next class discussion for things that you will do differently and how you can better prepare yourself.
- If you still have questions or concerns about class discussions, reach out to your professor or the Center for Academic Success to learn more success tips and develop your skills.