

What to Do When a Discussion is Dead

- A. Toughest of problems but necessary to discuss/WE ALL GO THROUGH IT!
- B. My responses will vary depending on the situation. There's no magic formula. However, here are some key questions to consider in calibrating a response:

- Is it an easy topic to discuss? (Easy topic=not an uncomfortable topic, something students can relate to directly, something easy to comprehend)
- Were students given a reading or some prep beforehand?
- Is it a topic that students in the past have discussed well?
- Do students just seem like they are in a lazy mood (use your instinct)?
- Is the discussion one that you really need for the course or to have a successful class that day?

The more questions from the 5 above are answered yes, the more aggressive I would be in encouraging the students to talk using the tips in part C

- C. Here are some tips for waking up the class:
- have them take a minute and write something down
 - have them talk amongst themselves
 - call on someone cold then call on someone else to respond to the first person etc. Be especially complimentary and gracious with people you have called on.
 - in these difficult moments, use whatever gifts to the max that you possess as a teacher (sense of humor, ability to charm, ability to persuade etc.)
 - (playfully) make them feel guilty
 - (not so playfully) tell them you are disappointed in their performance
 - Praise heavily and profusely any sign of life ("Ok, NOW you're coming to life. See? I told you this topic was interesting etc.")
 - Related to that, be enthusiastic even if they're not
 - have multiple questions at the ready so that you can approach an issue from different angles if one does not work
 - go with your instinct (it's usually right)