

# The Hidden (and some not-so-hidden) Rules of Seminar Success

The William & Mary Neurodiversity Working Group

The logo for NEURODiVeRSiTy is enclosed in a double-bordered rectangular box. The text "NEURODiVeRSiTy" is displayed in a sans-serif font, with "NEURO" in orange, "DiVe" in dark green, "RSi" in a lighter green, and "Ty" in dark green. The 'i' in "DiVe" and the 'i' in "RSi" are stylized with dots.

NEURODiVeRSiTy

# A seminar is...

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- A small class of advanced students working on a single topical focus.
- A discussion of intensive assigned reading.
- Centered on the reading, and on explicating the relationships among the readings.
- Cumulatively, the combination of readings plus the high level of discussion.

# The Original Flipped Classroom

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- The flipped classroom is a concept that is gaining traction both in K-12 education and in higher ed.
- The basic idea is that students are presented new material (often online) outside class (homework) and then use class time to practice and work through or refine their understanding of this material.
- Yeah. That's what a seminar is. Thanks, Socrates and Plato.

# When a seminar works...

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- Students are free to share what is confusing or opaque about the assigned material.
- Students are free to elaborate what they understood.
- Students make explicit connections with one another's comments and questions, immediately and over time.
- Students leave the seminar with more knowledge than they brought to it.

# ...and when it doesn't.

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- The professor does not encourage and model active listening.
- Students feel they cannot comment or question freely.
- Students do not support or encourage one another's comments and questions.
- Students do not leave the seminar with different perspectives nor a deeper understanding.

# Don't be that person...

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- ◉ Who interrupts other students.
- ◉ Who talks only to the professor, and not to the other students.
- ◉ Who dominates the discussion.
- ◉ Who thinks “I shouldn’t say that because surely everyone has already thought of it.”
- ◉ Who doesn’t prepare for class.

# To be inclusive you should...

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- ⦿ Allow others to speak.
- ⦿ Listen carefully and respectfully.
- ⦿ Acknowledge the previous person's point, and try to connect your comments to theirs.
- ⦿ Help someone out if they clearly seem stuck, or if they have forgotten what they wanted to say.



# How to prepare for seminar

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- Make sure to do all of the assigned reading.
- Think about how the reading materials are connected.
- Think about how the reading material might offer some points of conflict or divergence.
- Review your notes before class.
- Make notecards, or even just a list of the questions you'd like to ask, or points you'd like to make. Note the page numbers of the passages in the reading that you find interesting, challenging, or problematic.



# Seating in a seminar

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- Because a seminar is a community, it's good to sit together at the table.
- Often people sit in the same seats every week, but you don't have to sit in the same seat every class.
- Be aware of the physical space that your books and belongings take up on the table and around your chair.

# Good ways to start or continue a discussion topic

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- What if you have something to say, but the class is discussing a different topic? Try this: “I’d like to add something on a different topic.”
- What if you want to add to the current topic? Try this: “I’d like to add to that.”
- Or try this: “I have a different perspective on that.”

# Effective Communication

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- Be aware of the people around the table, and watch to see if it looks like someone might be trying to say something.
- Catch the professor's eye if you want to make a contribution to the discussion. A good seminar leader will keep track of who is waiting to speak.
- When speaking, direct your voice towards other students in the class.

# Technology Rules

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- It's rude to use personal technology in any classroom, but it is especially obvious in a seminar.
- If you need a laptop to take notes, make sure you are on task. It may be helpful to turn off your wireless connection to maintain focus on the discussion.
- Make sure your laptop (and cord) does not take up too much space at the table

# Evaluation and feedback

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- Have you had a seminar previous to this one?
- Have you ever encountered an explicit presentation like this one about seminars?
- On a scale of 1-7 (1 is *least*, 7 is *most*), did you find the material:
  - Relevant?
  - Helpful?
  - A good reminder?
  - Possibly of use in other classes?