

Scored Discussion

Adapted from *Bring Learning Alive! Methods to Transform Middle and High School Social Studies* (TCI)

A scored discussion is one in which students receive points for displaying good command of a skill or appropriate group behavior and lose points for inadequate skills or inappropriate behavior. You (or in some cases, the students) score the discussion as it progresses and share the results at its conclusion.

Depending on your instructional objective, you might award points for accurately restating a previous comment, offering new evidence, or drawing someone into the discussion. A scored discussion can also help you monitor—and modify—student behavior during class discussions. That is, you could evaluate and score on-task behavior, polite responses, or other behavioral issues you want to address. The scored discussion is an alternative form of assessment and is relatively easy to execute. It is also extremely flexible; the type of scoring you do will likely vary from one class to the next.

Criteria for Scored Discussions

Choose from the following criteria, in any combination, to meet your teaching objectives for group discussions. You may want to weigh the point value of different criteria according to the relative importance of each. Have students focus on one to four criteria per discussion.

Positive Points

- + Acknowledging the previous speaker
- + Accurately restating the previous comment
- + Clearly stating an opinion
- + Clearly stating a fact
- + Using convincing evidence to support an argument
- + Making a relevant comment
- + Drawing another person into the discussion
- + Recognizing contradictions
- + Recognizing irrelevant comments
- + Using analogies to support an argument
- + Asking probing questions that further the discussion
- + Disagreeing in an agreeable way
- + Pointing out details in an image to support an opinion
- + Calling on the next presenter, by name, before sitting down
- + Speaking with a loud, clear voice

Negative Points

- Interrupting speakers
- Not paying attention or distracting others
- Monopolizing the discussion
- Making personal attacks or using put-downs
- Deviating from the topic of discussion
- Disagreeing in a disagreeable way

How to Use a Scored Discussion

The following suggestions will help you execute a successful scored discussion.

- I. Determine the criteria.** Determine which scored-discussion criteria you want students to practice. If scored discussions are new for students, focus on one or two relatively easy skills, such as clearly stating an opinion and offering a new argument. You may also want to score for inappropriate behavior, such as interrupting speakers or not paying attention. As students become more familiar with scored discussion, use higher-level criteria, such as using convincing evidence to support an argument and using analogies to support an argument.

2. Create a scored-discussion tally sheet.

The form of a tally sheet will vary depending on the type of discussion and your teaching objective. For a Response Group discussion, you will need to set up a matrix that lists each group, plus each of the criteria you intend to score.

3. Model the discussion skills to be scored.

Before students start their discussion, model the skills that will be scored and check to make sure all students understand them.

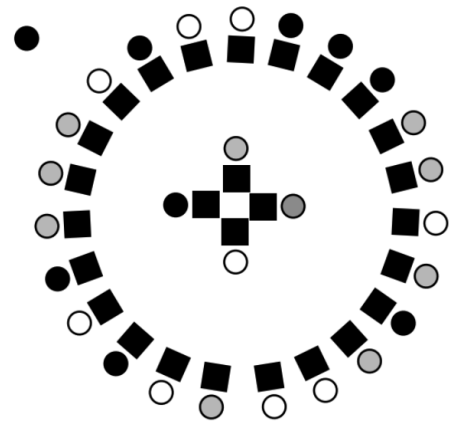
Group or student	Clearly states opinion	Offers convincing evidence	Deviates from topic	Total
1. Kelso/Jen/ Alvarado	+ 1 +1	+1 +1 +1	-1	4
2. Scoma/Avery/ Rundell	+1 +1 +1 +1 +1	+1 +1	-1 -1	5
3. McNeil/Decker Washington	+1 +1	+1		3
4. Robles/Schmit/ Karzal	+1 +1 +1	+1 +1 +1	-1	5
5.				
6.				

4. Score the discussion. As the presenter from each Response Group shares that group’s ideas, score the discussion on your prepared tally sheet. Scoring might consist of a simple plus/minus tally as you note positive and negative points. (Be sure to keep the projector turned off at this time so that students focus on the discussion instead of your scoring.)

5. Debrief the scored discussion. After the discussion, reveal the scores and debrief the experience with students. Point out a few examples of when you gave points for the higher-level discussion skills that were exhibited.

Conduct a Fishbowl Scored Discussion

You can also help students improve on their discussion skills by staging a “fishbowl” discussion. That is, one group holds a discussion in the center of the classroom—in the fishbowl—while you and the rest of the class observe and score the discussion. By observing a group discussion and learning to accurately identify and score high-level discussion skills, students will be better prepared to participate in a high-level discussion themselves.



Start with four student volunteers who are willing to discuss a topic while the rest of the class watches and scores them. Arrange the classroom as shown in the diagram, with the group of four in the center and the rest of the class seated in a large circle around them. Choose a discussion skill or two that you want students to learn—such as using convincing evidence to support an argument—and model it for the class. Then hand out a Scored-Discussion Tally Sheet. Have students start by listing the names of the students in the discussion group, and filling in the discussion skills they will be scoring. Model the scoring system you want students to use (plus/minus, checks, or points). Give the fishbowl group a topic to discuss while the class evaluates and scores the four students individually.

After several minutes, stop the discussion. Debrief the discussion with students by having them compare their scores for the students in the fishbowl. Have students post their score sheets on the wall, or create a matrix on a transparency and have them enter their tallies. Have students look for—and briefly discuss, if relevant—similarities and discrepancies among their scores.