

Using the Learning Through Discussion (LTD) Approach to Teaching for Thinking

Notes * Adapted from Learning Thru Discussion, by William Fawcett Hill, Sage Publications, 1977.

PREPARING AN LTD SYNTHESIS AND BEING A LTD GROUP LEADER

The Learning Thru Discussion (LTD) Synthesis is an 8-step written process that will guide you as you lead a small group discussion in class. Prepare the LTD Synthesis by using the 8 steps as an organizing outline format. ALL students should be mindful of the 8-step process when reading and preparing for class. When preparing a LTD Synthesis for an assignment that includes multiple readings, you must complete all 8 steps for each of the readings assigned to you. The steps may be integrated for each article or chapter (for example, Step 1 may include subheadings that refer to the readings in turn), or a separate 8-step LTD synthesis can be prepared for each reading.

On the day(s) you are a Group Leader, you must prepare enough copies of your synthesis to distribute one copy to all members in your small group. In addition, you must turn in one copy of your synthesis to the professor at the beginning of class, and you will use one copy to lead the small group discussion. It is not necessary to prepare enough copies for the entire class.

Your job as a LTD Group Leader is to initiate group discussion around materials and issues that were presented in the class reading(s) for that day. You are NOT responsible for *teaching* the materials to the other members of your small group. It is assumed that every member of the group has read the materials and is responsible for their own learning. Your job is to identify the issues that may have been confusing and the issues that are of interest to you so that the group can discuss these issues further. One highly effective way to do this is to pose questions to the group. Writing down questions as you prepare the LTD synthesis will remind you of what to ask during discussion time. Every member of the group is expected to participate in the group discussion. If everyone prepares in accordance with the outline, the discussion can move along with remarkable ease and efficiency. All members of the group are responsible to maintain the conversation, ask questions, offer their interpretations, reflections and positions on the issues, and encourage each other to participate if someone is not engaging in the conversation. At the end of the group discussion time period each group should evaluate how the group discussion went, and what things to could be done next time to enhance the LTD discussion experience.

Suggestions for preparing the LTD synthesis:

- Familiarize yourself with the 8 steps so you have them fresh in your mind when you begin reading
- As you read, jot down ideas whenever you think they fit best into the synthesis outline
- Look up and learn to say the meanings of new words and concepts
- When you have finished reading, go back through the outline and write down reminders of what you might say during each step in the discussion
- Formulate questions about material you anticipate introducing into the discussion



OUTLINE FOR PREPARATION OF THE LTD SYNTHESIS*

Step 1 – Definition of terms and concepts

- a. List all the words of which you are unsure.
- b. Look them up and write down the definitions of them.
- c. Give an example to clarify the meaning or during the discussion ask someone in the group to give an example.

Step 2 – Statement of author’s message

- a. Write down your version of a brief, general statement of the author’s message
- b. Frame a question that will encourage someone else to state what the assignment was about

Step 3 – Identification of major themes

- a. Identify the subtopics in the article(s) /chapter(s)
- b. Note organization of author’s material in terms of headings and subheadings used
- c. Consider what makes for a logical sequence of subtopics

Step 4 – Allocation of time

- a. Note the subtopics which you had trouble comprehending or which you think would provide a profitable discussion

- b. For each subtopic, formulate a question that would initiate a profitable discussion
- c. Assume you will have at least one hour for your group discussion, and decide how you roughly would like to allocate the time to each topic. Please know that some flexibility will be needed here, as you cannot fully anticipate how the discussion will progress. This allocation of time is used as a guiding plan.

Step 5 – Discussion of major themes and subtopics

- a. Write out a statement of the subject matter of each subtopic.
- b. Design a question you would ask for each.
- c. The purpose of this step is to provide enough background to support the discussion without having to rely heavily on your reading materials.

Step 6 – Integration of material with other knowledge

- a. Write down the meaning or usefulness the material has for understanding other concepts
- b. Indicate what other ideas the material substantiates, contradicts or amplifies
- c. Phrase questions to put to the group members which will stimulate them to see how the new material fits into what they have studied previously.
- d. In discussion, call attention to and reinforce a comment that seems particularly helpful.

Step 7 – Application of material

- a. Write down how the material can apply to your own life situation – past, present or future, or what implications the article has for your own intellectual and professional interests and pursuits.
- b. Give examples of how you might apply the knowledge, or give examples you know of which the new material helps to explain or helps you to understand
- c. Compare to your own experiences the author’s reasons for thinking the material is worthwhile
- d. Test the usefulness of the new material by constructing a situation for which it should be useful

Step 8 – Evaluation of author’s presentation

- a. Write down your reactions and evaluation of the assignment
- b. State questions to help the group evaluate the new material, the method of arriving at the conclusions, etc.
- c. State points supporting or questioning the validity of the arguments or the reasoning of the author.
- d. State why and how you think the new material is or is not useful
- e. State questions that will help the group to test the usefulness of specific points.



Learning Thru Discussion (LTD) Group Roles and Member Skills

- Sequence of task roles specific to a discussion of a topic
 1. Initiating – Every group member is responsible for starting and maintaining discussion
 2. Giving and asking for information – Ideally info will be volunteered, but it can be solicited
 3. Giving and asking for reactions – Interact, don't just rotate! Feedback is needed for learning!
 4. Restating and giving examples – Reflect others' statements to check meaning and understanding
 5. Confronting and reality testing – Reflect statements to check communication and accuracy
 6. Clarifying, synthesizing, and summarizing – To solidify understanding and give closure
- Overall task roles required in the *Learning Thru Discussion* method
 2. Gate-keeping and expediting – Ensuring everyone's participation, keeping group on task
 3. Timekeeping – Making sure group sticks to the time allotments collectively agreed upon.
 4. Evaluating and diagnosing – Silently evaluate and diagnose group performance throughout
 5. Standard setting – Ensuring that performance is in line with collectively agreed upon standards
- Group maintenance roles required in the *Learning Thru Discussion* method
 2. Sponsoring and encouraging – Words of encouragement and praise to nurture participation
 3. Group tension relieving – Lessen stress and relieve frustration when disagreements occur
- List of Criteria for Standards Setting
 1. Prevalence of a warm, accepting, non-threatening group climate.
 2. Learning is approached as a cooperative enterprise.
 3. Learning is accepted as the raison d'être of the group.
 4. Everyone participates and interacts.
 5. Leadership functions are distributed.
 6. Group sessions and the learning task are enjoyable.
 7. The material is adequately and efficiently covered.
 8. Evaluation is accepted as an integral part of the group operation.
 9. Members attend regularly and come prepared.