Participating in Class

Participating in class is a hallmark of higher education as these are opportunities to engage in class conversations and critiques. It helps professors understand what concepts the students understand and which need further explanation. For these reasons, many professors will make participation in course discussion a major element of your overall grade.

What are productive contributions?
- Sharing your informed ideas on the topic
- Providing relevant examples or evidence
- Asking for further clarification on a topic or assignment
- Making connections to other topics related to the course or resources

What are unproductive contributions?
- Sharing uninformed ideas on the topic
- Engaging in side conversations
- Asking questions that have already been answered

Keys to Success

Know the difference between attending and participating. While some faculty members may have attendance grades, you should not confuse these with actual participation. Attending a class is certainly important, but participating in class through active contribution and engagement is what your professors will expect. If you go to class, listen, and take notes, you are attending the course. If you are asking and answering questions, providing feedback, and sharing thoughts, you are participating in the course.

Find different ways to contribute. If you dread participating in class, look for different ways to contribute that do not involve raising your hand, such as short, written responses, discussion board posts, reflection essays, that will help you to demonstrate engagement. When all else fails: ask a question!

Practice makes perfect. The more you participate the less nervous it will make you. Try participating in courses with a smaller number of students or where you are familiar with the other students. Practice especially in a class where you feel comfortable with the professor.

Keep participation productive. Participation isn’t about the amount that you engage in the course, but rather, it’s the quality of that engagement.

Participate. Don’t dominate. Professors need to ensure that everyone in the class has an opportunity to engage with topic. If you have no issues talking in class, remember to regulate your own contributions to ensure that other students have a chance to engage.

Adapted from Central Penn College “Keys to Success”