Discussion Leader Assignment

Discussion leaders are responsible for conducting 20-30 minutes of class discussion. By 8 p.m. on the day before you are scheduled, you should send me 3 to 5 proposed questions via email (jkskaf@ship.edu). I will respond with suggested revisions. You should send me revised questions at least one hour before the start of class (or earlier if I request because you need to make more than one revision).

You are responsible for sending me questions earlier if you are not available to email questions the evening before class or revise questions on the day of class.

If you have access to Microsoft Word, send me questions in a Word document. This will allow me to make corrections and suggestions using the comment and track changes features.

Some questions should be factual, asking fellow students to summarize main point(s) of the reading. The others should be open-ended, asking students to share their interpretations and opinions of the reading.

Your grade will be based on the effectiveness of your questions and presentation:

• An “A” grade will be given for well thought out questions that lead students to understand a historian’s main arguments and then push them to challenge those arguments.
• A “B” grade will be given for clear, well-organized questions that lead students to summarize the readings.
• If your questions are partially or totally incoherent, disorganized or irrelevant, you will receive a grade of “C,” “D,” or “F,” depending on the extent of problems.
Eleven Points on How to Lead a Discussion
Adapted from Dr. Vera Reber

BEFORE CLASS

1. **Prepare**: thoroughly read all material on the topic that is to be discussed. Review past readings that may be relevant.

2. **Organize** your ideas by noting specific problems, issues, and questions relating to the topic.

3. **Develop** questions that lead students to understand and evaluate a historian’s main arguments. Factual questions (What happened…?) may be necessary, but they are not enough for a good discussion. Provoke students to challenge a historian’s interpretation of the evidence.

DURING CLASS

4. **Set** a proper, relaxed atmosphere for the group.

5. **Begin** the discussion with a clear, interesting, controversial question. (The use of a quotation, demonstration or a picture provides an alternative method of beginning a discussion.)

6. **Listen** carefully to what is said: Respect other people’s contributions.

7. **Encourage** all to participate before adding your comments or going on to another question.

8. **Expand** and clarify comments made by members of the group in order to help them recognize the main issues.

9. **Inform** without being dogmatic and try to remain neutral. (If the discussion is really dead you may wish to take a controversial position on the issue.)

10. **Follow through** with questions or points the group wishes to discuss.

11. **Summarize**: Restate the problems discussed and indicate general conclusion and divergent viewpoints expressed on the topic.

“A good discussion is one in which the participants are able to communicate easily, freely, and purposely.”