There are three features that typically characterize precepts, seminars, and other discussion-based classes: a heavy reading load, papers (as opposed to exams), and, of course, in-class discussions. Here are some strategies that you can try before, during, and after class to make discussion-based classes more manageable and fun. We encourage you to edit, add to, and even delete strategies from this list as you figure out what works best for you.

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| Reading Assignments    | • Use the course syllabus to understand why you are reading a particular text  
                           • Set aside plenty of uninterrupted time to complete the reading assignments  
                           • Talk to somebody about the reading you completed  | • Highlight, flag, or annotate the sections of the text(s) that are discussed in class  
                           • Pay attention to HOW your instructor and classmates analyze and respond to texts to learn new methods  | • On your syllabus, note down 2-3 keywords associated with each reading and/or a brief sentence summary of how reading related to the week’s topic or questions  
                           • Flip through the text to flag sections or quotations that are illustrative of concepts or ideas you discussed in class  |
| Class Discussion       | • For each reading, prepare 2-3 questions or comments (and email them to your professor or preceptor or post them on the class discussion forum)  
                           • Before class starts, ask the person sitting next to you what they thought about the readings/lectures  | • Look at the “Participating in Class: Contributions that Count” handout for practical suggestions on what you can say to meaningfully contribute to class discussions  
                           • Set tangible goals for yourself about the quality and quantity of your in-class participation  
                           • Feel free to pass on answering a question or say “I don’t know” when appropriate  | • Review your class notes to make sure you understand them – and send your professor or preceptor a clarifying or follow-up question  
                           • Fill in gaps in your notes and add responses or comments to what you wrote during class  |
| Papers                 | • Practicing creating (and answering) potential questions that you could answer with one or more of the readings  
                           • Read the paper prompts as soon as they are available – keep making and revising “back-of-the-envelope” responses  | • Note down instructions or thoughts that the professor or preceptor provides about what they might (not) be looking for in paper  
                           • Get input on your paper ideas (topics and analyses) by including them in class discussion  | • Set aside a little time (10-15 minutes) after every class to write a summary of class discussion or to highlight how different readings connect to one another |

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