

# Hamilton

## Inclusive Practices for Multilingual Students in Class Discussions

### Be clear, specific, and detailed in your expectations for class participation

Students often come from a range of educational contexts, which means that their expectations for class sessions will likely vary. For example, some may be more accustomed to a classroom culture where students are expected to listen and not ask questions (Zhang-Wu 2022). Explain to students what your expectations in the classroom are and how students will be assessed for participation. For example, if you ask a question and expect all students to respond, let them know. You might say something like, “I would like everyone to respond. Knowing that everyone will need to participate, who would like to start?” Or, “I would like to hear from everyone. I’ll start on X side of the room and move in Y direction.”

### Recognize and value various forms of class participation

While some students may gladly contribute verbally to large classroom discussions, others may feel more comfortable taking notes or actively listening. Consider providing students with multiple ways to participate—small group discussion, [think-pair-share](#), [entry and/or exit tickets](#), synchronous virtual discussions, class notetaker, individual meetings with you, email correspondence with you outside of class, etc. Additionally, Stephen Brookfield’s [Discussion as a Way of Teaching](#) is a helpful resource for developing discussion based activities in courses across the curriculum.

### Provide students with multiple forms of input

Students benefit from having multiple ways to access and process information. If possible, provide students with materials that reinforce the class content such as lecture notes or outlines, handouts, and/or class slides. Incorporate not only textual but also visual content such as images, graphs, charts, and/or diagrams to help students remember key terms and other information. While some students may benefit from recording lectures, research has shown that this can often create additional work for students that ends up being more burdensome than beneficial, which is why posting lecture notes and other class materials can be helpful (Zhang Wu 2022). Additionally, whenever possible, provide students with any discussion questions and or topics that the class will focus on in advance of course meetings.

### Regularly check-in with students during discussions and throughout the semester

Consistent comprehension checks can be a helpful tool to understand how well students are understanding the material. Try to ask students for their understanding using open-ended questions. For example: What questions do you have? At what point was that confusing? What can I explain further? Stop to check-in at various points throughout the class. Try to avoid yes or no questions such as: Does that make sense? Is that clear? Are we ready to move on? You can also end classes with [a minute paper](#) to assess what students understood; these papers take a limited amount of time, focus on one question, and give students an opportunity to write their responses. Additionally, it can be helpful to ask students to provide feedback on the class throughout the semester. Consider, for example, having them

complete a Google form 2-3 times during the semester where they share what is working well in the class, where they have felt confused, and/or what they would like to explore moving forward.

### **Be attentive to the speed, intonation, and clarity of your speech**

When lecturing to a class or discussing various points, it can be helpful to speak in a way that is clear and evenly paced. Multiple forms of input and comprehension checks can be especially helpful. For example, when posing a question to the class, having the question written on a projector, whiteboard, or other space for students to refer to can help them process the question visually and verbally. Additionally, instructors may use idioms, colloquialisms, phrasal verbs (e.g.-- “play out”), and/or culturally specific language that may be unfamiliar to students; try to be mindful of these words and phrases and offer brief explanations/clarifications when possible. For example, “I think you will find this assignment to be a piece of cake or especially easy.”

### **Provide support and encouragement**

Contributing to a class discussion can feel like a risk for any students; it is an act of vulnerability where students are sharing their voices, language, and ideas unsure of how they will be received. When students are validated in their contributions, they are more willing to participate. You can do this by thanking students for their contributions (and using students’ names), connecting their contributions to one another, and/or referring to their contributions at various points throughout the class. If you find a student is struggling to locate a word or phrase, don’t be afraid to offer a suggestion. If a response is slightly unclear, you can ask clarifying questions, elaborate on the response, and or repeat the response back to the class. For example, “I think that what you said about X, Y, Z is an interesting point because...” or “What I hear you saying about X is .....

### **Sources**

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