

# Tech Snacks: Anticipatory Sets; Real Talk

A month into the semester, it can feel like you've really hit your groove – or like you need to find some new strategies to maintain student attention and your own motivation. This session will cover one foundational but often-overlooked classroom strategy (“anticipatory sets”) as well as one strategy for improving the authenticity and depth of discussions (the Real Talk method).

## Anticipatory Set (aka Hook, Advance Organizer)<sup>1</sup>

Jennifer Gonzalez, author of the blog [Cult of Pedagogy](#), puts it this way: “When you start a lesson, you could begin it with something like this: ‘Today we’re going to continue our study of hygiene.’ Or you could get more creative: You could come into the room, your hair a mess, with dirt under your fingernails, stained clothing, your teeth covered in yellow goo, with little signs taped all over you that say scabies, diarrhea, hepatitis A, hookworm, and lice. Which of these two approaches will be better at grabbing students’ attention?”

### Purpose of the Anticipatory Set

to provoke interest; to preview upcoming content and/or connect it to previous material; to help illuminate the value of the lesson and necessity of the content

### Examples

- **Hand out markers and tell students “Go to the board and write everything you know about or associate with [topic]”**  
*A history instructor has students do this before a lecture on a controversial or often misunderstood historical event. (This helps the instructor build on prior knowledge and clear up misconceptions when moving into the lecture.)*
- **Create an [anticipatory guide](#) handout to have students test their prior knowledge about something in a true/false or agree/disagree format.**  
*A diesel faculty member uses a guide to survey students on their knowledge about hydraulics flow prior to beginning the lesson, and then again at the end.*
- **Provide 2-3 versions/examples of something and put students in groups and ask them to come up with another version/example.**  
*A graphic design instructor displays a specific brand’s logo in its font -based style and its pictorial style. They then show some examples of abstract logos and ask students to work in groups to sketch an abstract version of the original logo.*
- **Give students an anticipatory problem to work out**  
*Prior to beginning a lesson on rigging, the Plumbing instructor asks students to work in groups to determine how they’d get a large bathtub into a 3rd story bathroom in a new build. (Then show a few relevant rigging disaster videos.)*
- **Offer an anecdote and a counter-anecdote and a few minutes to discuss them**  
*An Education instructor uses Gonzalez’s example above and asks the class to highlight how those health students might feel in each situation*
- **Bring an object to class that is somehow related to the lesson, and ask students to predict how it might represent today’s lesson. Or bring two objects and ask how they’re related.**  
*A geology instructor brings two types of igneous rock and two types of sedimentary rock and asks students a) what they think each are called and b) which they think go together and why (prior to explaining any of this).*

---

<sup>1</sup> The phrase “anticipatory set” was coined by Madeline Hunter in the 60s. Her lesson plan terminology is still used among educators: <https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/Holle-Lesson-Planning.pdf>

# Real Talk - a Class Discussion Strategy

Planning a class discussion can feel like a crapshoot: Will anyone talk? Will it be a chaotic free-for-all? Will you overplan it and end up micromanaging an unnatural, stilted discussion?

## Purpose of Real Talk

This teaching strategy helps instructors build the scaffolding for authentic, deep discussion and helps students build confidence in their own ability to contribute.

## Steps

### Practice Time

- Break students into small groups with 4-5 talking points that have nothing to do with the content at hand. (Later students will draft their own content-related questions.) Examples:<sup>2</sup>
  - What is something popular right now that future generations will think is silly?
  - What is the worst piece of advice a person can give?
  - If we ever find evidence of intelligent beings beyond Earth, should we try to contact them?
  - What do you think the following quote means (taken from the text that students will soon read)? “Instinct is no match for reason.”
- Provide students with a [talk stem](#)<sup>3</sup> to help them practice productive discussion phrasing. Encourage them to use the structure “**opinion – reason – example – question**” to support their contribution.

### Real Talk

- Have students draft 5-6 talking points during/after a reading, experience, observation, or other content-related task, with the help of a [talking points handout](#).<sup>4</sup> These might be questions, quotes that caught their interest, statements about patterns or connections observed, thoughts about authorial style choices, etc.
- Convene small groups and have each student pick their best 2-3 talking points and write them on sticky notes. As a group, they will then decide on the top 5 points and decide on a discussion order for the group.
- Once the order is decided, have them begin. Remind them to thoroughly discuss each chosen talking point and, importantly, to resist the urge to rush.
- If they finish too quickly, have them take out some of the leftover sticky notes to continue discussing until the other groups are finished.

**DISCUSSION talk stems**

- **I agree:**
  - I feel the same way as Henrik because . . .
  - Lea's statement about X is true. Another example that confirms this is . . .
  - X is very interesting. This also relates to Y because . . .
- **I disagree:**
  - I question your statement about X, because . . .
  - My thinking differs from Ian's in that . . .
  - I have a different interpretation. Here's how I read it . . .
- **I agree & disagree:**
  - I concur with Jaden about X, but for different reasons . . .
  - I see where you're coming from, but I think you're leaving out an important fact about X . . .
  - I can see that about X, but I don't agree with Y . . .
  - Now that I have seen Nolan's view, I'm rethinking my idea that . . .
- **Exploring possibilities:**
  - What if . . .
  - Is it possible that . . .
  - I wonder...

**TALKING POINTS**

**Student Directions:** Below you will find 6 types of talking points to choose from. A “talking point” is basically something that a group can discuss after reading the same text. Review these types before writing the talking points for your own discussion. Remember: Your discussion is in your hands, so make it interesting with great talking points!

- QUESTIONS**  
Remember to make them open-ended and interesting!  
Some stems: How... What if... Why...
- QUOTES**  
These can be dialogue, but they don't have to be. If it is dialogue, make sure to write down who says the quote.
- OBSERVATIONS**  
These are general events or details you noticed as you read, and you would like to talk about.  
Some stems: “Did you notice...” “It was interesting that...” “This stuck out to me because...” “I wonder if...”
- VOCABULARY**  
These could be words/phrases you did not know and would like to figure out with your group. They may also be words you thought were an interesting author choice and would like to discuss.  
Some stems: “Why do you think the author chose the word . . .?” “Why do you think [Character Name] uses the word X when describing . . .?”
- STYLE**  
These are an author's choices that you can talk about, such as imagery, figurative language, sentence structure, symbolism, etc.
- CONNECTIONS**  
Here you can make connections between the story and your own observations/experiences, current events, history, other texts, etc.  
Common stem: “X reminds me of...”

<sup>2</sup> This section leans heavily on Jennifer Gonzalez's post <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/realtalk/>, and these are her example questions. The example handouts linked below are also from her website.

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Talk-Stems.png>

<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Talking-Points.png>