Ideas for engaging students in discussion:

Share rules for communicating and have the students self-assess themselves. Students write rules for effective discussion techniques first. Discuss these and think about adding some of the rules below.

Some rules that I like follow:

‘Don’t fear silence.’ Allow for listening time.

Give the students sentence completions to begin discussions.
• ‘What struck me most about... is...’
• ‘The question that I’d most like to ask is...’
• ‘The most critical point from what I have learned/last week is...’
• ‘The part of the lecture/presentation that made the most sense was...’
• ‘What struck me most about our exchange with the students from Mexico was...’

See Brookfield and Preskill, 2005, pg. 69 for more ideas

Use ‘The Circle of Voices’ Discussion Technique (2005, pg.78) Students have a few minutes to think about what they are going to say. Then, each one will have an opportunity to share that information.

Share speaking time:
Speak only after everyone else has had a chance to say something or after 2 people have spoken.

Use a speaking stick. Only the person with the speaking stick can speak. Pass the speaking stick around when someone has something to say.

The student who started the last discussion can’t begin the next discussion.

Respond and Listen: Listen and respond/acknowledge what was said before continuing the discussion with your words. Paraphrase what was said before you before continuing. (2005, pg. 80)

Do not interrupt. (2005, pg. 80)

Limit time each person speaks to 3 minutes or other length of time so that one person does not speak too much. (2005, pg. 80)

See more ideas in Discussion as a Way of Teaching