

Socratic Seminars

"The unexamined life is not worth living."

-Socrates

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- Socratic Seminar Student Guidelines

Background

The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than to merely fill their heads with "right" answers. Therefore, he regularly engaged his pupils in dialogues by responding to their questions with questions, instead of answers. This process encourages divergent thinking rather than convergent.

Students are given opportunities to "examine" a common piece of text, whether it is in the form of a novel, poem, art print, or piece of music. After "reading" the common text "like a love letter", open-ended questions are posed.

Open-ended questions allow students to think critically, analyze multiple meanings in text, and express ideas with clarity and confidence. After all, a certain degree of emotional safety is felt by participants when they understand that this format is based on dialogue and not discussion/debate.

Dialogue is exploratory and involves the suspension of biases and prejudices. Discussion/debate is a transfer of information designed to win an argument and bring closure. Americans are great at discussion/debate. We do not dialogue well. However, once teachers and students learn to dialogue, they find that the ability to ask meaningful questions that stimulate thoughtful interchanges of ideas is more important than "the answer."

Participants in a Socratic Seminar respond to one another with respect by carefully listening instead of interrupting. Students are encouraged to "paraphrase" essential elements of another's ideas before responding, either in support of or in disagreement. Members of the dialogue look each other in the "eyes" and use each other names. This simple act of socialization reinforces appropriate behaviors and promotes team building.

Pre-Seminar Question-Writing:

Before you come to a Socratic Seminar class, please read the assigned text (novel section, poem, essay, article, etc.) and write at least one question in each of the following categories:

WORLD CONNECTION QUESTION:

Write a question connecting the text to the real world.

Example: If you were given only 24 hours to pack your most precious belongings in a back pack and to get ready to leave your home town, what might you pack? (After reading the first 30 pages of NIGHT).

CLOSE-ENDED QUESTION:

Write a question about the text that will help everyone in the class come to an agreement about events or characters in the text. This question usually has a "correct" answer.

Example: What happened to Hester Prynne's husband that she was left alone in Boston without family? (after the first 4 chapters of THE SCARLET LETTER).

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION:

Write an insightful question about the text that will require proof and group discussion and "construction of logic" to discover or explore the answer to the question.

Example: Why did Gene hesitate to reveal the truth about the accident to Finny that first day in the infirmary? (after mid-point of A SEPARATE PEACE).

UNIVERSAL THEME/ CORE QUESTION:

Write a question dealing with a theme(s) of the text that will encourage group discussion about the universality of the text.

Example: After reading John Gardner's GRENDL, can you pick out its existential elements?

LITERARY ANALYSIS QUESTION: Write a question dealing with HOW an author chose to compose a literary piece. How did the author manipulate point of view, characterization, poetic form, archetypal hero patterns, for example?

Example: In MAMA FLORA'S FAMILY, why is it important that the story is told through flashback?

Expectations of Participants in a Socratic Seminar

When I am evaluating your Socratic Seminar participation, I ask the following questions about participants. Did they....

- Speak loudly and clearly?
- Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?
- Use the text to find support?
- Listen to others respectfully?
- Stick with the subject?
- Talk to each other, not just to the leader?
- Paraphrase accurately?
- Ask for help to clear up confusion?
- Support each other?
- Avoid hostile exchanges?
- Question others in a civil manner?
- Seem prepared?

What is the difference between dialogue and debate?

- Dialogue is collaborative: multiple sides work toward shared understanding.
Debate is oppositional: two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.
- In dialogue, one listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground.
In debate, one listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.
- Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.
Debate defends assumptions as truth.
- Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.
Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
- In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than threaten it.
In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
- Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.
Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
- In dialogue, one searches for strengths in all positions.
In debate, one searches for weaknesses in the other position.
- Dialogue respects all the other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend.
Debate rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.
- Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to a greater understanding.
Debate assumes a single right answer that somebody already has.
- Dialogue remains open-ended.
Debate demands a conclusion.

Dialogue is characterized by:

- suspending judgment
- examining our own work without defensiveness
- exposing our reasoning and looking for limits to it
- communicating our underlying assumptions
- exploring viewpoints more broadly and deeply
- being open to disconfirming data
- approaching someone who sees a problem differently not as an adversary, but as a colleague in common pursuit of better solution.

Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Seminar

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
2. It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute.
3. Do not participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session.
4. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.
5. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
6. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
7. Listen carefully.
8. Speak up so that all can hear you.
9. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.
10. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.
11. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.

Socratic Seminar Rubric

	Content	Thinking & Reasoning	Conduct
Exceeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates advanced understanding and depth of knowledge of the texts. • Uses unit vocabulary accurately and insightfully. <p>Examples (evidence) used from the texts are balanced and drawn from a variety of sources.</p> <p>Shows thorough preparation for the seminar.</p>	<p>Arguments are reasonable and backed up with evidence from the texts.</p> <p>Explains complex ideas clearly.</p> <p>Adds new ideas that build connections to the texts or the ideas of others.</p> <p>Expresses reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the ideas of the texts or of others.</p>	<p>Demonstrates respect and enthusiasm for the purpose of the seminar.</p> <p>Listens actively and participates without dominating the discussion.</p> <p>Makes frequent eye contact with other students during the seminar.</p> <p>Keeps comments concise and to the point by thinking before speaking.</p>
Meets	<p>Demonstrates adequate understanding of the texts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses unit vocabulary. <p>Evidence used from the texts is drawn from a variety of sources, but may be less relevant or contain minor flaws.</p> <p>Shows adequate preparation for the seminar.</p>	<p>Arguments are generally reasonable and backed up with evidence from the texts.</p> <p>Attempts to explain complex ideas.</p> <p>Ideas are generally new.</p> <p>Often expresses reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the ideas of the texts or of others.</p>	<p>Demonstrates respect and enthusiasm for the purpose of the seminar.</p> <p>Generally is an active listener and participant.</p> <p>Makes eye contact with other students during the seminar.</p> <p>Comments are mostly concise demonstrating prior thought before speaking.</p>
Partially meets	<p>Demonstrates basic understanding of the texts.</p> <p>Some evidence used is vague, redundant, irrelevant or inconclusive</p> <p>Shows only fair preparation for the seminar.</p>	<p>Some arguments are underdeveloped and not backed up by evidence.</p> <p>Has difficulty moving beyond opinions to make new arguments within the discussion.</p> <p>Comments may lack deep thought or contain ideas that may have already been said.</p>	<p>Demonstrates respect and enthusiasm for the purpose of the seminar.</p> <p>Loses focus occasionally and/or is not participating actively.</p> <p>Does not make eye contact consistently with other students during the seminar.</p> <p>Comments are not concise and show lack of prior thought.</p>
Partially meets	<p>Demonstrates limited understanding of the texts.</p> <p>Does not use evidence to support comments.</p> <p>Shows poor preparation for seminar.</p>	<p>Arguments are underdeveloped and generally based only on opinions.</p> <p>Comments lack deep thought and often only repeat what other students have already said.</p>	<p>Shows occasional disrespect for the purpose of the seminar.</p> <p>Does not listen to all participants in the discussion and/or fails to speak during the seminar.</p> <p>Does not make eye contact with other students during the seminar.</p>
Does not meet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates inadequate understanding of the texts. • Shows lack of preparation for seminar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments do not address the discussion topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distracts others during the discussion. • Interrupts or insults others

Rubric for Socratic Seminar

Indicator	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1
Conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates respect for learning process • Exhibits patience w/ differing opinions • Asks peers for clarification • Attempts to involve others • Moves forward into new concepts • Not disruptive/ control of nonverbal gestures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows composure but sometimes shows slight impatience • Not patient while waiting to speak • Demonstrates respectful attitude toward others • Comments frequently but does not involve others • Shows a desire to contribute responsibly to the seminar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participates verbally/ shows impatience w/ seminar process • May make insightful comments but does so sparingly • May be argumentative and generally lacks poise • May be unfocused because of depth/ length of seminar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows no respect for process • Argumentative and rude • Takes advantage of/ causes distractions • Arrives unprepared • Wants the floor for himself • Writes personal notes instead of seminar notes • Attempts to sleep during seminar
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaks to all • Avoids talking too long • Can be heard by all • Avoids slang/incorrect grammar • Articulates clearly • Pronounces words accurately/extensive vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses majority of comments to peers (not leader) • Attempts to move discussion to new idea • Does not try to say "everything" while speaking • Tries to speak louder when asked to do so • Makes comments to merit reaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaks directly to leader • Speaks too softly and needs to be reminded • Routinely lapses into use of slang or substandard usage • Cannot pronounce key words in text • Speaks only with prompting and has no sustainable point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctant to speak when called on or passes • Mumbles/mispronounces words • Cannot be heard at all • Shows absolutely no desire to contribute verbally
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands questions • Cites textual support • Relates to other reading/studies • Expresses thoughts in complete sentences • Provides insightful comments • Resolves contradictory ideas • Considers all sources and input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to questions w/out any prompting • Demonstrates some reflection on text but not mastery • Makes limited connections w/ideas of others • Somewhat relates own ideas to other readings/seminars • Uses quotes/ paraphrases but inferences under-developed • Makes comments to merit reaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have read text but limited preparation • May overlook important points, thus leading to faulty logic • May be accurate on minor points while missing main concept • Contributes opinions that have no textual support • Has some difficulty in formulating understanding comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes illogical comments • Says no more than, "I agree." • Ignores previous comments and seminar direction • Uses humor to avoid serious thinking
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens for opportunities to respond • Does not overlook details • Takes notes/writes questions • Avoids repetitive remarks • Builds on discussion • Points out flawed reasoning • Overcomes any distractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is generally attentive and focused • Responds thoughtfully to ideas/ questions raised • May be too absorbed in own thoughts to hear others' comments • May write down some thoughts but not consistently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds only to ideas that are personally interesting • Asks for repetition of questions or rephrasing of questions • Takes very limited notes • Easily distracted or may be source of distraction • Does not look up the text as it is cited • Does not visibly respond to cited text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not attentive to others • Exhibits negative body language • Makes comments showing total misrepresentation of material • Does not listen well to understand others' points • Takes no notes
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passes a reading comprehension test • Is familiar w/text • Has marked text or has a note sheet • Understands major concepts in the reading • Identifies and contradictions in the reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passes a reading comprehension test • Has marked text or prepared notes • Can locate most references in text • Demonstrates knowledge of facts, but lacks mastery of concepts • Acknowledges difficulty w/reading and asks for clarification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears to have skimmed selection/ knows minimum on quiz • has little or no marking of text/ scanty notes • confused about key concepts • makes comments that reflect shallow knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly unprepared and fails reading quiz • Unfamiliar with text • Has no notes or marking or text • Asked for no help with the reading

Adapted by Pam Gray, PISD

SOCRATIC SEMINAR RUBRIC

[illegible]

SOCRATIC SEMINAR ANALYTIC RUBRIC

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Unsatisfactory
Conduct	Demonstrates respect for the learning process; has patience with different opinions and complexity; shows initiative by asking others for clarification; brings others into the conversation, moves the conversation forward; speaks to all of the participants; avoids talking too much.	Generally shows composure but may display impatience with contradictory or confusing ideas; comments, but does not necessarily encourage others to participate; may tend to address only the teacher or get into debates.	Participates and expresses a belief that his/her ideas are important in understanding the text; may make insightful comments but is either too forceful or too shy and does not contribute to the progress of the conversation; tends to debate, not dialogue.	Displays little respect for the learning process; argumentative; takes advantage of minor distractions; uses inappropriate language; speaks to individuals rather than ideas; arrives unprepared without notes, pencil/pen or perhaps even without the text.
Speaking & Reasoning	Understands question before answering; cites evidence from text; expresses thoughts in complete sentences; move conversation forward; makes connections between ideas; resolves apparent contradictory ideas; considers others' viewpoints, not only his/her own; avoids bad logic.	Responds to questions voluntarily; comments show an appreciation for the text but not an appreciation for the subtler points within it; comments are logical but not connected to other speakers; ideas interesting enough that others respond to them.	Responds to questions but may have to be called upon by others; has read the text but not put much effort into preparing questions and ideas for the seminar; comments take details into account but may not flow logically in conversation.	Extremely reluctant to participate even when called upon; comments illogical and meaningless; may mumble or express incomplete ideas; little or no account taken of previous comments or important ideas in the text.
Listening	Pays attention to details; writes down questions; responses take into account all participants; demonstrates that he/she has kept up; points out faulty logic respectfully; overcomes distractions.	Generally pays attention and responds thoughtfully to ideas and questions of other participants and the leader; absorption in own ideas may distract the participant from the ideas of others.	Appears to find some ideas unimportant while responding to others; may have to have questions or confusions repeated due to inattention; takes few notes during the seminar in response to ideas and comments.	Appears uninvolved in the seminar; comments display complete misinterpretation of questions or comments of other participants.
Reading	Thoroughly familiar with the text; has notations and questions in the margins; key words, phrases, and ideas are highlighted; possible contradictions identified; pronounces words correctly.	Has read the text and comes with some ideas from it but these may not be written out in advance; good understanding of the vocabulary but may mispronounce some new or foreign words.	Appears to have read or skimmed the text but has not marked the text or made meaningful notes or questions; shows difficulty with vocabulary; mispronounces important words; key concepts misunderstood; little evidence of serious reflection prior to the seminar.	Student is unprepared for the seminar; important words, phrases, ideas in the text are unfamiliar; no notes or questions marked in the text; no attempt made to get help with difficult material.

(Adapted with permission from Paul Raider)

SOCRATIC SEMINAR: HOLISTIC PARTICIPATION RUBRIC

PARTICIPATION IS OUTSTANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participant offers enough solid analysis, without prompting, to move the conversation forward ➤ Participant, through his/her comments, demonstrates a deep knowledge of the text and the question ➤ Participant has come to the seminar prepared, with notes and a marked/annotated text ➤ Participant, through his/her comments, shows that he/she is actively listening to other participants ➤ She/he offers clarification and/or follow-up that extends the conversation ➤ Participant's remarks often refer to specific parts of the text
PARTICIPATION IS VERY GOOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participant offers solid analysis without prompting ➤ Through his/her comments, participant demonstrates a good knowledge of the text and the question ➤ Participant has come to the seminar prepared with notes and/or a marked/annotated text ➤ Participant shows that he/she is actively listening to others. She/he offers clarification and/or follow-up
PARTICIPATION IS SATISFACTORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participant offers some analysis, but needs prompting from the seminar leader and/or others ➤ Through his/her comments, participant demonstrates a general knowledge of the text and the question ➤ Participant is less prepared, with few notes and no marked/annotated text ➤ Participant is actively listening to others, but does not offer clarification and/or follow-up to others' comments ➤ Participant relies more upon his/her opinion, and less on the text to drive his/her comments
PARTICIPATION IS NOT SATISFACTORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Participant offers little commentary ➤ Participant comes to the seminar ill-prepared with little understanding of the text and question ➤ Participant does not listen to others, offers no commentary to further the discussion

Reconfigured rubric based on Adams@studyguide.org

Socratic Seminar Rubric

	Exemplary	Proficient	Partially Proficient	Developing	Comments
Analysis and Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly references text to support reasoning. Demonstrates thoughtful consideration of the topic. Provides relevant and insightful comments, makes new connections. Demonstrates exceptionally logical and organized thinking. Moves the discussion to a deeper level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasionally references text to support reasoning. Demonstrates consideration of the topic. Provides relevant comments. Thinking is clear and organized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely references text, may reference text incorrectly. Demonstrates awareness of the topic but little reflection on it. Comments are mostly relevant. Thinking is mostly clear and organized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not reference text. Demonstrates little or no consideration of the topic. Comments are off-topic or irrelevant. Thinking is confused, disorganized, or stays at a very superficial level. 	
Discussion Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks loudly and clearly. Stays on topic and brings discussion back on topic if necessary. Talks directly to other students (rather than the teacher). Stays focused on the discussion. Invites other people into the discussion. Shares 'air time' equally with others. References the remarks of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks at an appropriate level to be heard. Stays on topic and focused on the discussion. Aware of sharing 'air time' with others and may invite them into the conversation. May occasionally direct comments to teacher. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly speaks at an appropriate level but may need to be coached. Sometimes strays from topic. Occasionally dominates the conversation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot be heard, or may dominate the conversation. Demonstrates inappropriate discussion skills. 	
Civility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listens to others respectfully by making eye contact with the speaker and waiting their turn to speak. Remarks are polite and demonstrate a high level of concern for the feelings of others. Addresses others in a civil manner, using a collegial and friendly tone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listens to others respectfully. Uses appropriate language and tone. Remarks demonstrate a concern for the feelings of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listens to others respectfully, but may not always look at the speaker or may sometimes interrupt. Remarks demonstrate an awareness of feelings of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be distracted or not focused on the conversation. Interrupts frequently. Remarks demonstrate little awareness or sensitivity to the feelings of others. Uses an aggressive, threatening, or otherwise inappropriate tone. 	

Rubric for Evaluating Classroom Discussions

	Exemplary	Proficient	Partially Proficient	Developing
Recognizes and Understands Multiple Perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beyond recognition and understanding, student is able to empathize with others' perspectives. Student's own thinking becomes more complex and thorough with added perspectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student demonstrates recognition and understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student recognizes and understands some alternate perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student struggles to reflect and paraphrase alternate perspectives accurately.
Participates in a Civil and Democratic Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beyond meeting discussion guidelines, student is a discussion leader, soliciting others' viewpoints and enforcing discussion guidelines in a respectful manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets all discussion guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meets some discussion guidelines, but some areas need development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several areas of discussion guidelines need development.
Communicates Ideas Using Supporting Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student states ideas with relevant supporting evidence from several of the following: content presented in class, experience, legitimate sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student states ideas with relevant supporting evidence from content presented in class, experience, or legitimate sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student sometimes states ideas using relevant supporting evidence from content presented in class, experience, or legitimate sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student rarely or never states ideas using relevant supporting evidence from content presented in class, experience, or legitimate sources.
Demonstrates Understanding and Application of Science Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student consistently uses ample content vocabulary appropriately. Scientific statements are factual and thorough. Student is able to apply scientific concepts through examples and integration, even to areas outside the original content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student uses content vocabulary appropriately. Scientific statements are factual. Student applies scientific concepts accurately through examples and integration of different concepts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student is at times able to use vocabulary appropriately. Some facts are incorrect. Student shows limited ability to apply scientific concepts through examples and integration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student rarely uses vocabulary appropriately. Facts are often incorrect. Student struggles to apply scientific concepts through examples and integration.
Identifies Ethical Processes and Theories Used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student is able to correctly relate one's own and others' perspectives to schools of ethical thought and frameworks or reasoning tools used to arrive at the various perspectives. Student demonstrates clear understanding of stakeholders, values, and issues, as well as the alternate decisions that may be made according to the various parties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student demonstrates use of ethical frameworks and reasoning tools in arriving at perspective. Student correctly identifies perspective to schools of ethical thought. Student demonstrates clear understanding of stakeholders, values, and issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student demonstrates some use of ethical frameworks and reasoning tools in arriving at perspective. Student makes limited connections between personal perspective and schools of ethical thought. Student demonstrates limited understanding of stakeholders, values, and issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student arrives at a perspective without the use of any framework or reasoning tool. Student is unable to relate personal perspective to the schools of ethical thought. Student is often unable to identify stakeholders, values, or issues.

✓ Speaks (20 pts) © Cites text to support argument or pose question (30 pts) ~~gk~~ insightful comment (35 pts)

Ⓔ provides historical evidence (30 pts) Ⓔ asks question (25pts) ~~rs~~ repeat (-5pts)

