

Information Sheet. Promoting Discussion

Guidelines for using discussion

1. Strategies for introducing discussion

- Present learners with options, and ask them to verbalise their choices.
- Ask learners to use existing knowledge in a new context.
- Present learners with a phenomenon and ask them to try to explain why it happens.
- Ask learners to bring to mind anything about a subject that they already know.
- Ask learners to discuss possible outcomes to an experiment, problem or task before you or they do it.
- Offer learners activities such as a card sort, requiring them to agree on each categorisation they make.
- Invite learners to explore a concept or to experiment with aspects of it before you give them a problem, task or explanation.

2. Benefits

- You find out where their misconceptions are.
- Learners articulate their ideas and use scientific terms.
- By accessing what they know already, learners can relate new knowledge to existing knowledge.
- Learners are actively involved.
- They learn from each other.
- They are more aware of what they do and don't know.

3. Making discussion effective

- Think carefully what knowledge and understanding learners need to have in order to benefit from the new discussion-based activity.
- Structure the discussion very carefully by being very specific about what the outcomes should be.
- Set a time limit for the discussion.
- Give learners specific roles, to ensure that everyone takes part.
- Ask learners to record their answers in some way, such as in a simple table or grid.