

## ***Making the Most of Conference***

**Prepare.** Yes, you should do the reading. But preparing for conference requires more than that. Once you're done reading, take a few minutes to reflect and write or type some notes. How do these readings relate to what you have discussed earlier in the course? What was most interesting or puzzling to you about what you read? What questions do these readings provoke for you? In some courses, the professor might require you to prepare for conference in a particular way, such as completing a short writing assignment or posting your thoughts or questions to Moodle (the course website software).

⇒ **“I didn't have time to do all the reading.”** If you find yourself habitually overwhelmed with the work for a class, talk to your professor. Find out what he or she thinks is a reasonable amount of time to spend on an assignment. If you are spending a lot more time than that on a regular basis, ask if your professor has advice to get through the reading or other assignments more efficiently. Take advantage of tutoring and other academic support services at the DoJo, as needed.

**Get in the mood.** Most conferences meet for, at most, three hours a week. That's not a lot of time. Make the most of it by arriving on time (or a few minutes early) and coming prepared with your books, notes, pen, and paper (or computer).

**Learn names.** Getting to know your classmates by name creates a better environment in class and facilitates discussion. It also makes things less awkward when you run into a classmate in Commons.

**Listen.** You could get a pretty good education by going to the library, reading a lot of books, and having your own brilliant ideas about them. But the benefit of a place like Reed is that you also have the advantage of hearing *other* people's brilliant ideas. Chances are that some of the most interesting people you will ever meet will be sitting around the conference table with you. Take advantage of the opportunity to hear what they have to say!

⇒ **How to listen even when you're talking.** Often the best contributions to conference are those that show how closely the speaker has been listening. Aim to tie at least some of your remarks to your colleague's comments: “I liked what Abigail said about Book 2. I noticed something similar in Book 3....” Or: “John, I followed your interpretation of the first half of the poem. But I'm not sure I agree with the second part. Can you explain why...?”

**Talk.** Just as you came to Reed to get to hear what interesting people have to say, your classmates came here to hear you! So be sure your voice is part of the conversation.

**Challenge yourself.** If you're a person who is very comfortable talking in a group, train yourself to be a better listener. Instead of jumping into the conversation every time you think of something to say, try to make space for other people to participate. (Asking questions and modeling active listening are great ways to do this.) If you are nervous about talking in conference, aim to speak once in each session—the earlier the better. Advance preparation can help here because you don't have to worry so much about coming up with something to say.

**Don't let technology be a distraction.** Find out what each of your professors prefers when it comes to using technology in class. Some faculty members invite you to use your laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices in conference; others discourage or limit the use of these items. All faculty members insist that you pay attention in conference. It is rude to your colleagues and your professor to text your friends, edit your Facebook profile, do homework for another class, or go online shopping for a new costume for your poodle during conference. Even if it is a very cute costume for a very cute poodle.