Checklist of Speaking in Class Experiences

Copyright © 2011, 2015 President and Fellows of Harvard College

Speaking in class is a difficult experience for many students. Below is a check list of typical responses students might have to class participation.

Check all those that apply to you.

I am more likely to speak when

____ I know other students in class.
____ I think the teacher/section leader is encouraging.
____ I think the teacher/section leader expects it.
____ I know something about the subject matter.
____ I like the subject.
____ I can understand and follow the discussion.

I am reluctant to speak when

____ I feel unsure whether what I have to say is right.
____ I’m not sure what the teacher expects.
____ I see other students speak a lot.
____ I don’t feel like I have complete thoughts.

I think when I speak

____ I should have “no holes” in my thinking or should not speak at all.
____ what I say should be new or interesting.
____ what I say should be clear and organized.

My hesitance to speak increases when

____ the class size is large.
____ it’s unclear where the discussion is going.
____ I think I can’t elaborate or formulate my ideas clearly.
____ I think over what I am going to say (rehearse in my head) so many times.
____ I am afraid my comment/question is too obvious.
____ other students sound very confident (others have more to say).

continued ➔➔➔➔➔➔
My comfort/confidence in speaking increases when

___ I have spoken in class.
___ I feel prepared for class.
___ I sit closer to teacher/TF.
___ I have a friend in class.
___ I actively listen and am interested.

My worst fear about speaking in class is that

___ what I said is wrong.
___ I will not explain clearly (no one will understand me).
___ I look stupid (like I don’t know what I’m talking about) when I speak.
___ my heart races, and I feel so nervous, and others will know how nervous I am.
___ I’ll be asked a follow up question and I won’t be able to answer.
___ what I have to say (contribute) is too trivial or obvious.
___ others will think I am stupid.

When I think about raising my hand to speak.

___ my heart begins to race.
___ I feel sweaty.
___ my voice is shaky.
___ my hands are trembling.

It’s not unusual for students to recognize themselves in many (sometimes all) of the above items. There are many strategies that can be helpful to improve your class participation experience. For some suggestions, see the Bureau’s handout: “Ways to Improve Your Class Participation Experience: Suggestions from Students.”

Bureau academic counselors are available to consult with you about this topic or other things that might be on your mind. Call 617-495-2581 or stop by at 5 Linden Street to schedule a time.