

Discussion suggestions

I. Start of session

Say why you picked this paper. Enthusiasm goes a long way towards getting everyone interested.

Explain any definitions or acronyms that are used in the paper that won't be obvious to a non-expert. If there is an essential piece of background that is missing from the intro, explain this as well. However, do NOT start a lecture.

II. Getting going

Start out with questions about the premise and the hypotheses to be tested. Try not to get bogged down in the technical details at this point.

Always wait 20 seconds after you ask a question before you open your mouth again. You need to give people time to think about it and respond (don't answer your own questions!). If you wait long enough, someone will answer.

If you don't get a response that you are looking for, then ask a related question that is easier. Keep on going until you start getting answers. i.e. if no one knows what the hypothesis is (your first question), then ask them what information they had when they started the study, and come around to the hypothesis later.

III. Middle section

Prepare a list of 12-15 questions to ask the class. You probably will not get through them all depending on how much discussion there is.

Try NOT to go through the paper figure by figure. Instead, structure your questions around the major concepts of the paper. e.g. ask a question where the answer is found in Figure 2, rather than asking "what did they do in Figure 2" Also, spend more time on the important figures—if a figure or panel is not really that important for the main points, skip it by all means.

Ask questions in logical sequences.

III. Ending

Be sure that you try to bring out the "big picture" and why this paper is important.

Try to get more discussion by asking questions about whether or not the authors proved their hypothesis (come back to your starting questions).

IV. General

Always look at people in the eye when you are asking questions (i.e. never look down or away after you have asked a question). The best way to get someone to talk is to catch their eye. Stare at them if you have to. Call on people if you want.

When someone in the class asks a question, be sure to repeat it back to the entire class. Try to involve everyone.

Use the expertise in the class. If you get the impression that someone really knows about the subject of the paper, ask them to expand on answers given by others.

Before you answer any questions yourself, make sure that you have given the class a chance to try to answer it.