Tips for Effective Online Shared Inquiry Discussions

Setting Up

- Use a video conferencing tool that allows students to see each other (e.g., the default view in Zoom or Google Hangouts with the Grid View extension).
- Have students practice muting and unmuting their audio, and remind them to mute themselves when they're not speaking in order to prevent feedback and limit noise.
- Reserve the chat function of your platform for technical questions so that students do not have side conversations with each other and create a split focus.
- Have students make name tents if the display names assigned by the conferencing platform are not theirs.

Clarifying Expectations

- Before discussion, explain that you will be focusing on asking questions.
- Emphasize listening to others and responding to them directly.
- Establish guidelines for etiquette during discussion. Examples might include:
  » Turn on your camera and speak up so that everyone can hear your ideas.
  » Be mindful of how often you speak, and give others a chance to contribute.
  » Feel free to ask other students questions and to agree or disagree respectfully.
  » Remember to use the chat box only for technical questions and issues.

Conducting Discussion

- Start with open-ended questions you are genuinely interested in discussing.
- Track participation by creating a list of participants and making a check mark next to a student's name when he or she speaks. This will help you quickly see who may need to be encouraged to contribute.
- Focus on listening. Don't hesitate to ask a student to repeat or rephrase an answer.
- Close discussion by asking students to write a brief response that explains how they have added to or changed their initial answer, or that describes a new idea they heard.
- After discussion, ask students to share what they think worked well and what they think the group should set as goals for next time.