Leading an effective discussion is more difficult than it might seem. Your challenge is to create an environment in which everyone understands the material, remains attentive and interested, and participates equally in a lively, productive interaction. Here are some strategies to cultivate:

**Frame.** At the beginning of the session, remind your classmates of any previous discussions that relate to this one and explain what you hope to achieve.

“Last week we talked about…”
“Our goal today is to…”

**Questions.** Keep your questions short, clear, and focused. If possible (discuss with your instructor), circulate them by email in advance; if not, you might wish to write them on the board or project them one by one on the screen. Launch the discussion by asking one specific question and explaining why it’s a good place to start.

Silence. Don’t be afraid of silence! Give your classmates a chance to think about your question and, most importantly, *don’t answer it yourself.* If absolutely no one responds, it might help to reword your question slightly for greater clarity, or you might call on a student who you think could offer some sort of reply:

“What do you think, X?”

**Patience.** Many questions can be answered by more than one person, even if the first person offers a reasonably good overview. So wait to see what other perspectives may come out; encourage others to elaborate further or think differently about an answer.

“How about some other thoughts on this?”

**Connect.** Help your classmates link ideas, both within the discussion and with previous class sessions. Ask for comments on the specific issue at hand. If someone offers a comment that seems unrelated, ask them to either explain its relevance or bring it up later.

“This relates to last week’s discussion of…”
“How does that relate to…?”
“Can you hold that thought? I want to stick with…”
“This relates to X’s point about…”

**Clarify.** If a comment is not clear, ask the speaker to say more or attempt to restate it yourself. If a comment is incorrect or misleading, correct the misunderstanding or ask the class for clarification. Pause periodically and ask if anyone has a question about what has been covered so far.
"Could you say that again another way?"
"Are you saying that...?"
"Let me jump in and clarify something. The meaning of that term is..."
"Can someone clarify the meaning of the term...?"

**Summarize & emphasize.** Help your classmates stay focused and cue note-taking by restating and highlighting important points. Use the blackboard to record key terms or ideas. Pause periodically during discussion, and again at the end of class, to sum up major points.

"This is a critical point."
"So far we’ve explored..."
"The key issues today have been..."

**Full participation.** It’s important to involve the entire class, so don't always call on the first person who raises her/his hand. In order to make sure that everyone contributes at least one comment, feel free to call on people. Encourage students to talk to one another, not just to you.

"Let’s bring some other voices into this conversation...X: what were you thinking?"
"Can someone respond to Y?"

**Enjoy!** Help your classmates feel comfortable and engaged by expressing enthusiasm for the material. Be friendly and energetic, use "I" and "we," and show that you really care about your project and want the class to learn from it.