THE COLOR CARD SYSTEM

Today we are going to try something you have probably never done before. Instead of calling on you based on the raising of hands, I will be calling on you based on a color-coded system, in which you indicate whether you want to be called on by turning your namecard to the appropriate color. The basic principle is simple. The colors are interpreted as follows:

CERISE – I do not wish to be called upon at the present time.
YELLOW – I am willing to be called upon at the present time.
GREEN – I wish to be called upon at the present time.

The reasoning behind the color card system is as follows: in an ordinary seminar discussion, students are called upon when they volunteer by raising their hands. Unfortunately, this leads to several problems. First, many students will not raise their hands even when they have something to say. That's because we are all insecure about our knowledge; we worry that what we have to say may be foolish, ill-considered, or flat wrong. So even when we all have thoughts in our heads, many of us will not volunteer. Second, and relatedly, when a discussion depends on volunteers, the people who are most comfortable volunteering may come to dominate the discussion. As a result, people who are reluctant to speak will rarely speak, even though everyone in the room is equally smart and insightful.

Nobody should have to speak if they do not want to speak. Calling on someone when they do not wish to be called on can be an intimidating experience. Yet an instructor needs to be able to call on people without them explicitly volunteering, so that everyone can be incorporated into the discussion.
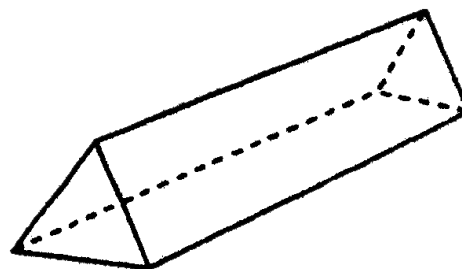
The color card system allows the instructor to call on people without them volunteering. But it also allows students to "opt out" of being called on at random. When someone's card is turned to yellow, they can be called on at any time. When their card is green, it is as if they are raising their hand. When their card is cerise, they will not be called on. Students can change the color of their card in accordance with their mood.

Ideally, most students will remain on "yellow" as much of the time as possible. The entire point of the card system is to allow the instructor the ability to call on people at random. But a person can also choose to stay "cerise" if they so choose, and will not be called on. A student could also stay "green" forever, as if they constantly have their hand waving in the air.

Using the card system, we will be able to mix (1) the excitement and egalitarianism of a calling-on-at-random system with (2) the comfort that comes with knowing you won't be expected to speak if you don't feel like it.

FOLDING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Write your name three times in permanent marker, once on each color.
2. Fold the card into a prism. Using double-sided tape, affix the white strip behind the green portion of the card. Your prism should look roughly like this:

3. Place your name-card in front of you. Decorate it with stickers as desired.