Frequently Asked Questions

**What is Reacting to the Past?**

*Reacting to the Past* is a series of historical role-playing games that explore important ideas by recreating the contexts that shaped them. Students are assigned roles, informed by classic texts, set in particular moments of intellectual and social ferment.

An award-winning active-learning pedagogy, *Reacting to the Past* improves speaking, writing, and leadership skills, promotes engagement with classic texts and history, and builds learning communities.

**What kinds of courses are appropriate for Reacting?**

Reacting can be used across the curriculum, from the first-year general education class to “capstone” experiences. A Reacting game can also function as the discussion component of lecture classes, or it can be enlisted for intersession courses, honors programs, and other specialized curricular purposes.

**So how do I play the game?**

Instructors can find a detailed schedule of game sessions in the Instructor’s Manual: a typical game begins with a few lectures to set the context, and then a series of events that may include speeches, faction meetings, and ultimately, a vote.

But Reacting to the Past games do not have a fixed script and outcome. While students must adhere to the beliefs and worldview of the historical figures they have been assigned to play, they must devise their own means of expressing those ideas persuasively in speeches or other public presentations. For these assignments they draw on the rich selection of primary sources in the student game manual.

There are several important tools to playing the game:

Each student is assigned a character from the bank of *Role Sheets* found in the Instructor’s Manual. Each student’s role sheet features a set of top-secret *Victory Objectives*. For example, a student playing a woman in the American Revolution game might win the game if she secures the vote in the new republic, whereas a rich landowner would win if they can preclude the vote from women and slaves. An anarchist may win if they can avoid a vote altogether.

A student may be part of a *Faction*, such as the Patriots and Loyalists in the American Revolution. But a set of indeterminate characters, or moderates, can swing the outcome either way. Students must balance their personal Victory Objectives with those of their faction.

In addition to their role sheet, students use the *Game Book* to learn more about the historical context that shapes their characters’ worldviews. They can also find
the rules of game play and a schedule of sessions. Finally, a bank of Primary Source documents grounds students’ arguments and written assignments.

For the instructor, the Instructor's Manual is an essential resource, containing everything you need to teach a Reacting to the Past game, including the role sheets for each student, a detailed outline of class sessions, and tips for teaching in a student-led classroom.

**Where can I learn more?**

Reacting to the Past was developed under the auspices of Barnard College, which hosts an annual institute where interested faculty can learn more about the series by playing condensed versions of the games. To learn more about the annual faculty institute and other events near you, go to the Conferences and Events page at [http://reacting.barnard.edu/](http://reacting.barnard.edu/)