0.1 Staging

Your expectations of the nature of a class discussion are conveyed nonverbally as much or more than verbally. Most instructors ask the students to rearrange their desks into a large U shape for any but the briefest class discussions. A subtler but important technique is to put as much of the class as possible between you and the respondent. If you call on a student on the left side of the room, walk over to the right side as you're doing so. As the words flow between you and the respondent, the almost physical presence of a stream flowing between the two of you will wash over the students in between. You and the respondent also keep eye contact with the rest of the class this way.

It is often a good idea to get students to come up to the blackboard. Students will give longer monologues at the blackboard, so be prepared to be a more active moderator if the student is losing the rest of the class. Be careful not to make having the right solution a pre-requisite for coming to the board, lest the students stop thinking critically and accept any blackboard demonstration as a surrogate for your telling them something. When a student is at the board, I try to take up a position in the back or on the perimeter of the room. Sometimes I sit in the student's seat. This has the effect of including the rest of the class, as above, and also gives me a new vantage - you'd be surprised at what you see this way.

Other body language to be aware of is whether you are passing judgment on what you hear. Do your eyes flit impatiently with wrong answers? Do you gesture in agreement with right answers? Do you angle your body to the board as if to write down something correct, then pause if it's not what you wanted? If you've chosen to teach SC style classes, it's because you want the students to develop their own judgment, so avoid this kind of tip-off.

A related topic is the use of intentional errors. These are a hit with kids, in a slapstick sort of way, but adult students tend to feel patronized. Instead, I substitute the mischeivous lie. If a student tells me the found all five regular polyhedra I may say, "Ah, so you haven't found the other two then?" They can often sense that I'm putting them on, but will still take the bait and try to prove that there aren't any more. On a problem best solved by assigning a variable to a certain quantity, I once told a group of frustrated students that I'd tell them the value of one quantity for free if they could decide which quantity they wanted to know. I planned to lie and tell them it was 10 when it was really 6. In fact I had tried this previously with success: the students figured out that the assumption of 10 led to a contradiction and were able to figure out the unique value that didn't lead to a contradition. This time it was even more successful. By the time I came back to give them their free question, they had figured out what quantity they wanted to be told, had put in x for this, and had gotten the solution (well ahead of the rest of the class).