

Guidelines for Facilitating Discussion Forums

Discussion Forums are one of the critical parts of learning in the online classroom as they serve to encourage student learning and help create a sense of community. Establishing effective discussion forums creates an environment where interaction can occur between the following: ***Student-Student, Student-Instructor, as well as Student-Content***. The ways in which instructors can effectively facilitate a discussion forum depends partly on the dynamics of the students in the group. These guidelines help to establish clear expectations to encourage our instructors to be more engaged in the discussion forums.

Want to have an interactive, engaging community in your online class? Try the following:

Create thought provoking Discussion board topics:

- Ask thought-provoking questions formulated from the required reading material.
- Pose open-ended questions
- Require (occasionally) students to add additional resources/research
- Phrase your questions in a way that requires the student to address the content in a workplace setting.
- Playing devil's advocate can challenge the student to approach his/her viewpoint from a different perspective.
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- Create a separate "Water Cooler Db for "off topic " discussions.
- Summarize weekly topics for students (especially during the first half of the semester)
- Keep consistent dates for initial post and replies (Initial post by Thursday, replies by Sunday night?)
- Try starting your DB questions with the following:

Convergent thinking questions often begin with:

- *Why,*
- *How and*
- *In what Ways*

Divergent thinking usually begins with:

- *Imagine*
- *Suppose*
- *Predict*
- *If..then...*
- *How might*
- *Can you create...*
- *What are some possible consequences of:....*

Evaluative thinking usually begins with:

- *Defend*
- *Judge*
- *Justify*
- *What do you think about?*
- *What is your opinion about?*

Responding/Redirecting:

- Monitor discussion boards regularly (Weekdays-at least every 24 hours). It is easier to redirect or clarify an issue before many students read and post.
- Elaborate with additional relevant research or resources to student responses.
- Respond to inquiries posted within 24 hours of the due date (48 hours on weekends).
- Respond to discussion posts in the discussion forum, not email.
- Affirm students who participate in the discussion to let them know that they are on the right track with their responses.
- Add feedback that encourages dialogue between students and instructors

Examples of Instructor Feedback:

- *“Can you tell me why it is wrong? What would happen if she...?” (encouraging elaboration)*
- *“Yes ...but the flip side of this is that... “ (providing alternative views)*
- *“Mary, You bring up a good point here... Now remember...” (reinforcing the material/elaborating on students response)*
- *“Lisa, I know what you mean when you say..... However...” (relating to students)*
- *“Thank you for this very thought provoking post. You make so many excellent points. I love the story of global awareness; it’s awesome!... The last sentence of your post is seemingly correct, but...” (displaying enthusiasm over the subject matter)*

Grading: Consider providing:

- A consistent rubric for each Discussion Board
- A FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) reference list.
- Examples of acceptable responses.
- Opportunities for students to earn extra points by acting as a monitor for the week’s topic.

Additional Resources:

[Edutopia’s Mastering Online Discussion Board Facilitation:](#)

[Best Practices in Online Discussion Boards:](#)

[8 lessons Learned from Teaching Online \(video\)](#)

Links updated SU24