

ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARDS

Planning, Managing & Assessing

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INTRODUCTION

Discussion boards are a staple in online education. Yet, when discussion boards fall short of enriching class content and providing opportunities for deepening the learning experience for students, their pedagogical value tends to decrease. Discussion boards may be a blank slate with endless possibilities to create an interactive and engaging learning environment for students. When used well, faculty can engage their students in a wide range of activities that can contribute to critical thinking and intellectual growth.

Establish your discussion board culture by shaping discussions to support the Academic Affairs 2013 Statement of Expected Pedagogy. It is unlikely that students will succeed in substantive, reflective exchanges if they have not learned to carry on similar conversations elsewhere. Remember that students need coaching and practice in how to carry on online discussions. Facilitate this experience by thinking about students and thinking about the discussion content.

PLANNING, MANAGING, and **ASSESSING** discussion boards should not be an afterthought, but a process that is designed carefully and thoroughly. The following sections will cover these three elements in detail.

THINK ABOUT CONTENT

- ▶ There is better participation in the discussion board when the discussion topic for the module is strongly supported by the content found in the course.
- ▶ Discussion questions should reinforce course purpose and link to specific learning objectives.

In accordance with the office of **Academic Affairs 2013 Statement of Expected Pedagogy**, consider the following checklist to ensure consistent teaching excellence when using discussion boards in online courses.



- ▶ Ensure that discussions and assignments require critical thinking, core values, and decision making on the part of your students.
- ▶ Post a minimum of five times per week including an introduction for each discussion session, midweek comments, and an end-of-week summary following its conclusion.
- ▶ Use open-ended discussion questions to provide opportunities for students to discuss course content in relation to their work and personal experiences.
- ▶ Be an active participant in discussions. Consider using Socratic Questioning when responding to student posts. Encourage your students to provide additional information by challenging them to expand their posts. Direct them to their classmates' posts to encourage further discussion.
- ▶ Prompt students who are not participating in discussions to do so. This is best done by email.
- ▶ When providing feedback for assignments, exams, and discussion board postings, comment on incorrect and correct answers or statements. Your feedback will help students learn not just from their mistakes, but also from your positive reinforcement. Be sure to post discussion responses, including those to clarify misunderstandings, on the discussion board so all students benefit from your feedback.
- ▶ Provide written substantive feedback, which includes comments on what was correct and what was incorrect, to every student on all written assignments (including exams), normally within three days but no later than five days after submission deadline.

THINK ABOUT STUDENTS

- ▶ Students tend to participate more often when they are familiar with the discussion topics, either personally or professionally.
- ▶ Discussion questions should demonstrate sensitivity and an inclusive orientation to the differing backgrounds of participants.
- ▶ Discussion questions should be open-ended and constructed to reveal comprehension while inducing critical thinking.

PLANNING: CREATING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

► When writing discussion questions, follow this four-step plan to ensure discussion effectiveness.



1. DETERMINING COGNITIVE NATURE OF QUESTION

- Rely on higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy: Evaluation, Synthesis, Analysis, and Application.
- Consider andragogy or how adults learn: Adult students want to know why they are learning something, they have something to bring to the course content, and they are motivated to learn what will help them in their lives.
- Consider learning styles: vary the types of questions to support a diverse class.
- Consider developing a discussion board that promotes a sense of community based on respect and engagement. For example, ask students to share something they already know about the concept or topic.
- Consider constructivism: design questions that facilitate different types of interactions.

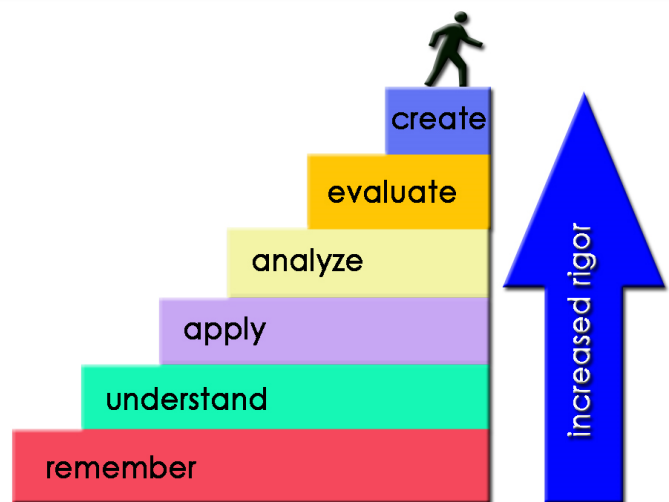


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INTERACTIONS

Student ↔ Instructor

Student ↔ Student

Student ↔ Content

Student ↔ Self

2. ESTABLISHING READING BASIS

LITERATURE BASED

TEXTBOOK READING

- ▶ Textbook-based discussions share a common vocabulary and experience.
- ▶ Sometimes, however, little is added to the discussion since content has already been covered.

LITERATURE READING

- ▶ Debate is enriched because content comes from different sources and perspectives.
- ▶ Strengthen information literacy when students share how they conducted their lit search.
- ▶ Serve as filter to highlight what a particular field is engaged in researching.

NON-LITERATURE BASED

- ▶ Questions are designed without relying on texts or readings.
- ▶ Examples:
 - Use of surveys.
 - Use of multimedia (podcasts, audio files, streaming video, simulations, or graphics).
 - Use of stories or anecdotes.

3. PROMOTING EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENTS

- ▶ Create authentic activities that are incorporated in the discussion board.

ADDING AUTHENTICITY

1. Create controversy.
2. Use small group collaboration.
3. Pose questions or problems that do not have easy answers or solutions.
4. Connect the question to students' lives.
5. Connect students' knowledge to the literature they study.
6. Strive to make sure that the questions asked or problems posed require critical thinking.

EXAMPLES

Business: Translating a good idea into a company. What are the different ways of doing this?

Biology: What if your doctor could choose medical treatments, guaranteed effective, based on your genetic makeup?

History: Students assume the role of an osteologist and are tasked with identifying the bones found by a farmer.

4. CHOOSING STYLE & TYPE OF QUESTION

STYLE

- ▶ Varying the style of the question benefits students by allowing them to experience different roles and strategies for working with their peers.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING QUESTIONS

PAIRING

- ▶ Initial discussion takes place in pairs, then each pair posts to the main discussion board.
 - **PRO TIP:** Pairing students for smaller discussions reduces the number of posts and cultivates community. It also reduces “social loafing.”

GROUPING

- ▶ Pairs are grouped into opposite sides of a debate, with assigned roles.

POST-BUILDING

- ▶ Discussion takes place, building on previous discussion posts or questions.

TYPE

- ▶ **Varying the type of question allows students to practice using different problem-solving methods.**
- ▶ **Consider varying questions that**
 - focus on a central topic.
 - evaluate ideas.
 - quote contrasting views.
 - relate to current events.
 - present real or hypothetical scenarios.
 - involve case studies.
 - address controversial issues.
 - require students to complete online activities and summarize their experience.
 - ask for more evidence.
 - ask for clarification.

MANAGING: BEFORE DISCUSSION

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS PRIOR TO DISCUSSION

- ▶ Timely postings should be the expectation and the operational norm. **Enforce the discussion windows rigorously.**
- ▶ Inform students whether you value examples, metaphors, stories, or humor in commentary. Call attention to the **Discussion Post Requirements for Students.**
- ▶ Clarify whether or not students are expected to elaborate on why they do or do not agree with another participant's perspective.
- ▶ Advise students that, depending on the nature of the questions, higher quality comments will have references (to the text, electronic lectures, guest speakers, or other sources).

SUGGESTED ICE-BREAKER TIMELINE

- ▶ Since nobody wants to be the first to post, consider designating students with a rotating icebreaker role so that discussions start on time. Icebreakers may reduce discussion reticence.

Initiator	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Icebreakers			Initial Post		1 st Response Post		Remaining Response Post
Participants				Initial Post		1 st Response Post	Remaining Response Post

MANAGING: DURING DISCUSSION

- ▶ Monitor and quickly reply to student e-mails concerning online discussions to maintain a resilient relationship with students. Create an **Online Discussion Log** to keep track of posts, using the example on page 7.
- ▶ Diagnose misconceptions early to prevent confusion.
- ▶ Identify areas of agreement/disagreement.
- ▶ Support comments of students by acknowledging and encouraging their thinking.
- ▶ Persuade the more reserved discussants to weigh in on an issue early.

QUESTION MODELING

- ▶ Model good Socratic-type probing and follow-up questions. Ask clarifying questions that encourage students to think about what they know and don't know.

Why do you think that?

What is your reasoning?

Is there an alternative strategy?

ASSESSING: DOCUMENTING & PROVIDING FEEDBACK

- ▶ Instructor should document online discussion assessments promptly to minimize effort later. See **Sample Online Discussion Log** below & **Discussion Post Scoring Rubric for Instructors** on page 8. Create your log using a table or spreadsheet.

SAMPLE ONLINE DISCUSSION LOG

Student _____ Group No. _____ Date _____

REFERENCE	COMMENT	ASSESSMENT NOTES	SCORE
Provide exact location of the post (see examples below).	Note cognitive level using the iDiscussion Post Scoring Rubric for Instructors .	Notes regarding timeliness, length, tone, critical thinking demonstrated, relevance, and interactive dimension.	Points awarded based on grading rubric, used to determine overall score later.

EXAMPLE


Student Jeremy Finch Group No. 3 Date 3/12/2014

Mod 1, Ques 1	MI	Initial Post; posted early; respectful tone; demonstrates critical thinking; only somewhat related to module topics	8
Mod 1, Ques 1	PK	Response Post; posted near deadline; includes references, but only textbook; includes personal example	2
Mod 2, Ques 1	RW	Initial Response; posted near deadline; includes application of concept to real world scenario; doesn't draw new conclusions	8

FEEDBACK TIPS



- ▶ Assessment feedback should be timely, clear, thorough, consistent, equitable, and professional, using several communication routes.
- ▶ Instructors can report how well the discussion went, emphasizing positive points and identifying where improvement is needed. They can draw upon their assessment log and refer to their grading rubric to ensure comprehensiveness.
- ▶ Instructors should consider a cut-off point for explanations. For instance, an instructor might entertain assessment explanations up to five calendar days after the discussion grade is posted.

ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARDS

	BLOOM	CODE	DEFINITION	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	SCORE
 HIGHER ORDER THINKING	Analysis – Synthesis – Evaluation	MI Making Inferences	Going beyond information given. Beyond comprehension, application. Constructing new knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participant timely contributes to the discussion without trying to dominate it. ▶ Integrates personal observations and knowledge in an accurate and highly insightful way. ▶ Links to other concepts and actively demonstrates conventional netiquette. ▶ Provides concrete examples from the content and other sources to support postings. ▶ Integrates prior content in postings. ▶ Presents new observations. ▶ Constructively responds to classmates’ postings and shows interest in and respects the views of others. ▶ Posts are organized and information is presented in a logical sequence. ▶ Word choice and sentence structure are suitable for doctorate-level work. ▶ INITIAL POSTS reflect exceptionally written, exceptionally thoughtful, independent commentary with research or relevant references, cited in APA style. ▶ RESPONSE POSTS reflect exceptionally written, exceptionally thoughtful, independent, commentary with research or germane references. 	A
	Application	AE Abstract Example	Use of analogies, metaphors or philosophical interpretations to support one’s understanding of a concept or principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Constructively responds to classmates’ postings and usually shows interest in and respect for the views of others. ▶ Participates relatively actively while usually demonstrating conventional netiquette. ▶ Refers to examples from the content to support postings. ▶ Integrates personal observations and knowledge in an accurate way. ▶ Presents new observations. ▶ Posts are organized, and information is presented in a logical sequence. ▶ Word choice and sentence structure are suitable for doctorate-level work. 	B
RW Real World Example	Personal experience, professional/academic experiences. Providing examples that demonstrate the application of knowledge to a real world context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ INITIAL POSTS reflect well-written, thoughtful, independent commentary usually supported with research or germane references. ▶ RESPONSE POSTS reflect well written, thoughtful, independent commentary usually supported with research or germane references. 			



BLOOM	CODE	DEFINITION	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	SCORE
Comprehension	PK Prior Knowledge	Prior knowledge and outside resources, e.g. learner uses prior knowledge or outside resources to support a statement or an understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participant timely contributes to discussion, but in a limited way. Constructively responds to classmates' postings and sometimes shows interest in and respect for the views of others. ▶ Sometimes contributes actively while demonstrating conventional netiquette. ▶ Makes rambling or off-topic statements, which do not link to the ideas of others. ▶ Alludes to the content to support postings. ▶ Integrates personal observations and knowledge in a cursory manner. ▶ Does not present new observations. ▶ Posts are somewhat disorganized; information not presented in logical sequence. ▶ Word choice and sentence structure are not suitable for doctorate-level work. ▶ INITIAL POSTS reflect satisfactorily written, only occasionally thoughtful, somewhat independent commentary only occasionally supported with research or germane references. ▶ RESPONSE POSTS reflect satisfactorily written, only occasionally thoughtful, somewhat independent commentary only occasionally supported with research or germane references. 	C
	CC Content Clarification	Personal interpretation of content or content knowledge comprehension, e.g. paraphrasing concept or principles in one's own words.		
Knowledge	RC Reading Citation	Citation of weekly readings, e.g. learner specifically cites article or chapter when making a point; post does not relate to learning objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participant timely contributes in discussion but usually gives only minimal replies. ▶ Responds in a cursory manner to classmates' postings and demonstrates insufficient regard for the contributions and views of others. ▶ Seldom makes satisfactory concept linkage or seldom demonstrates conventional netiquette. ▶ Does not refer to the content to support postings. ▶ Does not integrate personal observations or knowledge. ▶ Does not present new observations. ▶ Posts are disorganized and information is not presented in a logical sequence. ▶ Word choice and sentence structure are not suitable for doctorate-level work. ▶ INITIAL POSTS reflect inadequately written, shallow, unoriginal commentary seldom supported by research or germane references. ▶ RESPONSE POSTS reflect inadequately written, shallow, unoriginal commentary seldom supported with research or germane references. 	F

BLOOM	CODE	DEFINITION	STUDENT DISCUSSION POST EXAMPLE	SCORE
HIGHER ORDER THINKING 	MI Making Inferences	Going beyond information given. Beyond comprehension, application. Constructing new knowledge.	If I understand the text so far, price elasticity and inflation are two different subjects. Price elasticity is the measure of change in quantity demanded for/supplied of a product. There is Price Elasticity of Demand and Price Elasticity of Supply. Inflation on the other hand is merely a rise (across the board) of most prices in the economy - which will affect demand and supply of products and resources. Inflation and taxes are changes in prices, price elasticity measures how the market will now respond to those changes in prices.	A
	Application	AE Abstract Example	Use of analogies, metaphors or philosophical interpretations to support one's understanding of a concept or principles.	B
RW Real World Example	Personal experience, professional/academic experiences. Providing examples that demonstrate the application of knowledge to a real world context.	There are many stores that have very little marketing strategy outside of discounting the price of their products. Grocery stores do this all the time. I have seen people with a shopping cart full of Gatorade because it was 10 for \$10. The mobs of people shopping the day after Thanksgiving and Christmas are excellent examples of that.		
LOWER ORDER THINKING 	PK Prior Knowledge	Prior knowledge and outside resources, e.g. learner uses prior knowledge or outside resources to support a statement or an understanding.	Two ways to decrease gasoline price are to decrease demand and increase off-shore drilling. I am for reducing the demand for gasoline. I am not for offshore drilling because the concerns for wild life are just too large a trade- off (recent major Gulf spill)... Not to mention the cost of potential spills would end up causing billions in cleanup cost that would generate back to increase in production and there goes the cycle again...	C
	CC Content Clarification	Personal interpretation of content or content knowledge comprehension, e.g. paraphrasing concept or principles in one's own words.	A store that increases the price of its shoes from \$50 to \$68 is expected to see a change in quantity demanded not a change in demand because it is only a change in price that has occurred. This is essentially what the Law of Demand states. Some of the determinants that can cause a change in demand are determinants such as; consumer taste, income, price of related goods, consumer expectations, and number of buyer.	
Knowledge	RC Reading Citation	Citation of weekly readings, e.g. learner specifically cites article or chapter when making a point; post does not relate to learning objectives.	Great job. You gave a lot of information. I enjoyed reading your post. The law of demand states that when price drops, demand will rise or when price rises, demand falls. Yesterday while at the grocery store the price dropped to \$6.50 per bag. I bought 2 bags even though I am spending .50 cents more, I am receiving more of the product. I figured this was a pretty good deal considering the price difference over the course of 3 years. 3 years ago I would only purchase 1 bag of whole bean coffee because 2 bags were \$25.00. The law of demand without even knowing it was a major factor when I decided to purchase the item.	F

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The following is a list of criteria for you to use to assess your doctorate-level participation. Please take the time throughout the course to check and see where your participation level falls. Review this early in the course to see what is expected of you, and then again near Module 4 so that you can judge for yourself how well you have been doing. Please feel free to use it as often as you feel necessary. This document is for your use, so you know what is expected of you and how your instructor will be assessing you.

INITIAL POST is a well-constructed, thoughtful, independent comment of one full paragraph or more.

RESPONSE POST is a well-constructed, thoughtful, independent but shorter comment to the Initial Post of another discussant.

<p>Netiquette:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Avoid dominating discussions, offensive words, and criticism of others. ▸ Use plain English and flawless spelling and writing mechanics. ▸ Consider alternative perspectives while expressing your own opinion. ▸ Share insights while seeking the views of others. ▸ Clarify important points with instructor and carefully review any communications before sending.

BLOOM	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	GRADE
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">HIGHER ORDER THINKING</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">↑</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Analysis – Synthesis – Evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participant timely contributes to the discussion without trying to dominate it. ▶ Integrates personal observations and knowledge in an accurate and highly insightful way. ▶ Links to other concepts and actively demonstrates conventional netiquette. ▶ Provides concrete examples from the content and other sources to support postings. ▶ Integrates prior content in postings. ▶ Presents new observations. ▶ Constructively responds to classmates’ postings and shows interest in and respects the views of others. ▶ Posts are organized and information is presented in a logical sequence. ▶ Word choice and sentence structure are suitable for doctorate-level work. <p>▶ INITIAL POSTS reflect exceptionally written, exceptionally thoughtful, independent commentary with research or relevant references, cited in APA style.</p> <p>▶ RESPONSE POSTS reflect exceptionally written, exceptionally thoughtful, independent, commentary with research or germane references.</p>	A
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">HIGHER ORDER THINKING</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Application</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Constructively responds to classmates’ postings and usually shows interest in and respect for the views of others. ▶ Participates relatively actively while usually demonstrating conventional netiquette. ▶ Refers to examples from the content to support postings. ▶ Integrates personal observations and knowledge in an accurate way. ▶ Presents new observations. ▶ Posts are organized, and information is presented in a logical sequence. ▶ Word choice and sentence structure are suitable for doctorate-level work. <p>▶ INITIAL POSTS reflect well-written, thoughtful, independent commentary usually supported with research or germane references.</p> <p>▶ RESPONSE POSTS reflect well written, thoughtful, independent commentary usually supported with research or germane references.</p>	B



BLOOM	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	GRADE
Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participant timely contributes to discussion, but in a limited way. Constructively responds to classmates' postings and sometimes shows interest in and respect for the views of others. ▶ Sometimes contributes actively while demonstrating conventional netiquette. ▶ Makes rambling or off-topic statements, which do not link to the ideas of others. ▶ Alludes to the content to support postings. ▶ Integrates personal observations and knowledge in a cursory manner. ▶ Does not present new observations. ▶ Posts are somewhat disorganized; information not presented in logical sequence. ▶ Word choice and sentence structure are not suitable for doctorate-level work. ▶ INITIAL POSTS reflect satisfactorily written, only occasionally thoughtful, somewhat independent commentary only occasionally supported with research or germane references. ▶ RESPONSE POSTS reflect satisfactorily written, only occasionally thoughtful, somewhat independent commentary only occasionally supported with research or germane references. 	<p>C</p>
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