

# Discussion Board Tips and Pedagogy

## Tips for Planning Discussion Board Activities, Evaluating Postings, and Managing Discussion Boards

Students need to feel that the time invested in preparing responses is not wasted.

Posting deadlines need to be provided. Posting to the forum must feel like a worthwhile activity to the student. Students should be encouraged to build relationships and continue common interests outside of the class.

- Provide criteria for discussion postings in the discussion board grading rubric
  - Create discussion board activities that require students to reflect
  - Create discussion board activities that require students to list the pros and cons of a topic.
  - Provide examples of quality postings.
  - Ask students to post “My muddiest moments” or “Aha moments” in the course.
  - Tell students that if they can answer another student they should do so.
- Netiquette
  - Students need to know what proper etiquette is for using the discussion board. The etiquette must be enforced so that students feel free to express their ideas.
  - Layout ground rules during the first class meeting.
- Instructor Presence
  - All students need to receive some feedback on postings either from peers, or the instructor.
  - Answer questions within 24 hours.
  - Make your presence known on the board but don't be overwhelming.
  - Wait for students to answer first
  - Always be there – even if you are not responding.
  - Send private email thanks for profound postings.
  - Let students know if you are going to be away from the computer for longer than 24 hours.

## Topic (Board) Ideas

- Just for fun topic
- Topic for technical questions or Basic Course questions
- Journaling (Private topic for student and instructor)
- Set up boards (topics) for class groups.
- Change the main topic (board) name to General Course Questions
- Change the Notes topic name if you want.
- Topics: Instructions (Break the Ice)
- Add topics for Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, or Topic 1, Topic 2, Topic 3, etc.

## Track Students

- Search capabilities and collect tool – great for grading discussion boards.
- Go to individual student to see original and follow-up postings.

## ***Discussion Boards - Advantages, Disadvantages, and Tips***

### **Advantages of Discussion Boards:**

- Build a sense of community.  
*This is very important to do in an online course. Many times students get to know each other better in an online or web enhanced course that uses the discussion board than they do in course that does not use the discussion board.*
- Allow for the integration of real-world experience with course materials.  
*The real-world experience can come from students, the instructor, or guest discussion board lecturers.*

**Tip:** When planning student Interaction with subject matter experts line up guest lecturers and request guest account username and passwords so that when they participate in the discussion area their names will display.

- Provide students with increased access to the instructor.
- Allows further exploration of topics of interest.  
*"The Teachable Moment" Allows instructors to provide additional instruction or encourage additional discussion and research*
- Provide a forum for inclusion of reference materials.
- May provide an atmosphere in which quiet students may feel more comfortable responding than they do in a face-to-face class.
- Have the potential to allow networking between students with similar interests.
- If conducted properly, allow students to seek answers from their peers.
- Allows students to be thoughtful and reflective in their responses
  - Students have more time to reflect and summarize before posting a discussion posting.
  - Requires all students to respond instead of just the student who is called on in class.
  - Allow students to answer questions from peers, who can serve to solidify the conception in their own memories.

Allows more students to participate in course discussions than would be possible in a traditional classroom setting.

### **Disadvantages of Discussion Boards (that can be avoided with careful planning):**

- May be intimidating for some students who are not comfortable writing for public scrutiny among peers.
- May not spark the same level of interest in all students and postings; consequently, may lack required substance.
- May produce a certain level of stress in the students if responses to original posts are required from the instructor with a set minimum amount of words. Especially if the original posts for which they are to respond lack substance.
- May contain many posts that lack substance if the grading rubrics require a certain number of words rather than quality responses.
- May feel like a burden to students when there are lots of other assignments, or assignments that require a hefty investment of time.
- Can be viewed as a waste of time by students if students do not receive any feedback from their peers or the instructor on the postings
- May not be relevant to students working ahead of schedule, discussions may not be relevant to current work.

## Sample Discussion Board Rubrics

Develop a grading rubric that encourages class discussion, one that makes the composition of postings pleasant and informative, but also a rubric that is not overwhelming for the instructor to use when it becomes time to grade.

Course Structure and Grading Criteria for effective discussion board utilization:

- a. **Instructors need to develop grading rubrics that indicate that the length of the posting needs to be adequate (rather than specifying a specific number of words) but of high quality. Posting quality needs to be weighed heavier than posting quantity.**
- b. **The class must be structured in a way to encourage and reward discussion.** If a course is structured to be no more than a series of assignments for students to turn in each week, there will be little interactivity.
- c. **Make class participation part of the course grade.** Base a percentage (maybe 20%) of the course grade on class participation. Make clear that this grade will be assigned not only based on the number of times a student speaks, but also upon the quality of what is being said. This discourages students from posting comments that do not contribute to the discussion. Make your expectations clear. Students will hesitate to contribute to the discussion if they're unsure of how to do so.
- d. Develop a rubric to evaluate student use of the discussion board.
- e. Instructors need to plan effective topics and questions for discussion.

## Sample #1 Grading Discussion Boards

### Discussion Board Assignment

Class participation is an important expectation of this course. Students are expected to offer comments, questions, and replies to the discussion question that has been posed for each module as well as to classmate postings. Students are expected to actively participate in EACH module's discussion **EACH week** throughout the semester. The faculty role is as an observer and facilitator. I will be reading all messages and I will participate in the discussion as appropriate. Students may work ahead on the discussion boards but posting on past week's boards will not allow for stimulating discussions with your classmates.

### Evaluation of Assignment:

Postings will be evaluated on the quality of the postings and the degree that the postings promote discussion with classmates. Participation on 15 forums is required (13 modules, Breaking the Ice and Web Sites) and postings will be evaluated per forum on the below scale. Students can earn the 5 additional points by showing good effort to engage classmates in discussion comparing activities done on other graded assignments. The discussion assignment will be worth a total of 50 points.

1 Point	2 points	3 points
Minimal response to the module question	Posting responds to the question but does not stimulate further class discussion.	Posting fully addresses the module question and stimulates at least one substantial follow-up posting

### Sample #2 Discussion Board Rubric

The following points are what is looked for in your original postings to the Discussion Board and your replies to others postings (Total of 10 points for each Discussion Board assignment).

#### Original Posting (7 points):

1. Mentions at least **2 specific points** from the article or reading. (1 point)
2. Relation of **new information** to **old information** learned in the course to date. (1 point)
3. Relation of information in article or reading to **personal experience**. (1 point)
4. Discussion at a **critical level**, not just recitation of facts from the article. (3 points)
5. Length of posting approximately **1 word processing page**. (1 point)

Note: Discussion at a critical level means discussing things such as your **opinion** of the point mentioned, **why you hold that opinion**, what you **see wrong** with the point mentioned, how you see the point **consistent/inconsistent with what you have learned** so far, **implications** for the future, **consistencies/inconsistencies within the article or reading** itself, and so forth. In other words, critiquing an article means **analyzing the good and/or bad aspects** of the article and **justifying** your analysis. *Do not just tell me what the article or reading states...I already know this.*

#### Reply to Others' Postings (3 points):

1. Discuss one point you like/agree with, and one point you dislike/disagree with, and why. (2 points)
2. Length should be about 1/2 page in length (approximately 100 words).

## **Sample #3 Grading Discussion Boards**

### **Discussion Rubric**

Discussion postings that meet all criteria for a grade level will receive the highest points possible at that level. Postings that meet mixed levels of criteria will receive a score within the point range of the appropriate levels.

Participation in discussion activities can only be measured by the date on the discussion posting. For example, participating 3 times during the week is measured by postings on 3 different days; there may actually be 5-6 postings, but participation only occurred 3 times during the week.

#### **A Discussion (90-100): Distinguished/Outstanding**

Students earning an “A” for discussion activities have participated 3 or more times during the week and have posted outstanding information.

“A” discussion postings

- Are made in time for others to read and respond
- Deliver information that is full of thought, insight, and analysis
- Make connections to previous or current content or to real-life situations
- Contain rich and fully developed new ideas, connections, or applications

#### **B Discussion (80-89): Proficient**

Students earning a “B” for discussion activities have participated at least 2 times during the week and have posted proficient information.

“B” discussion postings

- Are made in time for others to read and respond
- Deliver information that shows that thought, insight, and analysis have taken place
- Make connections to previous or current content or to real-life situations, but the connections are not really clear or are too obvious
- Contain new ideas, connections, or applications, but they may lack depth and/or detail

#### **C Discussion (70-79): Basic**

Students earning a “C” for discussion activities have participated at least 1 time during the week and have posted basic information.

“C” discussion postings

- May not all be made in time for others to read and respond
- Are generally competent, but the actual information they deliver seems thin and commonplace
- Make limited, if any, connections, and those are often cast in the form of vague generalities
- Contain few, if any, new ideas or applications; often are a rehashing or summary of other comments

#### **D-F Discussion (10-69): Below Expectations**

Students earning a “D-F” for discussion activities have participated at least 1 time during the week and have posted information that was below expectations.

“D-F” discussion postings

- May not all be made in time for others to read and respond
- Are rudimentary and superficial; there is no evidence of insight or analysis
- Contribute no new ideas, connections, or applications
- May be completely off topic

**No participation in a discussion board activity will result in a zero for that activity.**

## Sample #4 Grading Discussion Boards

### Discussion Board Rubric

Criteria	A (90-100) Outstanding	B (80-89) Proficient	C (70-79) Basic	D/F (0-69) Below Expectations
<b>Critical Thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rich in content</li> <li>Full of thought, insight, and analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substantial information</li> <li>Thought, insight, and analysis has taken place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally competent</li> <li>Information is thin and commonplace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rudimentary and superficial</li> <li>No analysis or insight is displayed</li> </ul>
<b>Connections</b>	Clear connections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To previous or current</li> <li>To real-life situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New ideas or connections</li> <li>Lack depth and/or detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited, if any connections</li> <li>Vague generalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No connections are made</li> <li>Off topic</li> </ul>
<b>Uniqueness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New ideas</li> <li>New connections</li> <li>Made with depth and detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New ideas or connections</li> <li>Lack depth and/or detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few, if any new ideas or connections</li> <li>Rehash or summarize other postings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No new ideas</li> <li>“I agree with...” statement</li> </ul>
<b>Timeliness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All required postings</li> <li>Early in discussion</li> <li>Throughout the discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All required postings</li> <li>Some not in time for others to read and respond</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All required postings</li> <li>Most at the last minute without allowing for response time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some, or all, required postings missing</li> </ul>
<b>Stylistics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few grammatical or stylistic errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Several grammatical or stylistic errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obvious grammatical or stylistic errors</li> <li>Errors interfere with content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obvious grammatical or stylistic errors</li> <li>Makes understanding impossible</li> </ul>

## Sample #5 Grading Discussion Boards

Contents:

1. Evaluation sheet
2. Criteria for Evaluation and an Explanation of that criteria

### Discussion Board Discussion Evaluation Sheet

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Course: 311.50 Advanced Composition (online)

Semester: Summer II, 2004

Rating Scale:

3 – Outstanding      2 – Acceptable   1 – Weak, unacceptable   0 – No Posting

Characteristic/Criteria

Discussion Board	Reading Title
Focused on topic	
Organization of ideas/thoughts	
Critical thinking evident in responses	
Correlations of contributions to assigned readings	
Use of other resources/citations	
Thoughtfulness in interactions	
Listening to others	
Grammar/mechanics	
Timeliness per course policy	
Total	x/27
Comments:	
Overall participation score: _____	

### Discussion Board Evaluation Sheet-Criteria & Explanation

Criteria	Explanation
Focused on topic	Clear indication that the response is motivated by the particular reading and that the writer has taken a particular slant on that reading and developed it.
Organization of ideas/thoughts	There is a sense in the response that ideas lead to each other and that there are connections being made.
Critical thinking evident in responses	The response is just not a summary but an attempt by the writer to push attempt by the writer to push toward a particular personal meaning.
Correlations of contributions to assigned readings	The response refers consistently to the reading and to particular ideas and situations within the reading that have made an impression.
Use of other resources/citations	The response makes connections to information, writers and other texts the writer has read or seen.
Thoughtfulness in interactions	Evidence of college level thinking that relates the writer's life to the social.
Listening to others	The response illustrates that the writer has been paying attention to those who have interesting and provocative things to say.
Grammar/mechanics	Few grammar or sentence mechanics errors—none that interfere with the meaning the writer wants to convey.
Timeliness per course policy	Possible pts: 3=posted on time; 2=late, 0=no post

Scores:	27 – 22	3 points
	21 - 17	2 points
	16 and below	1 point
	No post	0 points



## Sample #6 Grading Discussion Boards

### Discussion Board Grading Rubric

Category	1	2	3	4
<b>Promptness and Initiative</b>	Does not respond to most postings; rarely participates freely	Responds to most postings several days after initial discussion; limited initiative	Responds to most postings within a 24 hour period; requires occasional prompting to post	Consistently responds to postings in less than 24 hours; demonstrates good self-initiative
<b>Delivery of Post</b>	Unitizes poor spelling and grammar in most posts; posts appear "hasty"	Errors in spelling and grammar evidenced in several posts	Few grammatical or spelling errors are noted in posts	Consistently uses grammatically correct posts with rare misspellings
<b>Relevance of Post</b>	Posts topics which do not relate to the discussion content; makes short or irrelevant remarks	Occasionally posts off topic; most posts are short in length and offer no further insight into the topic	Frequently posts topics that are related to discussion content; prompts further discussion of topic	Consistently posts topics related to discussion topic; cites additional references related to topic.
<b>Expression within the post</b>	Does not express opinions or ideas clearly, no connection to topic	Unclear connection to topic evidenced in minimal express of opinions or ideas	Opinions and ideas are stated clearly with occasional lack of connection to topic.	Expresses opinions and ideas in a clear and concise manner with obvious connection to topic
<b>Contribution to the Learning Community</b>	Des not make effort to participate in learning community as it develops; seems indifferent	Occasionally makes meaningful reflection on group's efforts; marginal effort to become involved with group	Frequently attempts to direct the discussion and to present relevant viewpoints for consideration by group; interacts freely	Aware of needs of community; frequently attempts to motivate the group discussion; presents creative approaches to topic.

### Sample #7 Discussion Board Rubric

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Below Expectations</b>
Content	<p>Fully detailed information.</p> <p>Full thoughtful and insightful analysis.</p> <p>In addition to course connections, connections are made to materials from outside the course.</p> <p>New ideas or questions are posed.</p>	<p>Substantial information.</p> <p>Thoughtful, insightful analysis.</p> <p>Clear connections to course materials are noted.</p>	<p>General information.</p> <p>Some analysis evident.</p> <p>Connections to course materials made.</p>	<p>Superficial or no information given.</p> <p>Summary or no analysis provided.</p> <p>Vague or no connections to course materials made.</p>
Timeliness and Quantity	<p>Posting made on time/responses are made throughout the week.</p> <p>Initial post and more than the minimum number of responses posted.</p>	<p>Posting and responses are made according to the dates set.</p> <p>Initial posting and the minimum number of responses are posted.</p>	<p>Posting late/responses on time.</p>	<p>Some or all required post/responses missing.</p> <p>Posting and responses are made within a short time frame.</p> <p>No posting or response provided</p>
Professionalism	<p>No grammatical/stylistic errors that interfere with the reading.</p>	<p>Few grammatical/stylistic errors that interfere with the reading.</p>	<p>Obvious grammatical/stylistic errors that interfere with the content</p>	<p>Many grammatical/stylistic errors that interfere with the content</p>

Each week the participant is expected to make an initial post, followed by at least 2 responses to peers. This is the minimum requirement. A quality collection of this quantity will earn the participant a grade no higher than the Proficient area.

## Discussion Board Participation Rubric

Your instructor uses this rubric to assign points for your discussion board participation. Each discussion board post is worth 5 points. You will receive two points for posting an assignment by the due date. Additional points will be based on your contribution to the discussion.

Category	Excellent (1)	Satisfactory (.5)	Requires further effort (.25)
<b>Quality of Information</b>	Information clearly relates to the main topic. Contributions are thoughtful and relevant to the discussion.	Information clearly relates to the main topic.	Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic or simply restates the main concepts.
<b>Participation</b>	Responds to the instructors and other members of the online community. Encourages and facilitates interaction among members of the online community.	Responds to other members of the online community.	Responds to the instructor only.
<b>Professional Language</b>	Professional vocabulary and writing style are used consistently throughout the discussion.	Professional vocabulary and writing style are used frequently throughout the discussion.	Professional vocabulary and writing style are occasionally used.
<b>Total Possible Points</b>	3 points	1.5 points	.75 points