

Online Discussions

How to foster effective discussions in your online course?

TIP
1



From the start of the course, provide students with clear expectations and guidelines for online discussions. Make sure that you model these discussion expectations in all of your own postings to online discussions.

TIP
2



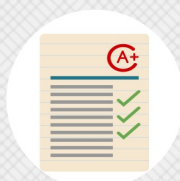
Create open-ended questions or questions with multiple answers, promoting critical thinking and connecting discussions to course learning outcomes.

TIP
3



Use different discussion-board designs (e.g., student-led facilitation, case-study scenarios) to provide opportunities for students to discuss concepts & solve problems with each other.

TIP
4



Assess and evaluate the quality of students' discussion posts using grading rubrics. Provide students with standards of performance with model examples of good, medium, and poor discussion postings.



Build learner interaction into your online discussions through careful planning, with due dates for postings and responses spaced throughout the week.

Use Blackboard "Subscribe" Setting for Alerts of New Discussion Posts

The "subscribe" setting in Bb allows instructors and students to receive an email when new entries are posted in a discussion forum or thread. Note that forum or thread subscriptions are not a default; course instructor must enable the "subscribe" setting.

For help with Blackboard discussion board settings, please contact GMU Courses Support at: courses@gmu.edu.



Workshop: "Designing Effective Questions for Online Discussions"

Want to learn more about online discussions?

The Stearns Center regularly offers the workshop, "Designing Effective Questions for Online Discussions". This workshop is facilitated by our instructional designers.

Check the Mason workshop schedule for upcoming dates.

<http://workshops.gmu.edu/>

Best Practices from Mason's Online Faculty

How do YOU use discussions to enhance learning in your online course?

Focus Online Discussions with Rubrics and Guidelines

"It's recommended not to limit the length of students' online discussion posts. Best practices indicate that critical thinking can be enhanced in online discussions, not by limiting posts, but by focusing discussions with detailed rubrics, guidelines and etiquette documents.

Dr. Nada Dabbagh (GMU, CEHD) has developed some useful online discussion rubrics and protocols available at:
https://www.icre.pitt.edu/cbe/documents/Rubrics/Online%20Discussion_Analytic.pdf.

-Dr. Larisa Olesova, Senior Instructional Designer, Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning; Adjunct Faculty (CEHD)

Discuss Case Studies

"I use management case studies in my online business class. I find that it helps discussion to start by making a provocative observation about the issues in the case, leading students to take a side on the issue. Students then must support their perspective with evidence from the case. I select solid responses representing the differing perspectives and lead students to work through the logic and the implications of the different positions for managerial decision makers. The fact that a decision is ultimately required by the end of the online discussion helps to keep the conversation from becoming too theoretical or drifting off topic."

- Dr. Gregory Unruh, Arison Professor of Values Leadership, School of Integrative Studies

Assign Roles to Students in Discussion Groups

"I like to put students in groups of 5 or 6, using the Blackboard 'groups' function. For each weekly discussion, I assign roles to three students in the group: a starter, a wrapper, and a skeptic. The starter and wrapper are tasked with beginning and ending the conversation, respectively, according to a question or task that I assign to the group. Meanwhile, the skeptic's job is to ask questions during the week to keep their peers thinking and to move the conversation forward. I have separate rubrics for these 'special' roles versus the regular role. I've worked closely with an instructional designer to design the discussions and to assess their impact."

-Dr. Margaret Slavin, Assistant Professor, Nutrition and Food Studies, CHHS

How is an online discussion like a dinner party? Find out!

Hayek, C. [2012]. How Many Faculty Discussion Posts Each Week? A Simply Delicious Answer.

Faculty Focus: Higher Ed Teaching Strategies.

Retrieved from: <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/how-many-faculty-discussion-posts-each-week-a-simply-delicious-answer/>

More about using scripted roles in online discussions

Olesova, L., Slavin, M., & Lim, J. [2016]. Exploring the Effect of Scripted Roles on Cognitive Presence in Asynchronous Online Discussions. *Online Learning*, 20(4).

Retrieved from
<https://olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org/index.php/olj/article/view/1058>



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