

Guidelines for Student Participation in Online Discussion Forums



With freedom to voice your opinion and personal thoughts on the web comes responsibility. Keep the following guidelines in mind when developing your posts:

Netiquette

- Identify yourself by your real name. Be mindful of your personal safety, and avoid including personal information, such as phone numbers or addresses, in discussion forums.
- Write in the first person (this is your opinion).
- Use humor, joking, or sarcasm with caution. We often rely on non-verbal cues such as facial expressions to communicate joking or sarcasm; but these cues are not always clear in an online environment. These cues can be simulated with emoticons to reduce misunderstandings.
- What you write is public—respect your audience and be mindful of proper netiquette. Netiquette, also known as 'net etiquette,' includes using language free of profanity, proper tone and mechanics (including full sentences), as well as courtesy and respect for others' opinions. Instructors may interpret breaches of netiquette as "[disruptive behavior](#)."

How to Get Others to Read Your Posts

- Jot down notes as you read; and before you post, think about the focus question in the context of the readings. Address the focus questions as much as possible (don't let the discussion stray).
- Distribute contributions evenly during the discussion period (not concentrated all on one day or at the beginning and/or end of the period).
- Give your post an interesting descriptive subject line to draw attention and invite responses from others.
- Avoid cursory, non-contributory posts, such as "I agree" or "great idea." If you agree (or disagree) with a post, then say why--and support your statement with concepts from the online lecture or assigned readings, or by sharing a related example or experience.
- Avoid using texting abbreviations in your posts.
- Elaborate one single idea and try to keep your message to a couple paragraphs. Long, multiple-screen "mini-dissertations" are difficult to follow on screen and limit opportunities for the give-and-take essential to effective dialogue.
- Review your comments carefully for grammar and punctuation before you post. Well-formulated, grammatically correct, clear posts attract more attention (from both instructor and colleagues). Consider developing your initial posts in a word processing program that allows you to edit for spelling and grammar—then copy it into the discussion forum. This not only will improve the quality of your posts, but also has the added benefit of preserving your insights and observations in word documents you can access after the online course has been completed. Another advantage to composing "offline" is avoiding a timeout from the online discussion forum while you compose your thoughts--resulting in a loss of your careful composition!

Earning Full Credit

- Keep your posts related to the focus question.
- Think of the assignment as a collegial dialogue--not a writing exercise. Engage in a discussion about the text and issues of the course materials.

- Cite or reference any part of your posts that aren't your own original thoughts. (Avoid plagiarizing!) Citing your sources is especially important in courses where your instructor offers full credit only when citations support the ideas in your post. When you refer to online resources include a hyperlink directly to the source to add context to your comments.
- After you have posted, check back to see if anybody has responded to you—and whether a return response is desired/expected. Build on others' responses to further develop threads of dialog.
- Respond to a colleague who either supports your own thoughts or lacks supporting evidence or seems to fall short on an important point. Pose questions, offer arguments (distinguish between opinion and argument), or play "devil's advocate." Avoid responses that offer only right or wrong perspectives while ignoring other possible answers; pose open-ended questions that invite dialogue.
- **Participation in online forums may be a significant portion of the assessment for your course, so check the course requirements for the weighting of the assessment in your final grade as well as the frequency and requirements for discussion posts to receive full credit.**

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