

Discussion Doctor

Fixing Your Forum Failings

Created by Laura March & Mark Anthoney

What's your biggest gripe?

Use Rubrics

Rubrics communicate expectations for participation and streamline grading. Students can use your rubric to self-assess or review peer contributions.

- [Online Discussion Boards & Rubrics](#)
- [Using Rubrics to Promote Thinking and Learning](#)
- [Rubrics for Designing and Evaluating Online Asynchronous Discussions](#)

Create a Schedule

Make sure discussion due dates are consistent (e.g., Fridays at 4pm) and that students know that they will not receive points for participating after the due date has passed. Set two due dates for each discussion board: one for the original post, and another for peer responses. Consider offering bonus points for exemplary posts that go beyond minimum requirements.

- [Notes on Class Discussions](#)
- ["Chain-Linked" Discussions](#)
- [Scheduled Studying](#)
- [Theoretically Based Pedagogical Strategies Leading to Deep Learning in Asynchronous Online Gerontology Courses](#)

Intermittently Reinforce

Intermittently insert reinforcing or clarifying posts (*after the first two weeks of actively posting*). Then scan weekly posts making note of non-participation, which deducts from overall course participation score. Individual discussions are not graded, but make sure to keep detailed notes of participation score deductions.

- [Sage, guide or ghost? The effect of instructor intervention on student participation in online discussion forums](#)

Students don't participate in the ways I'd like

It takes too much time

Grading takes forever

Reading and responding to every post is a waste of my time

Let Students Lead

Assign one or two students to lead a discussion and write a summary of lessons learned to later share with class. This will build intrinsic motivation for students as they are asked to assume more ownership over the discussion.

Provide students guidance about what makes a good discussion prompt (i.e.: open-ended questions that can have multiple interpretations or solutions). Use the Question Formula Technique (QFT) for a step-by-step process for helping students formulate their own questions.

- [Student Discussion Facilitators](#)
- [The Right Questions](#)
- [Should You Let Students Lead Discussion Boards? "Chain-Linked" Discussions](#)
- [Beyond Student Perceptions: Issues of Interaction, Presence, and Performance in an Online Course](#)
- [Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions](#)

Students have time management issues

Maintaining an active discussion is too time consuming

I hate leading every conversation

Everything is too chaotic

Conversations aren't meaningful

Students don't get anything out of the discussions

Students don't grasp the important aspects of the topics discussed

Split Students into Groups

Smaller discussion group sizes (4-6 members) positively impact student learning. This is especially true when you assign student groups specific tasks such as real-life problem-solving, gathering evidence, etc. Smaller groups support increased learning when team members are invested in a common goal where they strive for mutual benefit. In addition to aforementioned intrinsic motivators, individual accountability can be supported by clear evaluative measures. Students can also use your rubric for self and peer evaluations.

- [Pedagogical Uses of Discussion Forums](#)
- [Engage Students with Online Discussions](#)
- [How can you create effective online discussions?](#)
- [Online Discussion Boards & Rubrics](#)
- [Fostering knowledge construction in university students through asynchronous discussion groups](#)

Students aren't comfortable interacting with each other

Posts lack higher-level thinking

There are no connections between my coursework and discussions

Synthesize the Discussion

Post a course announcement where you summarize the "lessons learned" and "muddiest points" in a discussion. This allows you to acknowledge particularly valuable student contributions. This builds a sense of community in your course by demonstrating to students that their contributions matter.

- [Cutting the distance in distance education: Perspectives on what promotes positive, online learning experiences](#)

Outcome Alignment

Connect online discussions with your overall course learning outcomes and course activities and summative assessments. Online discussions can be a space for students to respond to course readings before having to apply concepts from the readings in later activities (group work, papers/projects, etc.). Online discussions can also be a great place for students to share their work and get feedback from their peers in preparation for an upcoming assessment (i.e.: term paper or exam).

- [Bloom's Taxonomy](#)
- [Collaborative Learning: Group Work](#)
- [Problem-Based Learning](#)
- [Learning Effectiveness Online: What the Research Tells Us](#)

Inappropriate language, themes, or trolling occurs

Responses are superficial or otherwise impersonal

Posts are dull

Posts are uninspired

Define & Maintain Civil Discourse

It's important to dedicate discussion time at the start of your course going over the norms and expectations students should follow so the class is able to dive deep when collectively deliberating on course topics. This conversation is important whether or not course topics are seen as controversial, as group dynamics apply across all courses. Consider providing students a reading about inclusivity and then ask them to propose ideas for norms to build a "course charter" that you refer to when agreed-upon norms have been breached.

- [Strategies for Inclusive Teaching](#)
- [Netiquette: Make it Part of Your Syllabus](#)
- [Creating Inclusive College Classrooms](#)
- [Notes on Class Discussions](#)
- [Dialogue Across Difference](#)

Many students don't receive any responses

Objectivity and/or analysis are missing

Discussions are too safe

Get Creative

There are a variety of formats that discussions can take, which support different levels of rigor in student thinking. For example, do you want students to apply a concept? Critique an event? Evaluate a piece of text? Collaborate with peers to create a final product? Even for standard discussion designs where you write a prompt and students respond to you and classmates, the questions you pose can be interpretive, subjective, evaluative, diagnostic, or meant for brainstorming.

- [Generating and Facilitating Engaging and Effective Online Discussions \(p. 5-6\)](#)
- [The Art of Asking Questions](#)
- [What the Best College Teachers Do](#)

Encourage Inclusivity

Some students may not receive a response to their comments or questions from classmates, which may cause them to become discouraged and drop out of the discussion. In your course announcements, make sure to point this out and encourage students to respond to their "orphaned" classmates.

Also make a point to send an encouraging message to less active students when you see them participate in meaningful ways.

- [Enhancing Discussions in the Asynchronous Online Classroom: The Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction Does Not Lessen the Lesson](#)

Build Community from the Get-Go

Devote one question during the first week for all students to introduce themselves (inside Canvas both you and your students can post a webcam video of themselves). Collect, consolidate and share a summary of all students in the class (picture, workplace, experience, management level, interests/ventures, etc.). As a 'cheat sheet', it will become handy during the course in asking students the specific/customized follow-up questions.

- [Demonstrate Relevance](#)
- [Balancing Quality and Workload in Asynchronous Online Discussions: A Win-Win Approach for Students and Instructors](#)

Teach Critical Thinking

Students may not have enough experience evaluating arguments to guide the development of their beliefs to take action. In other words, they need help thinking critically. You can help students think more deeply in online discussions by formulating rich, open-ended discussion prompts and, importantly, probing students to clarify or provide evidence to support their claim or analysis. Be careful, though, students will start to depend on your probing questions if you intervene too often. Give them time to reflect on your few, highly purposeful, neutral and probing discussion replies.

- [Universal Intellectual Standards](#)
- [Move over Socrates: Online Discussion is Here](#)
- [The Art of Asking Questions](#)
- [Encouraging Critical Thinking in Online Threaded Discussions](#)

Push Boundaries

Start your course by encouraging students to push themselves and take risks in their discussion posts. To make this process more familiar, ask students to draw upon their unique perspectives. This approach requires that you are prepared to address misconceptions, as students are actively attempting to construct new understandings. It's also important for you to clearly articulate guidelines for your discussion activities, no matter the level of creativity you employ in your designs.

- [Pedagogical Uses of Discussion Forums](#)
- [Engage Students with Online Discussions](#)
- ["Chain-Linked" Discussions](#)
- [Instructor and Student Expectations for Communication](#)
- [Enhancing Discussions in the Asynchronous Online Classroom: The Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction Does Not Lessen the Lesson](#)