

Online Discussions - General Guidelines & Expectations

If you've taken an online course before, then you're likely aware that discussions are often a significant part of these courses. Although different, these assignments are meant to take the place of both the in class discussions we might have if we were meeting in a classroom, as well as some of the exercises we would work through to generate some conversation.

In order for these discussions to be successful, we need to clarify a few things: My role as an instructor, my expectations of you in these discussions, and the general criteria I use to grade discussion posts.

Instructor Role

During discussions, my job is to facilitate and keep the conversation going. This means you'll see me doing a lot of the following:

- Responding to students who directly pose a question
- Encouraging more in depth responses
- Affirming responses from students
- Monitoring the "mood" of the discussion to make sure that things don't get too heated (or, easier said, we don't become the darker corners of 4chan or Reddit).

In the first few weeks of the course, you'll see me involved pretty heavily. As the quarter progresses and you all become more comfortable with responding, you'll see me step back and respond less, and work more to summarize salient points.

I will respond to each student numerous times over the course of the quarter. But just as it's impossible to respond to every single student during an in-class discussion for a traditional class, it's unrealistic to expect me to respond to every single student, in every single response, every single week.

Student Expectations

TRY. The purpose of discussions is to explore material together. This means I am not always expecting you to have the *right* answer. Make a sincere effort to engage with the material. Be willing to support each other or pitch in with guidance if you see a classmate struggling. Remember: The purpose of discussion is to test ideas, make mistakes in a low-stakes environment, and use it as a spring board to improve.

RESPECT. A big challenge of online communication is that many of the nonverbal signals that accompany verbal messages are gone. If someone presents a viewpoint different than yours, do

not go immediately on the offensive. If a post upsets you, read it, breathe, then come back to respond when you've had time to relax and do so with a cooler head.

Grading Criteria

For written discussions, I do not set a specific word count other than expecting your initial post to be longer than your responses to your classmates. That said, these are the general criteria I look at when assessing a grade on a discussion:

- **Completeness:** Does it answer the prompt of the discussion?
- **Coherent:** Does the post stay on topic (for the most part)
- **Grammar:** Does the post contain numerous spelling and typographical errors (this is where typing your post on a phone can get you in trouble; remember, spellcheck is always out to get you on mobile devices)
- **Punctuality:** Is the post **on** time?

Essentially, as long as you post on time, make an attempt to answer the prompt, and don't go off on too wild a tangent, you'll do fine on discussions.

If you feel like recording a response to your discussion and posting it in a discussion (aside from our FlipGrid weeks, where it's mandatory), then feel free! It will only give you more practice in presenting! Just make sure that it's uploaded to YouTube or another venue where we can all view it.