

At a Glance: Class Discussion Best Practices and Tools

The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching

Effective Discussions

Discussion is a great way for students to participate and work through topics together. It also creates teachable moments regarding academic discourse, respectful disagreement, and diverse experiences. You can have effective discussions in face to face or online classes. The suggestions below are targeted to online discussion boards, but can be adapted to face to face and hybrid courses.

Best Practices

- Post specific guidelines and expectations for each discussion
 - One possible structure for student responses is the 3CQ method - Compliment, Comment, Connection, Question. Giving a specific structure leaves little room for confusion about expectations and helps students formulate complete responses.
- Model an acceptable discussion post (or a superior discussion post). Point out the features that make this an acceptable post.
- Post a rubric that details your expectations and guides students in formulating responses.
- Give timely feedback so that students feel that their contributions are being read, and so that they can adjust to meet or exceed expectations.

Engaging Discussion Ideas

- Vary response types - Change the format in which the students respond to the prompt. (audio, visual, video, written, concept maps/graph)
 - Considering the need for equity and accommodation, offer students two different ways to respond and let them choose based on their preference
 - Visual could include images of real-world examples, memes, photos of hand drawn images, student-made graphics. Be sure to specify your preferences or suggest options in the assignment.
- Showcase student work or portfolios
 - If your students have been working on a project or portfolio, use the discussion board as a time to get feedback and recommendations from peers
- Alternate summarizing and responding roles
 - Have half the class summarize the reading and the other half write responses to the summaries then switch the next week. This alternates the type of writing students are doing and gives you a break from grading because there are less responses to read.
- Jigsaw Posts

- Break content into small topical chunks. Assign students to groups (you can do this in Blackboard and each group gets their own discussion board). Give each group one of the topics. After a suitable time period based on your course objectives, have students comment on the course discussion board about their topic. Learning can be assessed by giving all students a quiz over all topics based on their learning in the discussion or by having them write a summary in which they synthesize all chunks of the topic based on the discussion.
- There are many ways to assign topics: textbook section, SWOT categories, theories about the topic, different types or iterations of _____. It all depends on your subject matter.
- Role Play
 - Break a topic into different points of view. Assign students a point of view to research and then on the discussion board, they have to stay in character and argue for their point of view and share resources and evidence-based articles that support their viewpoint.
- Case Study or Problem/Solution
 - Post a real-world problem or case study connected to the week's material and have students propose solutions using their learning from the week or from outside research.

Discussion Board Alternatives

Social Annotation Tools

- [Hypothes.is](#) – annotate web pages and online PDFs or EPUBs. Install a chrome extension to use.
- [Perusall](#) – annotate any PDF or EPUB that is original to you or to which you have the rights through your textbook or an open resource. Perusall also integrates with Blackboard. When you grade in Perusall, it uploads to grade center in Blackboard once you link your course to Perusall. You can have students buy their textbooks through Perusall (if available) and then they can annotate their textbook. Use through the website platform.

VoiceThread

[VoiceThread](#) offers the interactivity of a discussion board combined with engaging tools and media resources.