WRITING EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION POSTS

MAKING THE MOST OF ONLINE FORUMS

Online forums and discussion boards can be a great way to enrich your learning. They make it easy to review how others have engaged with the topic so you can better reflect on what’s been said and think about how you would like to respond. But, just like an in-person discussion, it takes time, effort, and energy to keep the conversation going.

Here are our top tips.

1. REFERENCE PREVIOUS POSTS

Yes, threads can make it easy to track how a conversation is developing - but there’s a lot to be said about citing your classmates within the first sentence or two of your post. It’s a quick way to show engagement (“hey, I read what you wrote!”) and build community. It also shows your ability to be a good listener (albeit remotely) and build on the existing conversation.

2. INTRODUCE YOUR TOPIC

This sounds obvious, doesn’t it? But making intentional use of keywords will help your classmates quickly understand the focus of your discussion post. Explicit phrasing like “This debate makes me question X” or “This concept reminds me of Y reading” can make it easier for your readers to understand what to expect from your post - and motivate them to keep reading.

3. ELABORATE AND SUPPORT

At the heart of your discussion posts are YOUR ideas! Once you’ve introduced your topic, elaborate on it and support your interpretation. Demonstrate your critical thinking skills by asking critical questions, making associations, and supporting your ideas and thoughts with evidence. Don’t be shy. This is where you demonstrate why your post is worth reading.

4. ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Wrap-up your post by asking one or more open-ended questions. Posting questions to your classmates or instructor can really help them think about the topic and keep the conversation going.

Open-ended questions include “Do you see a connection between topics X and Y?” or “What might be the positives and/or negatives of Z interpretation?”

5. WRITE, REVIEW, POST

We recommend typing up your discussion posts in a separate document. Not only can this system help you catch silly typos, it can also prevent you from losing work if the server ever becomes unresponsive!

Double-check your tone before posting. Remember that online discussion boards will be read by your classmates and instructors. In some courses, your posts may form a large part of your grade. Treat these posts accordingly.

Oh, and don’t forget to paragraph! Reading online can be tiring, and your readers will appreciate having information clearly organized.

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