



## WRITING DISCUSSION POSTS

The purpose of discussion posts is to create an online extension of the classroom discussions between students. Most often, discussion posts are utilized in hybrid or online courses. Because this type of writing assignment is often a new one to students, and is typically expected to be a blend of casual and academic formats, it can feel a little intimidating. The intention of this tip sheet is to offer suggestions for writing and responding to online discussion posts in an academic context.

### Start with the Syllabus

Instructors often explain their requirements for discussion post assignments within the class syllabus. If you find yourself feeling stuck or confused, you might find some clarity in the syllabus. Sometimes, instructors will post an introduction to discussion posts on the forum or blog itself as a means to offer guidance on their expectations. You can also reach out to the instructor directly to ask for help or clarification of their expectations.

### Choosing a Topic

You know the requirements for making a post, but what should you write about? If your instructor hasn't given you a specific topic, here are some ideas for coming up with one yourself:

- ◆ Highlight a detail from the reading you found particularly interesting
- ◆ Relate a relevant personal experience
- ◆ Ask question that's come up for you and give your classmates an opportunity to share their thoughts



- ◆ Share a relevant piece of media that you discovered outside of class with your classmates and connect it to the course material
- ◆ Draw a connection between two pieces of required reading, or, alternatively, point out how they contradict one another

### **Read Other Posts**

Sometimes reading others' posts can give you a spark of inspiration for writing your own. Don't be afraid to expand upon an idea or topic that someone else already posted about - instead, offer your own unique perspective and create additional discussion.

### **Use a Word Processing Program**

You can type draft posts and responses in your word processing program of choice before copying and pasting them into the discussion board platform. This allows you to save drafts, get a word/character count, and utilize grammar and spell check functions. Some students also find it easier to write with a program that they're already comfortable with. If there's ever a glitch with the online platform or your internet connection when you're trying to submit a post, having a backup written and saved in another program can be very helpful!

### **Incorporate Source Material and Cite as Needed**

If your instructor requires you to incorporate sources and cite them, they'll usually detail those requirements in the syllabus. If not, ask them directly. If you're still unsure, it's always a good idea to err on the side of caution and cite your sources.

### **Voice and Style**

Discussion posts can range from casual, journal-style posts, to what we typically think of as formal academic writing. Make sure you understand what your instructor expects, and keep your posts consistent



within the expected style of writing. If your instructor is asking for a more casual writing style, avoid getting too casual - this is still a college class assignment, not a text message to your friends!

### **Responding Appropriately**

Remember that online discussions are an extension of the classroom, and you shouldn't write anything that you wouldn't say to your class in person. It's okay to pose an argument, ask a critical question, or play "Devil's Advocate" in the name of furthering a discussion, but it's not okay to make a classmate feel attacked or bullied. If you're not sure if a post or response is appropriate, you can always e-mail your instructor before sharing it to make sure. Keep in mind that unlike discussions held in person, your tone cannot be heard by your audience, which makes it extra important to be mindful of how your words might come across. Try reading posts out loud before submitting them to see if they sound clear and respectful, or send them to a friend to get an outside opinion on how it comes across.

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