Assignment Type: Discussions

What is it: A discussion forum, also known as a discussion board, is an online location for asynchronous written communication. Each discussion is typically defined by a specific function (such as “I need help” or “Water Cooler Chat”) or focused on a specific topic from the course. As participants post messages containing their original thoughts as well as responses to posts from other class members, a threaded written dialogue develops.

In traditional campus-based courses, online discussions may be used to continue and extend conversations beyond the confines of the physical classroom. In fully online courses, many of the types of interactions that would normally occur in class can be moved online. The format allows the instructor to set standards that would be hard to maintain in real-time conversations, as well as to create new types of assignments based on dialogue between students.

It is worth mentioning that online discussions offer some distinct advantages.

- Every member of the class gets to contribute directly to a conversation, which is impractical in most other circumstances due to time constraints.
- When grading class participation in a traditional classroom, it may be difficult to judge how much a given student has contributed relative to others if they raise their hand less frequently but share greater insights whenever they do speak up. Online discussions, on the other hand, provide a permanent record that displays both the amount and quality of participation.
- Students who prefer to deliberate for a little longer or consult reference materials before responding are able to take the time needed to develop high quality responses.
- Those who normally feel less comfortable participating verbally in a public setting often find their voice online.
- The work of stronger students serves as a model to others, and some students will put in extra effort knowing that their own work will be viewed by peers.
- The format allows for regular practice working with course concepts at the middle to higher conceptual levels. Students can analyze, interpret and reflect on what they are learning while you observe both their progress and current level of understanding. This type of formative assessment allows you to intervene more quickly or adjust your instruction as needed. It is also less effortful and less obtrusive to students, so it can be employed more frequently than major summative assessments.

Why use it: It is widely accepted that learning is facilitated through interaction with others. Course material is learned at a deeper level when you mentally work with the
subject matter, explain your interpretations to others, reflect on their perspectives, and develop shared understandings together. In the physical classroom, this leads to instructional techniques such as Q&A during lecture and seminar-style discourse. In the online course, discussions are commonly used for the same purposes.

Discussions and other means of interaction between students also create a sense of social presence and community. These are considered critical components of a supportive environment that is conducive to learning. Fully online courses intentionally designed with such human interaction in mind can be very engaging for both students and instructors.

**How to use it:** Blackboard Learn contains an integrated discussion tool that makes it easy to utilize discussions within any course. An instructor can set up as many graded and ungraded forums as needed. A range of settings are available including whether students may post anonymously, edit their own existing posts, rate each other’s posts, and attach files.

In most courses, these types of non-content related forums are valuable for both instructors and students:

- **Introductions:** This type of forum allows students and instructors to meet the people they will be working with online all semester. It is common for students to want to connect with each other based on things they have in common that are identified through this forum. It sets the stage for collaboration throughout the course. Participation is generally required during the first week of class. This allows students to become familiar with this central communication tool early in the semester in a non-threatening and low-stakes context. A best practice is to provide concrete prompts or at least topical suggestions to guide what students might include in their personal introductions such as reason for taking the course, areas of professional interest, career aspirations, major and/or class standing.

- **Ask a question about assignments or course logistics:** It is a best practice to set the expectation that students must post all non-personal course related questions here. Additionally, it is helpful to tell students that they may assist each other by providing answers when possible. It builds community, cuts down on the number of emails from students, eliminates the need to answer the same question multiple times, and students may get the answers they are looking for faster.

- **Social area:** It is not unusual for students to want to engage in conversations with classmates about topics that are not directly course related. Providing a designated forum for such activity allows the natural processes of relationship and community building to proceed without diverting focus away from content-related discussion threads.

Some tips about content-focused discussions:
Will you be using discussions primarily as a means of instruction or as a method of assessment? Your overall approach should drive the design of your discussion topics and any other types of assignments you plan that will use the discussion board tool as a delivery mechanism.

Good discussion prompts guide students to interpret what they are reading about, explain how they link the content to other things they know or have experienced, and think critically about the subject matter. Questions with a very factual “right” answer, on the other hand, do not give students many ideas to explore together.

Prompts that may generate productive discussion and increase comprehension of course content include those that ask students to:
- apply what they've learned,
- reflect, question and probe,
- analyze or synthesize information, or
- support a position they hold after evaluating an issue.

Outside materials can be used as the basis for a discussion by attaching articles or placing links to outside websites in your discussion prompt. Likewise, the incorporation of outside materials may breathe new life into a discussion that is starting to slow down. Instructors and students alike may attach files or embed links within discussion board messages.

Are controversial topics okay for discussion prompts? Controversial topics can lead to productive and engaging discussions that help students understand the course content and achieve your stated learning outcomes. However, just as in the traditional classroom, all discussions should be monitored and there may be times when behavior must be managed. When you set up a controversial discussion or can reasonably anticipate that a conversation may naturally move that direction, it helps to explicitly remind students of your expectations for their behavior during discussions.

Considerations:
- The discussion tool is Blackboard is not difficult to use, but providing explicit technical instructions is a best practice. A very short screencast video is an ideal way to demonstrate the tool for students.
- Will you expect every student to read every discussion post? Or are you more interested in having students participate in the conversation and get the gist of what their peers have shared? As with any other type of instructional activity, making your expectations clear to students is critical. When your intent is for students to read all posts and replies, consider the volume of messages that will be involved. One way to control the workload may be to assign students to smaller discussion groups within Blackboard.
- Do you envision a conversational dialogue in your discussion boards, similar to the casual style of traditional class participation? Or do you picture a more formal academic style for your students’ posts, including properly formatted citations to primary source materials? The purpose of your discussions will
guide you in writing appropriate instructions for the students about the format of their posts.

- The conversational approach may allow students to interact more naturally, creating a more “personal” feeling in your course and a greater focus on integration of new knowledge with previous experience. You may find that discussions flow more easily and that students feel more comfortable “talking” to each other about course content when you use this approach.

- More formal approaches place a greater deal of emphasis on the mechanics of the students’ participation. This may be appropriate when one of your primary goals is socialization of advanced undergraduates and graduate students into your discipline, or perhaps when mastery of the written conventions used in academia is an important outcome. With some audiences, it can be challenging to create an environment for dialogue when employing this approach. Participation is also more effortful and time consuming for students, which may impact your point awards and the use of other activities and assignments.

- The role of the instructor in online discussions may vary with the type of forum or topic being discussed. At a minimum, instructors must monitor netiquette, answer questions that students can’t resolve amongst themselves because they require advanced subject matter expertise, and correct student misconceptions about content. However, too much instructor participation can hinder the flow of conversation between students and limit the peer-to-peer teaching that occurs in discussions. Let the learning outcomes associated with the assignment inform your philosophy and approach for each discussion. For instance, when intellectual exploration of a topic or demonstration of higher order thinking are important, the instructor may need to limit their own participation and let students take the lead. To maintain a presence in such cases, the instructor can facilitate learning by occasionally highlighting key insights posted by the students.

- Most people adapt fairly quickly to this type of written communication. Clear expectations about manner of writing, length of posts, and timing should be provided to guide students. The nature of a given discussion assignment may help to define whether an informal, conversational style versus a formal academic style with citations of source materials is more appropriate. Sample discussion posts from the instructor may help those are new to the process, but experienced students will also model desired behaviors by populating the discussions.

- A range of common online participation patterns have been documented well beyond the online classroom. Have you ever heard the term “lurker” used to describe someone who reads blog or social media posts without ever posting an original contribution themselves?

  - Stated requirements for a number of original posts and replies that must be authored—by specific dates—will serve as a guide to your expectations and ensure a minimal level of interaction between
students. This has become common practice. In the absence of such instruction, many will post thoughts at the last minute which does not leave time for replies, choose not to contribute to the discourse even though they read what others have posted, or to post their own opinions without engaging in any actual dialogue.

- However, this will not guarantee that students are actively engaged in the discussion process or that learning is taking place. The best tactic is to craft engaging discussion prompts designed to facilitate learning and provide incentives to encourage target behaviors (such as grading based on quality versus participation). Some instructors also prefer to give students a degree of choice and control over the discussions they join (for instance, by requiring participation in at least 10 out of 15 weekly discussions).

**Instruction and assessment:**

- Some instructors like to assign roles in discussions to further engage and empower students, provide additional structure to the experience, encourage exploration of multiple perspectives, and help manage participation. Typically, roles are rotated with each discussion board. They may include facilitator, devil's advocate, and summarizer (responsible for summing up the entire discussion). This technique may be particularly valuable if your approach is to use discussion boards primarily as a method of instruction.

- Whether your approach is to use discussion boards as a means of instruction or primarily for assessment purposes, clarity of expectations for students and transparency of grading can improved through the use of rubrics. Rubrics may also make grading faster and easier for you!

  - A single rubric applied to all discussions throughout the semester may be appropriate. This works well when you would like to award a few points to encourage quality participation—sort of the equivalent of “attendance/class participation” points.
  
  - Separate rubrics may also be tailored to the requirements of specific assignments. If you are using the discussion board as a platform for delivery of assignments that reach beyond the typical class discussion, strongly consider the use of rubrics!
  
  - Many good sample rubrics (for discussions and assignments) are available online. A few links are provided in the Resources section at the end of this document to get you started.

- Assignments that utilize the discussion board tool as a delivery platform do not have to be limited by what we think of as a typical class discussion to check for understanding. The asynchronous format and communication-centered nature of the tool provides an opportunity to build discussions around application-oriented activities and inquiry-based learning techniques.

  - Imagine having the time for each student to do an in-class presentation each week about an investigation performed outside of class; that can be approximated on a discussion board.
You might even consider using the discussion tool as a process element in an assignment rather than the product. Much of the coordination and work involved in group projects can be conducted via discussion board.

Any discussion prompt can ask students to investigate some aspect of a topic on their own, identify salient aspects or emerging issues, and share their findings with the class. The discussion board can be used to debrief assignments, share and evaluate peer work, or link content to current news coverage and real-life examples discovered by the students.

It may even be the case that many of your goals for traditional group projects can be realized through the use of smaller discussion board-based projects. As described above, the discussion board can be used for assignments that require students to conduct individual investigations on different aspects of a topic then share what they've learned. In a discussion group of 2-5 students, participants should have ample opportunity to discuss how all of their findings relate—and the integration of knowledge takes center stage as the “product” of the assignment. Removing the focus from the “group paper” or some other large piece of physical output means that logistically you may be able to utilize these types of activities more often throughout the semester.

**Level of Bloom’s Taxonomy: Sample Action Verbs**

Assignments using the discussion board are probably best constructed to work toward accomplishment of learning outcomes at the middle levels of understanding. Here are a few examples of action verbs from relevant levels of Bloom’s cognitive domain:

- **Understanding:** Describe; Explain; Defend; Rewrite
- **Application:** Demonstrate; Illustrate; Interpret; Criticize
- **Analysis:** Predict; Compare; Examine; Analyze
- **Evaluation:** Argue; Assess; Judge; Rate; Support; Critique

**Resources:**

**KSU’s Blackboard Self-Help Documentation on Discussion Board (Forums)**

Task aids provide information on how to set up and use the built-in Discussions tool in your online Blackboard course.

**Research on online discussion boards**

If you would like a little peek into the research on discussion boards but are really more interested in the in the implications of what we know for your teaching practice, this chapter is for you. It is a great place to start.

**Examples of Discussion Board Etiquette for Online Courses**
[http://www.ic.sunysb.edu/Class/che326ff/discussion_board/etiquette.pdf](http://www.ic.sunysb.edu/Class/che326ff/discussion_board/etiquette.pdf)

SUNY-Stony Brook has gathered up several examples of Netiquette statements for courses. Other examples may be located easily by Googling “netiquette and online course.”

**Generating and Facilitating Engaging and Effective Online Discussions**
[http://tep.uoregon.edu/technology/blackboard/docs/discussionboard.pdf](http://tep.uoregon.edu/technology/blackboard/docs/discussionboard.pdf)

The first few pages of this booklet from the University of Oregon Teaching Effectiveness Program are worth skimming. They contain tips for instructors new to online discussions, including a few tips about managing your workload.

**Mastering Online Discussion Board Facilitation**

This 15-page Resource Guide from Edutopia (2009) is a nice primer to help you get started. It contains many examples of strategies and techniques for successful discussions.

**Questioning Styles for More Effective Discussion Boards**

*Kent State Online – [http://www.kent.edu/onlineteaching](http://www.kent.edu/onlineteaching)*

In only a few paragraphs, Faculty Focus walks you through how to think about the purpose of your discussions plus six general questioning approaches that will help you write discussion prompts that are specific to your content and learning goals.

**Rubrics for Discussion Boards from the Learning, Teaching & Innovative Technologies Center at Middle Tennessee State University**

[http://www.mtsu.edu/ltanditc/docs/Discussion_Board_Rubrics.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/ltanditc/docs/Discussion_Board_Rubrics.pdf)

This document contains three rubric examples along with samples of instructions for participation so the students understand what is expected.

**Sample Discussion Board Questions That Work**


This four-page document form McMurry University explains seven approaches to discussion prompts. Each includes a one-paragraph rationale and an example.

**Time students spend in discussions**


Reports the results of a study that suggests that the amount of time spent participating in discussions (2 hours crafting and posting messages plus 1 hour reading them) approximates the 3 contact hours per week of a traditional 3-credit course. The study examined 21 sections representing six fully-online courses from Instructional Technology and Curriculum Studies graduate degree programs at four universities. The courses presumably used weekly discussions as a primary method of instruction and interaction.

**Considerations on interaction in discussion boards**

Reports the results of a study showing that students did not interact with one another on a discussion board unless responses to others were required, and a high level of instructor participation in the discussion may have hindered student-student interactions.

**Learning vs. lurking**

Reports the results of a study that indicates students may be learning even when they are not actively posting in a discussion board. It is food for thought as you consider whether to require a certain level of participation in your discussion boards, which is important for a variety of reasons (e.g., to keep the conversation going for students that learn well through interactions with others, to build a learning community full of the types of social presence that keep online students from feeling isolated, and to allow you to assess how well students are understanding the course content).

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Online Discussions: Debate Examples

Debates encourage students to think critically and to organize their thoughts in a clear, cohesive and convincing manner.

Example #1
Debate Topic: Is theory important to instructional design?
For this discussion, your instructor has assigned you to one of two groups representing the two sides of a debate.

Initial Post:
With your group, develop an argument for the position you were assigned. Your argument should follow the premise and conclusion model described in Tavani’s *Ethics and Technology*, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.2, “The Basic Structure of an Argument” and should include at least 2 premises.

There are two threads for this discussion:
   - Theory Is Important for Instructional Design.
   - Theory Is Not Important for Instructional Design.

Based on the argument you have developed with your group, post your individual response, presenting your case in the appropriate discussion thread. Use relevant literature to support your position.

Response Posts:
Review the posts for arguments contrary to yours. Respond to at least one peer, challenging his or her position. Your goal is to persuade your peer to take your side of the argument.

Reference:
Example #2

For this week’s discussion, we will consider a current legal case involving copyright law.

Instructions

1. Read through an overview of the case provided in Blackboard, The Google Library Project: The Copyright Debate”.

2. Review the “facts sheet” as well as the two brief summaries of opposing arguments around the Google library project.

3. Once you have considered both perspectives as well as the law at hand please post a thoughtful, well-reasoned decision in the discussion board.
   - To access your group’s discussion board, click the Group link in the main menu in Blackboard. Make sure to post in the forum titled “Google Books Copyright Case”
   - Post your argument in the thread that corresponds with your judgment.
     - Supporting Google’s Position
     - Supporting the Author’s Guild Position
   - A full credit response will consist of 5-8 sentences and is well reasoned and thoughtful. Please review the rubric that will be used to grade your participation before beginning.

4. In addition, you are required to post a reply to a fellow student with the opposite opinion.
   - Reply posts do not need to be as long as your original opinion post (3-6 sentences) but they should challenge an aspect of the original poster’s opinion. Your reply post should counter their argument and play devil’s advocate to their opinion.
Online Discussions: Role Playing Examples

Role-play encourages students to look at an issue from the viewpoint of another. Assign roles based on module outcomes and allow students to respond to questions on the discussion board by answering them as their “character” would.

Principles for creating role-play exercises:

- Be very clear; about what you want people to get out of the role-playing experience. Muddy thinking at the outset will result in muddy outcomes. Clear thinking and role-play preparation result in clear outcomes.
- Are you assessing skills or are you developing them? If you are assessing people, they need to know the competency level expected of them and the brief needs to have measurable outcomes. People also need to trust that the role-play will have the same level of challenge for them and their peers.
- Are you giving everyone the same level of challenge, or are you flexing according to the level of skill demonstrated by each individual?

Required Elements for a Successful Role Playing Exercise

- Clear objectives
- Identify a scenario, context, and roles
- Describe the setting, problem, and roles
- Promote student investigation of their role
- Set clear expectations
- Debriefing/concluding remarks

Example

This example is a slight modification of Theissen’s (n.d.) United States Panel on Climate Change: Greenhouse Role Play Exercise.

Scenario: Welcome to the U.S. Convention on Climate Change. Each of you will be serving as a member of an interest group at the upcoming meeting on May 1, 2016. During this meeting, each of you will present your argument, debate with other interest groups, and finally vote on the bill that is being presented.

The Issue: All of you have examined evidence for global climate change and have seen scientific data strongly suggesting that humans are involved in the observed warming of the past century, primarily through the ever-increasing use of fossil fuels. There is
growing concern about this issue and a strong global push for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The most recent international effort was the United Nations Climate Convention at Copenhagen in late 2009. Although the need to prevent dangerous warming was recognized at that meeting, the U.S. and other nations failed to reach any legally-binding agreements. However, the U.S. did pledge to reduce emissions by 17% of 2005 levels by the year 2020, pending Congressional approval. There is a consensus among climate experts that this level of reduction is not aggressive enough to prevent the worst impacts of warming. For this reason, the United States Panel on Climate Change has been asked to consider striving for a more ambitious emissions reduction goal. (Theissen, n.d.)

The bill: At the upcoming U.S. Convention on Climate Change your delegation will vote on a bill proposing the following agreement to go before Congress: An agreed-upon reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States by 25% of levels recorded during the year 2005 by the year 2020. This would be achieved through any number of methods, including voluntary reductions, greater use of renewable energy, engineering, and market-based solutions such as cap and trade. You are urged to carefully consider both the economic impact of passing this legislation as well as the potential cost of not acting on this issue. You will need to do some web research to support your position. (Theissen, n.d.)

Discussion Instructions:
You will be assigned to role play as a member of one of the following interest groups:
1. U.S. Congressional Subcommittee on Climate Change
2. The Coalition of Concerned Climate Scientists
3. Fossil Fuels for a Strong America
4. The Business Organization
5. REALGREEN Environmental Group
6. The Citizen Advocates of America
7. Save Our Small Island Nations and Coasts
8. The Organization for International Business

Once you are assigned your interest group, read the assigned readings and the description of your interest group. In addition, conduct research on your interest group to find data that supports your position on the proposed bill. After completing the readings, decide on a strategy to best represent your interest group. Play your role to the best of your ability, even if you don’t agree with the interest group.
Initial Discussion Post: By Wednesday at 11:59pm, post your strategy. Your strategy should be 400-600 words and include answers to the following:

- Will you propose to accept, amend, or reject the bill?
- Provide at least 3 supported explanations to back up your position.

Response Posts: By Saturday at 11:59pm, challenge the strategy taken by at least 2 other interest groups. In your 200-300 word post, try to persuade your peer to accept your strategy.

Vote on the Bill: By Sunday at 11:59pm vote on the bill by either accepting, amending, or rejecting and offer a concise statement with your vote.

Reference:
Online Discussions: Small Group Activity Examples

Example #1

Your classmates are valuable sources of advice for you. They are intelligent people who can help you with course concepts and assignments. The purpose of the small group discussion is to get feedback from your classmates and support as you start finding sources for your final paper.

Initial Post:
Use the strategies discussed in this week’s tutorials to locate a useful piece of information for your final paper. Begin by breaking the research question down into terms, keywords, and synonyms for those keywords. Post your research question, terms, keywords, and synonyms for those keywords.

Response Posts:
Read the posts of other learners and select at least 2 to provide feedback too. What additional terms and keywords can you offer them? What additional research avenues can your provide to help them narrow their search?

Example #2

Instructor Note: Each student group will work on the same case and then the group will present their solution to the entire class.

Evolutionary biologists have proposed that new kinds of living organisms arise sequentially through time via genetic modification. For example, it is hypothesized that amphibians evolved from fish and that birds evolved from saurischian dinosaurs. By contrast, there are "scientific" creationists believe that all basic kinds of life arose within a six day period.

In your group suggest an investigation plan to test the phylogeny hypotheses in the above statement, reflect on your methodology, and brainstorm a list of characteristics of science and life.

By the end of the week, create a summary of your discussion and findings and present to you peers in the whole class discussion.
Online Discussions: Peer Review Examples

Peer review creates a learning community where participants can engage in meaningful conversations, build their learning experience, and deepen their network. Collaborative assignments such as peer feedback can result in dynamic, synergistic, and engaging learning through the depth of conversation that can occur when discussing course concepts. Peer feedback is a way to alleviate some of the communication burden instructors’ face in online courses in providing grades and feedback to individual students. The key to a successful peer review discussion is to provide specific guidelines for students to follow when reviewing their peers’ drafts. Research has shown that having students assess a peer’s assignment with the grading rubric, improved their writing quality and skills (Greenberg, 2015).

Reference

Example
During each module, you are required to post drafts of your handbook, visit the postings of at least 2 fellow classmates, and confer with them about their handbook. You can consistently visit the same classmate’s drafts, or you can pick two new classmates’ drafts to respond to within each module.

Initial Post: For module 2 you are required to: Create a discussion post with a draft of your responses to the 2 questions in assignment 2 of the handbook. Your entry is due at 11:59 pm on Wednesday of week 4. In your post include at least two areas of concern or questions you may have about the information you presented. This will help guide your peers’ feedback.

Response Posts: Then, by Sunday at 11:59 pm of week 4, read the posts of your classmates and comment on at least two.

Your responses are expected to be substantive in nature and focus on the assignment description and scoring guide. Construct an in-depth critique supported by scholarly, constructive comments. Ask clarifying questions, offer suggestions for improvement, and point out the strengths of the draft according to the scoring guide. Base your comments on the readings and provide corroboration by including references with your responses. In addition, please attach the completed scoring guide with your comments to your post.
Best Practices for Asynchronous Discussions

The following is a summary of best practices for asynchronous discussions that is supported by the literature:

- Develop clear guidelines and expectations for learners that are consistent throughout the course
  - Length of posts (e.g. initial: 250-350, responses: 150-250)
    - Short posts lack critical thinking and depth
    - Long posts can be verbose and off topic
    - Establishing a word count encourages concise, focused posts
  - Frequency and deadlines for posts
    - More posts correlate to higher grades
    - A good rule of thumb is an initial post followed by 2 responses this always learners to be the starter (raise issues and questions, provide reflection), responder (answer and post new questions), and facilitator (tutor, introduce new information) in the discussion.
    - May want to have a deadline for initial posts and response posts
  - 20-40% of course grade

- Develop rubrics that evaluate cognitive and social presence for substantive posts by assessing:
  - Critical thinking
  - Communication (grammar, spelling)
  - Collaboration

- Identify discussion board etiquette
- Facilitate and manage interaction regularly to create a welcoming environment
  - Respond to outstanding questions
  - Keep discussion focused on topic
  - Avoid “mothering” (responding too early) and “orphaning” (lack of presence)

- Encourage learners to be committed to the discussion by being:
  - Open and willing to share information
  - Honest through providing constructive feedback
  - Responsible for community formation through regular active engagement
  - Willing to work collaboratively

- Generate discussion by asking good questions
  - Initial prompts
    - Open-ended
    - Focus on higher levels of cognition
  - Response prompts
    - Ask a probing question.
    - Offer a suggestion.
- Elaborate on a particular point.
- Provide an alternative perspective.
  - Promote divergent and convergent forms of thinking
  - Defend arguments with supporting evidence from literature
- Include informal forums for learners to connect with one another
- Include a forum(s) for learner questions
- Dynamic discussions have between 14-20 learners
## Discussion Board Rubric

### Points possible:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Incomplete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial Post</strong></td>
<td>Completely, thoroughly, and logically responds to all components of the question; critical thinking apparent; course content applied; provides evidence/support; AND/or meets the word count.</td>
<td>Partially responds to question in a meaningful way; response may lack completeness or evidence of critical thinking; does not provide enough evidence/support; AND/or does not meet the word count.</td>
<td>Response is not complete and/or is missing important information; lacks critical analysis of the discussion topic; provides poor evidence/support; AND/or does not meet the word count.</td>
<td>Not posted by due date or severely limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response Post 1</strong></td>
<td>Completely, thoroughly, and logically responds to all components of the question; critical thinking apparent; course content applied; provides evidence/support; AND/or meets the word count.</td>
<td>Partially responds to question in a meaningful way; response may lack completeness or evidence of critical thinking; does not provide enough evidence/support; AND/or does not meet the word count.</td>
<td>Response is not complete and/or is missing important information; lacks critical analysis of the discussion topic; provides poor evidence/support; AND/or does not meet the word count.</td>
<td>Not posted by due date or severely limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response Post 2</strong></td>
<td>Completely, thoroughly, and logically responds to all components of the question; critical thinking apparent; course content applied; provides evidence/support; AND/or meets the word count.</td>
<td>Partially responds to question in a meaningful way; response may lack completeness or evidence of critical thinking; does not provide enough evidence/support; AND/or does not meet the word count.</td>
<td>Response is not complete and/or is missing important information; lacks critical analysis of the discussion topic; provides poor evidence/support; AND/or does not meet the word count.</td>
<td>Not posted by due date or severely limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Style</strong></td>
<td>Appropriate grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; ideas are clearly and concisely expressed; AND no more than 2 errors.</td>
<td>Appropriate grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; ideas are fairly organized and clear; AND no more than 4 errors.</td>
<td>Poor grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; writing lacks organization and logical thought; AND no more than 6 errors.</td>
<td>Greater than 7 errors noted in grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; OR not college-level writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Rubric Worksheet**

**Rubric Name:** Discussion Board Example

**Total Possible Points:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator (Levels of Achievement)</th>
<th>Novice</th>
<th>Competent</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Superior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting Evidence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relies on insufficient, irrelevant, or unreliable information</td>
<td>Relies on insufficient, irrelevant, or unreliable information</td>
<td>Relies on insufficient, irrelevant, or unreliable information</td>
<td>Relies on insufficient, irrelevant, or unreliable information</td>
<td>Relies on insufficient, irrelevant, or unreliable information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fails to identify or hastily dismisses strong, relevant counter-arguments</td>
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<td>Fails to identify or hastily dismisses strong, relevant counter-arguments</td>
<td>Fails to identify or hastily dismisses strong, relevant counter-arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confuses information and inferences drawn from that information</td>
<td>Confuses information and inferences drawn from that information</td>
<td>Confuses information and inferences drawn from that information</td>
<td>Confuses information and inferences drawn from that information</td>
<td>Confuses information and inferences drawn from that information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication (grammar &amp; writing skills)</strong></td>
<td>Greater than 7 errors noted in grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; OR not college-level writing.</td>
<td>Poor grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; writing lacks organization and logical thought; AND no more than 5 errors.</td>
<td>Appropriate grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; ideas are fairly organized and clear; AND no more than 3 errors.</td>
<td>Appropriate grammar, spelling, and/or punctuation; ideas are clearly and concisely expressed; AND no more no errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No citations or references OR greater than 6 APA errors.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Content Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Response does not address any of the components</td>
<td>Responses are incomplete and missing information</td>
<td>Partially responds to the components in the discussion prompts</td>
<td>Thoroughly and logically responds to all components in the discussion prompts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Collaboration  | Include  
|----------------|----------------|
| **timeliness** | -Does not collaborate with fellow learners  
-Does not explain relevant course concepts  
-Does not contribute examples/experiences to the discussion | -Collaborates with fellow learners without relating discussion to relevant course concepts  
-Explains relevant course concepts  
-Contributes examples/experiences to the discussion | -Collaborates with fellow learners, relating the discussion to relevant course concepts  
-Applies relevant course concepts  
-Integrates experiences/examples to the discussion | -Collaborates with fellow learners, relating the discussion to relevant course concepts and extends the dialogue  
-Analyzes course concepts  
-Integrates experiences/examples to the discussion to extend the dialogue |
Developing Engaging Discussion Prompts

Some instructors like to assign roles in discussions to further engage and empower students, provide additional structure to the experience, encourage exploration of multiple perspectives, and help manage participation. Typically, roles are rotated with each discussion board. They may include facilitator, devil’s advocate, and summarizer (responsible for summing up the entire discussion). This technique may be particularly valuable if your approach is to use discussion boards primarily as a method of instruction.

Consider:
Discussion boards are a way to work toward accomplishment of learning outcomes at the middle levels of understanding. Here are a few examples of action verbs from relevant levels of Bloom’s cognitive domain:

- Understanding: Describe; Explain; Defend; Rewrite
- Application: Demonstrate; Illustrate; Interpret; Criticize
- Analysis: Predict; Compare; Examine; Analyze
- Evaluation: Argue; Assess; Judge; Rate; Support; Critique

Discussions can be used as small writing activities that help learners work towards a larger written work.

Example #1:

Initial Post:
Find one peer-reviewed research article that uses ANOVA. Use the research databases in the library to locate the article. Then answer the following:

a) What was the research question?
b) What were the independent variable(s) and the dependent variable(s).
d) Did the researchers use one-way ANOVA, two-way ANOVA, or repeated measures ANOVA?
e) Was this test appropriate? Why?
f) Identify the $F$ statistic. What is your interpretation of this result?
g) Discuss whether it was appropriate for the researchers to use ANOVA.

Response Posts:
Read the posts of other learners and respond to at least 2 other learners. Your responses are expected to be substantive in nature and reference the assigned
readings, as well as other theoretical, empirical, or professional literature to support your views and writings. In your response, do at least one of the following:

- Ask a probing question.
- Offer a suggestion.
- Elaborate on a particular point.
- Provide an alternative perspective.

Example #2:

**Initial Post:**
We discussed two ways to measure crime – official police reports and victimization surveys. Discuss two differences between these two measures of crime. Which way do you believe gives the best estimate and why? How might we more accurately measure crime? Either suggest a new method of measuring crime or improvements to existing methods.

**Response Posts:**
Select two learners who chose the other measurement tool and debate his/her reasons. Also, critique his/her suggestions for more accurately measuring crime.

Example #3

**Initial Post:**
Recall a recent learning experience in which you were the learner and write a brief description of that experience. Describe your own learner characteristics in instructional design terms. Examine the learning experience you described relative to your own learner characteristics and answer these questions:

1. What elements in the learning experience (other than the content) enabled you to achieve what you should have from the experience, and why?
2. What elements in the learning experience (other than the content) interfered with your ability to achieve what you should have from the experience, and why?

**Response Posts:**
Examine the responses of two other learners from an instructional design perspective. If you were redesigning the learning experience that each learner describes, determine what you might do differently based on the information they provide about the learning experience and how they characterize themselves as learners. Write a brief rationale for any changes you would make to the design of the original learning experience.
Cognitive Domain Verbs

Verbs in **boldface** appear in more than one column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Domain</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>Abstract, Animate, Arrange, Assemble, Budget, Categorize, Code, Combine, Compile, Compare, Compose, Develop, Generalize, Join, Portray, Reorganize, Reorganize, Report, Rewrite, Schematize, Specify, Summarize, Support, Write</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>Appraise, Argue, Assess, Choose, Compare, Conclude, Contrast, Counsel, Criticize, Critique, Defend, Determine, Discriminate, Estimate, Evaluate, Explain, Grade, Justify, Measure, Predict, Prescribe, Select, Summarize, Support, Test, Validate, Value, Verify</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyzing</td>
<td>Analyze, Appraise, Audit, Blueprint, Breadboard, Break down, Characterize, Choose, Classify, Compare, Confirm, Contrast, Correlate, Criticize, Deduce, Detect, Diagnose, Diagram, Differentiate, Discriminate, Dissect, Document, Evaluate, Examine, Experiment, Explain, Explore, Figure out, Flow, Group, Identify, Illustrate, Infer, Interact, Interrupt, Inventory, Investigate, Lay out, Manage, Maximize, Minimize, Optimize, Order, Organize, Outline, Point out, Prioritize, Proofread, Query, Question, Relate, Select, Separate, Size up, Subdivide, Summarize, Test, Train, Transform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>Acquire, Adapt, Allocate, Alphabetize, Apply, Ascertain, Assign, Attain, Avoid, Back up, Calculate, Capture, Change, Choose, Complete, Compute, Construct, Customize, Demonstrate, Depreciate, Derive, Determine, Diminish, Discover, Dramatize, Draw, Employ, Examine, Exercise, Explore, Expose, Express, Factor, Figure, Graph, Handle, Illustrate, Interpret, Investigate, Manipulate, Modify, Operate, Personalize, Plot, Practice, Predict, Prepare, Price, Process, Produce, Project, Protect, Provide, Relate, Round off, Sequence, Schedule, Show, Simulate, Sketch, Solve, Subscribe, Tabulate, Transcribe, Translate, Use, Write</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Add, Approximate, Articulate, Associate, Characterize, Clarify, Classify, Compare, Compute, Contrast, Convert, Defend, Demonstrate, Describe, Detail, Differentiate, Discuss, Distinguish, Elaborate, Estimate, Example, Explain, Express, Extrapolate, Factor, Generalize, Give, Identify, Infer, Interact, Interact, Interpret, Interpret, Locate, Observe, Paraphrase, Picture graphically, Predict, Recognize, Report, Restate, Review, Rewrite, Select, Subtract, Summarize, Translate, Visualize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>Cite, Count, Define, Describe, Draw, Duplicate, Enumerate, Identify, Indicate, Label, List, Match, Meet, Memorize, Name, Outline, Point, Quote, Read, Recall, Review, Recite, Recognize, Record, Repeat, Reproduce, Review, Select, Show, State, Study, Tabulate, Trace, Write</td>
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