



Notes on Class Discussions

Much of the participation in online courses is measured through discussions. This [rubric](#) gives you an idea of the types of things instructors evaluate in your discussion contributions. Additionally, the following tips will help you excel in the online discussions, and the deeper understanding you achieve through discussions will help your performance on other course activities.

RESPONDING TO THE ORIGINAL PROMPT

- **Respond with the right information.** Make sure you read the question prompt carefully and include all the information and references your instructor asks for. In addition, at right is a list of the kinds of questions instructors might ask and how to go about answering them.
- **Consider adding media.** Include a link to make your response more engaging or include a video, article/passage or photo that is relevant to your response.
- **Encourage your classmates to respond to your postings** to invite further discussion:
 - Ask for clarification or further explanation about an aspect of the question you had trouble answering.
 - Ask your classmates to make a connection between the topic and another piece of literature, movie, or something they have personally experienced.
 - Invite your peers to draw a different conclusion or share another perspective.
 - If you presented an opinion or idea about the given topic that was not addressed in the question, ask your peers to respond to it.
 - Present a controversial idea or statement, and ask peers if they agree or disagree with the statement.
 - Encourage peers to ask questions about the points you made if anything was confusing or unclear.

RESPONDING TO YOUR CLASSMATES

- **Acknowledge your classmates** when they post exceptional responses to your discussion posts.
- **Provide encouragement** and direction to classmates whose responses need improvement.
 - Follow up with supplementary/additional questions and/or an explanation if peer responses lack depth or clarity, or if the responses are unfocused.
 - Make constructive suggestions that will support your peers in the development of their ideas.



- **Netiquette - always maintain a respectful tone.** Treat your peers as you would expect a teacher to treat you.
- **Make “I” statements:** *“I like your explanations Camille, but I think Henry did give up searching for Keiko. After years of no contact and moving on he finally let Keiko go, or tried to. Henry got married, I think it would be very dishonorable to search for a lover while married and Chinese are all about honor.”*
- **Use classmates’ names in your reply**
- **Avoid generic compliments:** Instead of “Great job!” tell them exactly what they did well. Reference specific content from their posting.
- **Keep critiques focused on the content, not the person:** If you have a different perspective, explain and support it. *“Good point, Sierra. I can see where you are coming from. I, however, agree with the statement because I feel like Elinor could begin to like Colonel Brandon to get her mind off of loving Edward. And I think that when Marianne doesn’t like somebody, then Elinor does.”*
- **Keep questions clear and concise to avoid confusion.** If asking about a specific part of their posting, then specifically reference it.

DISCUSSIONS QUESTION TYPES

- **Interpretive Questions** have more than one “right” answer. They require that you interpret the information based on your unique perspective and support it with evidence.
- **Subjective Questions** require you to produce information based on your personal opinion. Each answer will vary based on the subjective point of view being presented.
- **Evaluative Questions** have no wrong answer because they ask you to evaluate an issue, topic, piece of information, situation, etc. using your particular viewpoint to support those judgments.
- **Problem Solving Questions** present a situation, dilemma, or problem to be solved. When responding try to present clear solutions based on your knowledge and opinion.
- **Brainstorming Questions** ask people to generate a large number of ideas. The quantity and diversity of ideas is crucial to the success of brainstorming questions, so don’t hold back.
- **Debate Questions** require you to take a position on an issue then provide a justification for you position. You need to understand the topic, provide convincing evidence, address counter arguments by evaluating other points of view, and organize your points to maximize their effectiveness.

