

Pedagogical Considerations and Tips for Discussion Forums in D2L
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So, you've decided to incorporate discussion forums into your class. **What now?**



Tip #1: **Have student responses due the same days** each week when you use them over the course of a class.

- Example: Initial post due Wednesday by 11:59 pm CST; response to a peer due Sunday at 11:59 pm CST.
 - Note: No one says that discussion forums are required in a class or need to be used weekly. If you choose to use them, though, have the due dates be the same every time you use them.

Tip #2: Enable **individual student choice** when possible.

- Ask them to find and post items from the news, from their disciplines, from their worlds, etc. so that they are helping **source the content** for the class while addressing the requirements you set out for them.
- Let them share their individual discussions through **different kinds of mediums**, not just the written word. Consider letting them make short videos, presentations, audio recordings, images, infographics, recording interviews, making websites, and so on. Discussion forums can be sites for **activities** and asking students to engage with their peers about the activities that they create.

Tip #3: At least occasionally, **ask students to work in smaller groups**.

- You can create groups intentionally by using the “groups” feature in D2L.
- You can provide a few threads within a discussion forum that allow students to choose to respond to one of the threaded options. This way, students can choose the topic they want to respond to--and engage with peers who are similarly interested.

Tip #4: Consider whether you want to allow students to make their initial post without having access to their peers’ posts first.

- Benefits: Students will have to explain their own ideas fully, can’t gather ideas from their peers before making their initial post, will likely gain confidence in their individual ability to think critically.
- Drawbacks: Students may not benefit from considering other people’s perspectives before forming their own, and they can get curmudgeonly about having to submit first before seeing their peers’ ideas.

Tip #5: Create a document that **clearly lays out your expectations and desires for meaningful discussion.**

- So that it's not seen as just a boring "add on" or mere requirement, be intentional in your communication about the value that you see in peer-to-peer discussions, what you expect them to do in their initial posts and how you expect them to interact with their peers (use some examples of kinds of questions, if possible), how you will grade this component of class, and how you personally will interact with it (e.g., responding in discussion threads--or not, saying a number that you'll respond to each week, etc.).

Tip #6: Create a document, or find one that's relevant to your discipline, that lays out the **kinds of conversations** you expect students to have.

- Ideally, you'd include some **tips of your own** and kinds of questions to ask or respond to.
 - Example: "For a set of discussion board posts to be successful, you should do the following: Demonstrate accurate understanding of relevant course concepts, explain your own perspective clearly and fully, use examples from your own observations, and go beyond mere agreement with your peers. In responding to peers, it may be helpful to pose some counterexamples, connect in terms of your own experience, add additional support from course materials, and be as specific as possible in your own reasoning."