**D2L Discussion Tool**

D2L’s Discussion Tool fosters student-to-student learning. The tool can be used in a variety of ways to engage students and to encourage students to explore and learn new concepts and skills.

### Why use them?

* Students read other perspectives and consider a response.
* Can be used to develop a stronger class community.
* Provide more opportunities to cite research and class readings.
* Allows opportunities to engage in higher-level thinking.
* Shy students tend to participate more in discussion.
* Can be used to provide feedback before and after class.
* Can be used as a space to target learning gaps. Serve as a space for FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)?
* Be a space for peer review?
* Introduce additional material and further application of ideas already presented?
* Provides a place where you can participate in the discussion.

**Effective Questions for Leading Discussions -** Effective questions are the key to an effective discussion. Analysis, synthesis, and evaluation questions generally lend themselves to more in-depth discussion of the topic. However, starting with a few knowledge-type questions is an excellent way to get students warmed-up. Then progressing through comprehension and application questions will ensure that they understand the topic before you get to the in-depth discussion.

| **Type of Question** | **Explanation** | **Example** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Knowledge | Simple questions that test for content knowledge of subject matter | What is the purpose of \_?  Describe \_?  Who, what, where, how \_? |
| Comprehension | Explain, interpret, give examples, summarize concepts in your own words | What was the contribution of \_?  Retell \_? |
| Application | Requires application of knowledge (use of rules, facts, principles) | How is \_ an example of \_?  How is \_ related to \_?  Why is \_ significant? |
| Analysis | Requires the application of principles in new settings | Compare and contrast \_ with \_?  What are the parts or features of \_?  What evidence do you have for \_?  Outline/diagram of \_ |
| Synthesis | Requires combining ideas | How would you design \_?  How would you suggest \_?  What might happen if you combine \_ and \_? |
| Evaluation | Requires making a judgement | Do you agree with \_?  What criteria would you use to assess\_ ?  What is the most important \_?  What do you think about \_? |

## **Effective Prompts**

**Questions to jump-start the discussion** - Probe for deeper analysis, ask for clarification or examples, explore implications, etc. Question types:

* + 1. **Exploratory:** probe facts and basic knowledge
    2. **Challenge:** interrogate assumptions, conclusions, or interpretations.
    3. **Relational:** ask for comparisons of themes, ideas, or issues
    4. **Diagnostic:** probe motives or causes
    5. **Action:** call for a conclusion or action
    6. **Cause and effect:** ask for causal relationships between ideas, actions or events
    7. **Extension:** expand the discussion
    8. **Hypothetical:** pose a change in the facts or issues
    9. **Priority:** see to identify the most important issues
    10. **Summary:** elicit synthesis

### Setup of Discussions:

* Set clear expectations! (Yours and theirs)
* Specify how students should use the subject line or thread name in their initial post and their replies.
* Organize forums and threads to reflect the class chronology or topic sequence.
* Provide a schedule of discussion topics including their start and end dates, and the topic names.
* Use a Rubric for grading.

### Guidelines for Interaction:

* Start the major topic yourself unless you’ve set clear guidelines for students to moderate.
* Encourage, reinforce or redirect students and/or narrow down the discussions.
* Be present: Let students know how often you will participate in the discussions. While participating you should redirect, challenge, and summarize student posts.
* Mention students’ names when responding to their messages.
* In your responses, address the portion of the message you’re referring to by copying it or clearly referencing it.
* Provide feedback that promotes higher-level thinking and acknowledge students’ work through your comments.
* Technique to manage big classes: Have a student summarize the week’s discussion. This serves as closure and provides a good place for students to reference or review the topics in the future.

## **Sources:**

Ko, S., & Rossen, S. (2010). *Teaching Online: A Practical Guide*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

<http://drscavanaugh.org/discussion/online/benefits_of_a_discussion_forum.htm>

<http://www.bestlibrary.org/digital/files/ITBL_ReasonsforOnlineDiscussions.pdf>

[www.edutopia.org/pdfs/stw/edutopia-onlinelearning-mastering-online-discussion-board-facilitation.pdf](http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/stw/edutopia-onlinelearning-mastering-online-discussion-board-facilitation.pdf)

Davis, B.G. (1993). Tools for Teaching. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

[www.carleton.ca/edu](http://www.carleton.ca/edu) , Teaching Tips

## **Technical Use**

**Discussion Functions -** D2L discussions has different functions that instructors can leverage to change learning activities.

* Users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads
  + Good if you want students to form an opinion before viewing other’s responses
* A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic
  + Good if your discussion if you are afraid students will spread misinformation through the discussion
* Allow anonymous posts
  + Allows posters in this discussion will mark the author as “Anonymous”

**Group Discussions -** In the Discussion Tool, there are different ways to sort students into groups. The three key features of this are: auto enrolling groups so the instructor does not need to manually go through all students, students can self enroll in groups, and the instructor can place the students into groups. Students will not be able to see the discussions of students in other groups. Below is a list of the different ways to sort students into groups:

* # of Groups – No Auto Enrollments
  + The instructor sets how many groups will be in the class and requires the professor to put students into groups
* Groups of #
  + The instructor sets how many students will be in each group and the groups auto-enroll students
* # of Groups
  + The instructor sets how many groups will be in the class and the groups auto-enroll students
* Groups of # - Self-Enrollment
  + The instructor sets how many students will be in each group and the students select their group
* # of Groups - Self-Enrollment
  + The instructor sets how many groups will be in the class and the students select their group
* # of Groups, Capacity of # - Self-Enrollment
* Single user, member-specific groups

**Grading Discussions -** Using these features will make grading discussions faster and easier.

* Use the Rubrics Tool
  + Using this tool will allow you to give general and specific feedback while viewing all of the student’s postings to the discussion
* Connecting Discussion Topic to the Gradebook
  + This connection will automatically update grades in the gradebook