

Online Discussion Tips

Online discussions are a key component of blended learning environments, and they require a unique skillset. Use the various strategies and resources listed below to facilitate successful discussions in blended learning environments.

- Begin a discussion group with friendly introductions. Finding commonalities will begin to build community, leading to more motivated and productive discussions.
- Stay involved and be visible in all discussions, without overpowering student-to-student discourse or becoming the central focus.
- Model for students how to be explicit and use precise wording to make a point in a text-based discussion. This is important when students cannot rely on facial expressions, body language, and other social cues.
- Use sarcasm and humor judiciously because it can easily be misinterpreted in online discussions.
- Hold students accountable for reviewing previous responses before contributing, thereby moving discussions forward rather than repeating information.
- Stake out a controversial position or play devil's advocate to challenge students to think through their ideas.
- Engage students in thinking by inviting them to problem-solve a dilemma you are facing.
- Ask questions that can be responded to with a thoughtful answer.
- Provide feedback to let students know when they are on the right track.
- Highlight important points made during discussions.
- Question students about their understanding, or ask them to clarify and expand on certain ideas.
- Use timing in your responses to affect the pace and feel of conversations. An instantaneous response helps to keep a conversation moving, but may make students feel pressured to also respond quickly. A timely response (such as within one or two days) helps students feel responded to yet allows time for reflection.
- Correct misconceptions and misunderstandings.
- Provide direct instruction if students are struggling to understand the material.
- Teach students how to appropriately respond to disagreements or possible misinterpretations. Set the tone for higher-level discourse that allows for different points of view in a respectful environment.
- Post thoughtful answers that contain more questions and move the conversation forward, thereby sustaining the flow of the conversation beyond a simple question/answer rhythm.

Resources

Center for Professional Development

<http://tlt.suny.edu/originaldocumentation/library/cm/enhanceddiscussion.htm>*

Tips for enhancing online discussions

Faculty Focus—Discussion Forums

www.facultyfocus.com/articles/asynchronous-learning-and-trends/eight-tips-for-facilitating-effective-online-discussion-forums*

Eight tips for facilitating effective online discussion forums

Faculty Focus—Instructor's Role

www.facultyfocus.com/articles/asynchronous-learning-and-trends/understanding-the-instructors-role-in-facilitating-online-discussions*

Understanding the instructor's role in facilitating online discussions

Leader Networks

www.leadernetworks.com/downloads/Online_Discussion_Tips.pdf*

Top tips for moderators of online discussion groups