

Discussion Forum Activities

Discussions are often a standard requirement in an online class. Traditionally, an instructor poses a question, learners respond to the question, and then reply to a required number of peer posts. This usually comprises part of the learners' final grade in the class. Below are suggestions for other methods of using discussion forums in a class. Approximately 400 words for an individual post, and 200 words for replies, is recommended. Below are suggestions for other methods of using discussion forums in class.

Introductory Post

At the start of the term the instructor and students should write and post a brief introduction. The post should include:

- Your name
- The department or organization with which you are affiliated
- What experience you have with online teaching and learning (if any)
- What you hope to get out of taking this course
- A photo of you, or which represents you in some way

Please add an avatar (*a picture that becomes your "icon" when you post*) to help all of us put a "face" to your discussion posts. Your avatar can be a picture of you, but it could also be a picture of something that describes you in some way (e.g., a photo of art you've made, a photo of your pet, some scenery you like, etc.). Adding avatars can be helpful in building a connection with others in a class, but you should always give your students the option to post something other than a photograph of themselves. You can find instructions on how to add an avatar on the FAQ page.

Assigned Roles

Consider assigning various roles to discussion participants. For example, if you are studying a topic you may want to assign the roles of the various stakeholders to learners. You may want to first break learners up into smaller discussion groups. They would then respond to the discussion topics and peer posts from the perspective of their assigned role.

Another option for assigned roles is to again break learners up into smaller groups. You may want to have more than one learner assigned to a role. Create and assign roles such as:

- Question Creator-the learner in charge of composing the discussion topics or questions.
- Replier-the learner who replies to the discussion topics or questions.
- Commenter-the learner who comments on the replies to the discussion topics or questions.
- Related Media Searcher-the learner who searches for media related to the discussion.
- Fact-finder-the learner who finds facts to share about the discussion topics or questions.

Case Study Focus

The instructor may have a case study they would like to focus a discussion on. Here the instructor would share the case study and learners would have an opportunity to ask questions or discuss potential issues related to the content.

Content Quest

When you are introducing a new concept you may want to ask learners to search online for related content. This would be a great opportunity to share digital media about the concept and for learners to comment on what they discovered.

Invited Expert

Perhaps you know an expert who would be interested in sharing their expertise by participating or leading a discussion with learners. This would allow learners an opportunity to pose their own questions, share ideas and receive feedback from an expert in the field.

Idea Sharing

Using the discussion forum for sharing ideas or brainstorming about an issue is another opportunity to encourage innovation. Here learners could be encouraged to share and also to respond to peer driven solutions.

Peer Review

Discussions may also be a great opportunity for learners to share their work and have their peers review it. This peer review of the learners' composition could offer valuable feedback for improvement and inspiration. This could also be a great way to lead up to incorporating a more formal peer assessment into the class.

Learner Led

Rather than the instructor having to create questions or discussion topics, have learners compose their own to start the conversation flowing. This would encourage learners to direct their own learning and create their own meaningful dialogue.

Poster Session

You may have been to a traditional conference with a poster session. Here large posters are created and displayed to share information about academic research. Learners may want to design a digital poster to share information about their own academic research. An [infographic](#) is one option to consider for designing a digital poster to share information. Digital posters could be shared in the discussion forum as a foundation to spark discussions.