

TIPS FOR IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS



In-class discussions tend to facilitate direct peer interaction better than online discussions, so effective conversations require different skills than responding to a Discussion Board.

Understand Grading Criteria

You'll want to understand if and how your responses are being assessed. With in-person discussions especially, professors may have specific expectations about responding to your peers' contributions, so make sure you understand any requirements before starting the discussion in class.

Be Original

Before you jump into the discussion, consider if one of your peers has already shared a similar idea. Rather than repeating them, you may want to offer additional support for their idea, respectfully propose a counter-argument, or introduce a new idea. The discussion will be more beneficial when people share their own nuanced thoughts instead of restating ideas in different words.

Consider Context

People's unique backgrounds inevitably inform their ideas. When you engage with your peers, consider how their personal experiences are similar and different to yours, and how that might impact their views on a topic. Similarly, check how your own background might be influencing your opinions. Keep the conversation respectful by remembering that disagreement with someone's ideas doesn't have to be disagreeable.

Ask Questions

One of the best ways to directly engage with your peers is to ask them to clarify their ideas. Not only does this help you gain a better understanding of the topic, but it will also push them to improve their explicatory skills and clearly support their ideas. Asking questions is also a great way to draw quiet classmates into the conversation.

Mind the Time

While it's perfectly OK to talk multiple times during an in-class discussion, be mindful that you're not dominating the conversation. Just like you want to be concise online, think of how your ideas fit within the broader conversation rather than using the discussion as a chance to lecture your peers.

TIPS FOR ONLINE DISCUSSION POSTS



Discussion Boards are becoming a popular option for professors to engage their students in an online format. Keep the previous tips and these ones in mind to craft a substantive reply!

Understand Grading Criteria

Review your professor's instructions or syllabus before you begin writing to understand how your post will be graded. If there are no expectations provided and you're unsure, check in with your professor so you are both on the same page and get the most out of the discussion.

Brainstorm Before You Reply

Just like any piece of writing, take a few minutes to consider your answers to the prompt before you start. Because discussion posts are short, it can be tempting not to plan your ideas. However, brainstorming will help you refine your thoughts and craft a more cohesive response than if you just start typing.

Be Concise

Think of your post as dialogue within the broader discussion, not an opportunity for you to monologue. Your classmates are more likely to read and respond to a shorter post, so keep your reply focused and succinct.

Reference the Readings

Many professors assign discussion posts in response to required readings or other materials. Make sure to cite these sources if you use them in your response to signal to your professor that you have understood the important concepts and can apply them to formulate your own opinions.

Check Details Before Submitting

Before you hit 'reply', double-check that you've addressed all of your professor's questions and met the word count (if there is one). Forgetting to answer a question is a simple way to lose crucial points, and you miss the chance to engage that content.