Quick Tips and Purposeful Discussion Ideas

- Clearly explain the purpose and relevancy of each discussion forum.
- Make discussions gradable as a consistent participation element (*students are strategic and may not participate if there is no incentive)*.
- Create open-ended (*Socratic*) questions that compel learners to share their experiences, bring in new sources, and apply concepts.
- Stagger due dates: e.g. Initial discussion response due Wed, replies to classmates due on Friday.
- Ask for two-part responses: (1) what you liked, or agreed with, and (2) what you are still wondering or curious about, etc.
- Provide response choices: Let students share learning as it relates to their own work experiences and needs.
- Mix mediums: use text-based discussion forums alternately with FlipGrid (*video-verbal*), visual Google Slide discussions, VoiceThread discussions, or Blogs.

Examples of purposeful online discussions:

- **Brainstorming**
  Challenge students to come up with a large number of new ideas. Those ideas can then be analyzed, classified, or applied later in an assignment or another discussion.

- **Send-a-Problem**
  Students post problem-based prompts relevant to their experiences or what they are learning about. Challenge students with providing a solution in their reply, as well as comparing advantages and disadvantages of each other’s posted solutions.

- **Student Summary**
  As a variation of the brainstorming discussion or problem-solving, task one student to write a summary of ideas, solutions, and arguments presented throughout each discussion forum by a certain end date.

- **Muddy Moments**
  Students identify an area of confusion in the course content. Challenge students to help each other out by providing answers to their classmates.

- **Applied Peer Discussions**
  Integrate discussion question prompts so that posts and replies are applied in the context of a course.
assignment or project. Example: Students create a concrete product (a website, flyer, or proposal) and post it in the forum for peer evaluation.

- **Debate**
  Students create sophisticated, concise evidence-based arguments for or against a position with the intention of persuading others. Have one student moderate the discussion and another student determine arguments that successfully changed student opinions.

- **Devil’s Advocate**
  Students are tasked to find weaknesses in a proposed idea, solution, theory, or concept. They should cite evidence or reasoning for their stance.

- **Ask the Experts**
  Students come up with topics they want to master, then develop an FAQ forum with strategies, tips, and tools to help others master the skill.

**Notes on Instructor facilitation:**

Be a frequent contributor in your online discussion boards. Establish a positive (but not intrusive) presence, and model responses that question, enrich, and guide the discourse, just as you would in a face-to-face class. Think about giving participation points for discussions as making it optional can send a message that it’s not important. [Online Discussion Questions That Work – Faculty Focus](https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructionalstrategies/discussions.html)

**Relevant**

Discussion questions should be interesting and applicable to the course learning goals. For example, post a fascinating problem, scenario, or dilemma that mirrors what students are learning, and then ask how they would go about solving it. Pose a challenge that causes students to rethink assumptions and inspire them to support their statements with research.

**Timely**

Ask timely, compelling questions that motivate students to want to discuss them, such as a related current event or news item. This gets students thinking about how they can apply what they are learning to new situations.

**Discussion Pitfalls** - Don’t:

- Ask too many questions at once
- Fail to explore the implications of answers
- Ask unconnected questions
- Ask yes/no or leading questions
  [https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructionalstrategies/discussions.html](https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/design/instructionalstrategies/discussions.html)

**Group work pitfalls** – Don’t assign team projects without:

- Preparing students to work in teams first
- Providing ongoing teamwork support is critical to team success and student learning.
  [https://www.scholarlyteacher.com/blog/stop-assigning-team-projects](https://www.scholarlyteacher.com/blog/stop-assigning-team-projects)