



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*

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>

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>