

Interactive & Multimedia Learning Discussion Participation Guide

OVERVIEW

Participation in course discussions is a key part of this course and contributes **40% of your total mark** (5% per discussion, with 8 discussions in total). Discussions are an opportunity to demonstrate engagement, thoughtfulness, and collaboration. Avoid filler content—focus on creating **critical, constructive, helpful, and supportive contributions**. Your posts should be **substantive but succinct**, clear, and kind.

You are expected to participate **individually** in each discussion, adhering to the schedule provided in the course outline to maintain a **semi-synchronous flow**.

You don't have to read/respond to every post, but scan through the subject lines and engage with some of your peers. To meet expectations (i.e., high B, 75-79%) you will typically produce 5-10 substantive entries (either as OP on new threads or in responding to existing threads) with a total wordcount of perhaps 800-1000 words in each discussion. Aim for starting posts of 100–300 words for readability, responses should typically be 50-200 words. However, I am looking for more than just words, I'm looking for engagement, early participation, authentic contributions, connection making, creativity, and extras (links to relevant resources, images), etc..

I am not marking for grammar in these discussions (focus on engagement!). **You may not use any type of AI to generate your responses** (I will make an exception for your initial posts in the Introduction and Final Reflection discussions).

EXPECTATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTIONS (5%)

- **Post your introduction** in the first couple of days, following the provided prompts. You might include some images of yourself and your email so folks can easily contact you.
- **Engage with peers** by responding to their posts, asking thoughtful questions, and building connections.
- **Tips:**
 - Look for classmates with shared interests or compatible goals as contacts.
 - Connect with potential teammates for the first challenge (groups of 3–4 are required; note that you can switch teams for later challenges).

FINAL REFLECTIONS (5%)

- **Reflect on your participation** in the course and your learning journey
- Responses to peers are welcome but not mandatory; even one **substantive reflection (800-1000 words)** is sufficient to meet expectations.
- See the discussion introduction for specific prompts.

SHARING AND HELPING (3 DISCUSSIONS, 5% EACH)

- Share discoveries related to the challenges, such as apps, tutorials, websites, or tools, and explain their relevance.
- Engage with others by **asking questions, offering help, and responding to posts.**
- **Tips for effective participation:**
 - Create new threads for distinct topics, or add connected content to existing threads.
 - Focus on posts that haven't received much attention to ensure a balanced/inclusive discussion.
 - Start participating early for maximum impact and usefulness.
 - If stuck, reflect on course principles or review resources and share insights.

PEER PROTOTYPE REVIEW DISCUSSION (3 DISCUSSIONS, 5% EACH)

- **Review and provide feedback** on other groups' prototypes and descriptions after they are shared.
- Prioritize prototypes with fewer than three responses to ensure all groups receive feedback.
- **Ideas for feedback:**
 - Highlight aspects you appreciated.
 - Suggest revisions or improvements.
 - Connect your feedback to design principles or learning theories.
 - Share related examples or ask clarifying questions.
- Engage early to ensure your input is timely and valuable.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

1. **Quantity:**
 - Aim for **5-10 substantive posts** per discussion, with a total word count of **800-1000 words** for a high B mark (75-79%).
 - Plan to spend a total of **3-4 hours** on each discussion.
2. **Quality:**
 - Demonstrate thoughtful engagement, critical insight, and clear connections to course content and principles.
 - Exceptional insight, effort, and inclusion of resources can elevate marks into the A-range.
3. **Timeliness:**
 - Posts made early in the discussion are more helpful and earn more credit.
4. **Connection to Literature:**
 - Reference course readings and other sources wherever possible.
5. **Communication:**
 - Ensure clarity and positivity in your posts. Grammar is not graded, but AI-generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Bing, Grammarly) is strictly prohibited in discussions unless explicitly allowed (i.e., your initial post on your introduction, your initial post on your final reflection – but even then, they must be refinements of your thoughts.).

DISCUSSION TIPS

Adapted from: *Online Discussions: Tips for Students*. Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo.
<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/catalogs/tip-sheets/online-discussions-tips-students>

Online discussions can help you prepare for class, learn discussion skills, practice your writing skills, and learn from others. To be successful, you need to translate your face-to-face discussion skills to the online environment. Remember that online discussions are first and foremost dialogues, not writing assignments. The following tips highlight key features of effective online discussion strategies, whether for discussion groups. These are general strategies.

WRITING A POST

- **Review the discussion instructions.**

Your discussion may be more open-ended or there may be specific discussion prompts. In the case when there are specific discussion prompts, read them carefully and respond to all aspects of the prompt. Also, note whether your instructor wants you to include references and, if so, how many.

For more open-ended discussions, complete any of the assigned readings prior to drafting your post. You may be asked to think of a thesis and how to support it. Then read the other postings and see how they support or contradict your idea and write about this. Another strategy is to look for postings that lack evidence and probe for some. You can also turn your thoughts into questions or share alternate viewpoints. Remember, though, that opinions aren't arguments. Be sure to support what you say with references to course materials or outside sources, such as readings.

- **Use keywords in your title.**

Online discussions can generate many messages, so you need to consider efficient ways to make your contributions. To help the other participants quickly understand what your post is about, be sure that your title clearly indicates the content that will follow. "My ideas about today's readings" isn't nearly as clear as "My opinion on Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia." Your title could even summarize the opinion, argument, or question that you raise, like in the following: "Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia: A false divide."

- **Encourage discussion.**

If you're the first to post, strive to encourage discussion. Get others thinking (and writing) by making bold statements or including open-ended questions in your message. Those who post first are most often responded to and cited by others. Remember to check back and see if and how others have responded to your ideas.

- **Make posts short, clear, and purposeful.**

Review the discussion guidelines for how long your posts should be. If length is not specified, write one to two meaningful paragraphs because long messages are difficult to read online. Another consideration is to make only one main point in each post, supported by evidence and/or an example. Be concise (Vonderwell, 2003).

- Your stance need not be forever.

It can be intimidating to take a stand on an issue at times, especially when you put it in writing, which we associate with permanence. Remember that you are allowed to change your mind! Simply indicate that with the new information raised in the discussion, you have changed your stance. Learning is about change.

- Other practical considerations for discussion board postings

It can be frustrating to read through a busy discussion forum with lots of posts and replies. Make sure to create new threads if new topics evolve in the discussion. Subscribing to receive email alerts of new postings can help participants keep up with a conversation without checking back into the discussion forum repeatedly. You can configure the tool to receive alerts whenever a new post appears, or receive a daily summary of the posts.

RESPONDING TO OTHER POSTS

- Make the context clear.

An informative title will help, but also consider including in your reply a quotation from the original message that you're responding to. If the original message is lengthy, cut out what is not relevant to your response. If the original has many paragraphs, you could place your comments in bold between the paragraphs to give readers the context for your ideas (Vonderwell, 2003).

- Add value to the conversation.

Saying "I agree" does not move the discussion forward. Ask yourself why you agree and explain your rationale so that others have something else to respond to (Vonderwell, 2003).

- Ask probing questions.

Consider using the following questions when trying to extend a discussion:

- What reasons do you have for saying that?
- Why do you agree (or disagree) on that point?
- How are you defining the term that you just used?
- What do you mean by that expression?
- Could you clarify that remark?
- What follows from what you just said?
- What alternatives are there to such a formulation? (Roper, 2007)

- **Feel free to disagree with your classmates.**

To air different perspectives or help others clarify their thinking, you may need to contradict a classmate. Remember to disagree respectfully (no name-calling or obscenities) and support your point with evidence. Do not feel bad about offering a different interpretation. Your contribution should help to make the discussion more productive for all involved.

- **Work to create group cohesion.**

Discussions are about group learning. When you function well as a group, you will be more open to all the benefits that this type of learning can offer. Give positive feedback to one another, use light humour, avoid comments that could be taken as insulting, use first names, respond promptly to each other, and offer assistance. Also remember the lack of nonverbal and vocal cues in the online environment. You'll need to label emotions (e.g., "I'm confused about this" or "I feel strongly") because no one will pick up on how you feel otherwise.

- Be aware when postings prompt strong emotional responses.

If you feel very emotional about a message, wait before responding. It's very easy to write something in the heat of the moment and then wish you could retract it. If you send it to the discussion, the damage is done. Even waiting overnight can give you enough distance to respond in a calmer and more professional manner.

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

- **Engage in online chats.**

Online chats can provide an opportunity to ask questions or make comments during an online lecture. Try to make your comments concise and clear. Remember to be respectful and professional: don't write anything that you wouldn't speak in class. Also, avoid clogging up the chat with links to extraneous resources. Stay focused and aim to add value to the class experience.

- Be open to new ideas

Discussion is about hearing what others have to say and working to shape and re-shape your own thoughts and perspectives. Different perspectives can further everyone's understanding of the issue or concept being discussed—they represent opportunities for learning.

The online environment comes with many benefits, including learning from your peers in addition to your instructor. Use the time productively to hone lifelong skills and refine your ideas about the course content.

REFERENCES

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