

4 T'S FOR EFFECTIVE DISCUSSIONS

Types

Consider the various types of discussions and how they can benefit your students' learning.



- **Weekly Discussion:** provides students with the opportunity to discuss the classroom topic of the week.
- **Open Forum/Informal Discussion:** provides students with an area to discuss anything they wish pertaining to the course or other campus activities.
- **Specific Topic Discussion:** can be associated with assignments and activities for students to ask questions and clarify instructions.
- **Feedback Discussion:** provides an area where students can share their work and receive comments and feedback from their peers.

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Tone

Consider the tone of your discussion forum and your presence within it.



- Set a friendly and conversational tone for your discussions by ensuring that students know the boards are a safe zone for sharing their thoughts and ideas.
- Think about implementing a discussion guidelines contract to reinforce expectations for participation and post quality that all students sign. Be sure to share feedback early in the semester to create good posting habits for the students.
- Clarify your role and model your expectations as you create your online presence within the discussion boards.
- Build smaller discussion groups within large classes to facilitate small learning communities within the discussion boards.

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Topics

Consider selecting topics that encourage interaction and the sharing of ideas.



- Attempt for quality over quantity when selecting topics.
- Choose thoughtful topics relevant to student learning objectives.
- Incorporate real life situations, implications, and applications within your topics to promote critical thinking.
- Be prepared to help your students find resources that will help further their understanding of the topic.
- Use open ended discussion prompts to encourage elaboration in responses, incentivize deep engagement, and build connections among students.
- Consider allowing students to develop discussion topics relevant to their learning.
- Use a framework for creating each discussion prompt for consistency.

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Technicalities

Consider the various options available to provide structure while allowing for individualization.



- Use rubrics for grading the discussion and participation. Provide the rubrics to the students at the start of the term to set expectations.
- Incorporate various forms of media (links to tweets, blog posts, audio/video files, etc.) within the prompt to promote engagement.
- Stagger due dates for varying levels of participation during the week to decrease student workload over the duration of the discussion.
- Allow students to reply in multiple formats (text, audio, video, related posts, etc.).
- Offer alternatives such as optional live sessions for participation in the discussion.

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