



Best Practices in Discussions and Student Engagement

Identifying Purpose and Outcomes

Discussions are the medium for conversation and the exchange of ideas in your course. They can include but are not limited to exploration and critical thinking about course material, brainstorming, peer critique, meeting for casual Q/A, and more.

- General Considerations
 - Why construct a discussion forum and topic?
 - Show understanding of material
 - Engage/talk in the class – discussions may not be the best tool to get students engaged. Microsoft Teams or groups may be better.

Types of discussions:

Scenario: “What if this happened, what would you do?”

Role-Play: Encourage student to look at an issue from the viewpoint of another.

Experiential: Ask students to share their experiences as they relate to the topic.

Ask the expert: Invite a guest expert to respond to student questions.

Problem-solving: Pose a problem or challenge to solve.

Reflection: Reflect on ideas, what does this topic mean to them and why?

Connect and Critique: Have students find a relevant article, share, summarize.

Analyze: Set up students in groups with case studies to analyze.

Debate: Host a debate where the class is divided in two groups to take on opposing views.

Cause and effect: ask for causal relationships between ideas.

Challenge: question assumptions, conclusions or interpretations.

Student facilitation: Have students be the presenter for a discussion and allow their peers to comment/ask questions

“Hunt and Find” Send students to find an example or outside reading to post for their fellow students. Then assign pairs to read/engage over their findings. (this should also last longer than one week).

Best Practices for discussions:

Assessment/Evaluation

1. Clear expectations on assignments and due dates

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2. Rubric for parameters of excellence, very good, fair, needs improvement
3. Netiquette: set of rules to behave and interact with each other respectfully.
4. Model discourse

Design

1. Small and assigned groups
2. Open-ended questions that guide discussion around a topic but are not so loose that students believe anything is okay to write about.

Use Cases

1. Introductions to the course – who are you, why are you here, get to know classmates, share stories of who they are
2. Reflective sense for students to get a feel for where they are
3. Present to one another for feedback
4. Peer critique for writing assignments or other show and tell
5. Scavenger hunt for something outside of the course and return to discussion for sharing
6. Course material exploration, critical thinking
7. Student Lounge, Ask Anything topic for asking questions (informal, not graded)

Instructor Involvement

1. Acknowledge through topic summaries of what was covered in course material discussions
4. Be gracious. People communicate in different ways. Some are “chatty”, some are not. Some are going to be more open to different media and sharing, some are just not.
5. Anticipate having follow-up questions to steer discussion back on track
6. Grade within 3-5 days of students’ posts

Asynchronous Discussions

Best practices:

Assessment/Evaluation

1. Clear due dates, staggered, for example, first post due on Thursday, responses due by Sunday
2. Clear expectations about initial post and replies to others
3. “Must post first” topic setting

Design

1. Open longer than one week for ideas to be shared

Use Cases

1. Post in the introductions with a short video
2. Comment on each student’s introductory posts

Desire2Learn and Other Technology used for asynchronous discussions

- Select the “must post first” before being able to see others’ responses in topic settings.
- Utilize various technology for your discussion. Let students have freedom with using videos, pictures, drawings, etc.

Synchronous Discussions

Best practices:

1. Advanced planning: consider posting questions in D2L in advance
2. Log in early: welcome students, assist with technology issues
3. Establish clear expectations: Time allotted for each meeting, agenda, protocols
4. Use the Chat tool for engagement. Save chat for attendance/participation.
5. Student preparation: ask students to come prepared with a least one burning question.
6. Time Management: utilize “raise hand” and chat to post questions. Consider announcing time limit for each person to speak.

WebEx and Other Technology used for synchronous discussions

- Breakout rooms are now available in WebEx
- Students now have WebEx accounts
- Polling feature (answers can be anonymous)
- Chat feature (save chat for participation/attendance purposes)
- Microsoft Teams is available

Resources

[Socratic Questions](#)

[Guidance on designing questions that are effective and will promote engagement](#)

[Making Online Classroom Discussion More Dynamic and Engaging](#)

[How to make bad discussion questions better for an online course](#)

[Faculty Focus: 10 Tips for engaging students in Synchronous Online Classes](#)

[Bloom's Taxonomy - Center for Teaching - Vanderbilt University](#)