Discussion Board  
Best Practices
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Start with Learning Objectives
Ask the following questions before creating the discussion board:

- What do I want my students to learn?
- How does this connect to the course objectives?
- What do they need to know to effectively participate?
- How will I know that they have learned?

Use discussion boards to:

- Demonstrate and share understanding of key concepts
- Foster critical thinking
- Allow for in-depth reflection
- Facilitate peer review
- Build community
- Develop writing skills

Faculty Participation

- Important but in moderation: students participate when they know professor is paying attention
- Be visible early, comment periodically to refocus and further discussion
- Model the behavior you want students to follow
- Schedule a specific time to review posts
- Permit students to take the lead or generate questions

Grading

- To encourage participation, discussion boards should be graded, but for low stakes
- Include a rubric to make grading transparent
- Use Blackboard Forum Grading and Collect functions for greater efficiency

Resources/How-to Guides

- How to Use Blackboard Discussions
- Create Forums
- Set Up Discussions
- Grade Discussions
- Search and Collect Discussions
- University of Oregon: Generating and Facilitating Engaging and Effective Online Discussions
- Mastering Online Discussion Board Facilitation Resource Guide
Discussion Boards

Discussion Board Questions

Be clear about what is expected and when. Be specific about:

- Length of initial post
- Tone
- Deadlines
- Responses to other students
- Netiquette

Wording is critical. The wording you choose helps students understand what you want them to do.

Use specific question words and verbs:

- Why or how something is the case
- Suppose
- Predict
- What are some possible consequences of...
- Defend
- Judge
- Justify

Helpful Hints

Be thoughtful about how many responses you require your students to make to other posts. It takes time to read several posts, choose one and write a meaningful response.

Use Discussion Boards where appropriate. Discussion boards can work well in both on-ground classes and online classes.

Ask open-ended questions that allow for a variety of answers and conclusions. Avoid questions that only have one correct answer.

This can be a good way to have students explore a topic on the Internet and share the results.

Provide a live link to resources that students are expected to use.

Establish guidelines for appropriate behavior and writing style on the discussion board. Do monitor the discussion board regularly. Deal quickly and privately with offenders.

Effective Prompts

Align with objectives and direct students to seek out the most important information from the lesson. They can be:

*Exploratory:* conduct internet research and report findings
*Reflective:* students reflect on what they’ve learned
*Challenge:* interrogate premises and conclusions
*Relational:* comparative analysis
*Diagnostic:* examine motives, causes
*Action:* argue for a course of action, solution
*Cause & Effect:* make a causal argument
*Extension:* expand the discussion
*Hypothetical:* posit an original theory
*Priority:* make distinctions of significance
*Summary:* elicit synthesis