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Meaningful Online Discussions

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What is *meaningful discourse*?

Meaningful Discourse

Asynchronous Communication

- Online Discussions



Structuredness

- Online Posting Protocols
- Evaluation Rubrics
- Facilitator Guidelines

Constructivist Process of Meaning Making

- Articulation
- Reflection
- Social Negotiation



Meaningful Discourse

The asynchronous nature of the discussion allows for deep reflection and development of writing and thinking skills and cognitive exploratory learning. Each time someone interacts with the board, a deeper understanding of the subject matter is developed (Howard, 2015).





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Best Practices for Online Discussion Forums

Question Design

- Purposeful Discussion
 - What exactly do you want your students to learn?
 - Learning outcomes
- Structure discussions in advance
 - **Question types** – exploratory, challenge, cause & effect, hypothetical, summary, reflection, personal opinion and/or experience
- Make follow-up responses specific.
- Clearly state the amount of time given to complete discussion.



Forum Interaction/Facilitation Etiquette

“The best online instructors are those who are actively involved in their courses.”

- Reply to student postings
 - Model proper participation and discussion techniques.
 - If used correctly, interaction with students can be as much as 3x the interaction with face-to-face and peer-to-peer is even many times more than that (Howard, 2015).
- Quality vs. Quantity
 - Meaningful feedback posted less often has greater impact than less meaningful daily check-ins, such as "great" (Cuyahoga Community College).



Instructor Feedback on Completed Discussion Forum

- Online Discussion Rubrics
 - The addition of online discussion evaluation rubrics, in particular, the even distribution of postings' requirement and the increase in the overall grade percentage, positively influenced meaningful discourse in asynchronous online discussions (Dabbagh and Gilbert, 2005).
- Students appreciate constructive feedback from instructors, that is also encouraging (Vonderwell, 2003).
- Consistent and timely feedback



Discussion Forum Styles

- **Debate***
- **Individual Discussion***
- **Current Event***
- **Multiple Weeks***
- Whole Class Forum vs. Group Forum
- Critical Thinking
- Brainstorming
- Problem Solving





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Discussion Forum Styles

Debate Discussion Forum

It is illegal to use certain drugs. Some people claim that drug use is a "victimless crime" because the only person being hurt is the person whose body suffers as a result of drug use. Other people maintain that drug use is a crime against society because it leads to other crime and frays the moral fabric of communities. There are valid points being made on both sides of this debate. If you are familiar with this topic, then you do not need to do any readings for this discussion forum. If you are not familiar with the arguments, this article, [Should Marijuana Use be Legalized](#), might be helpful as you craft your postings.

For this discussion, the class will be split into two teams. Team 1 will argue to legalize recreational use of marijuana. Team 2 will argue against legalization of recreational marijuana. Please include "For" or "Against" in the title of your posting and share your thoughts on the statements below.

In light of decisions by several states and the District of Columbia to decriminalize marijuana, what are your thoughts on:

1. Whether possession of marijuana should be prosecuted;
2. Whether possession of marijuana should be legal;
3. Whether marijuana should be a controlled substance regulated by government; and
4. What other drugs, if any, you think should be made legal.
5. If you said other drugs should be legal, should they be regulated by the government?

*NOTE: Remember to include policy reasons for your responses.

After your initial posting, be sure to go back later in the week and reply to two of your classmates' postings. Only reply to students from the opposing team and reflect on their argument. Do you feel differently about this issue after reading their perspective?



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Debate Feedback

“At first I didn't like the idea of a debate discussion. Like, I didn't like being assigned to argue a side and I wanted to choose the side that I agreed with. I ended up liking the debate anyway because ***it forced me to think differently about a perspective that I didn't really agree with at first. That's a skill I'll need in the workforce.*** It was cool to see everyone's opinions instead of reading basically the same discussion forum answers from everybody like we do in other classes.”

-Anonymous Student



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Individual Discussion Forum

Read this article about the [Anthony Elonis case](#), then answer the following questions:

In your opinion, did Elonis assault his former wife? An FBI agent? A community? School children? Explain your answer.

When are words art, and when are they threats? How, and where, should we draw that line of distinction? Again, explain your answer.

Post your thoughts and be sure to go back later in the week and **REPLY TO AT LEAST TWO** of your classmates' postings.



Individual Forum Feedback

“Discussion forums like this are the worst part of an online class most of the time....so boring! But a super easy way to get points. Without putting in much of effort, I can spit out a brief posting myself, tell 2 classmates "I agree with your post", and get points. ***I had an awesome online class last year and the instructor posted in the forums too, like commented, asked questions, challenged us. It made the discussions better and I learned more from them. And I was on top of my game for my discussions to be on point because I knew the teacher was in there really reading them.***”

-Anonymous Student



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Current Event Discussion Forum

Please read the [Cornerstone Address](#). Also watch this brief video, [The Confederate Battle Flag: Heritage or Hate?](#) for background information on the Confederate Flag and what it means to people in the South.

After reading through the Cornerstone Address, watching the Heritage or Hate video, and considering the recent news about the Confederate Flag, do you think that displaying the Confederate Flag is a form of hate speech?

Before the end of the week, add an additional posting stating if any opposing views changed your opinion on this topic.



Current Event Feedback

“This was a good discussion! It wasn't like a regular discussion where I had to read something stupid or talk about boring weekly readings. This was relevant to current events of the past year and applied to our lessons. And it's something that caused a little conflict, because it's a controversial topic with racial aspects. And it's a sensitive topic to some people, which made the postings awesome to read. I was kind of excited about the discussion and replying to my classmates to find out how people feel about this issue. **And I learned to appreciate and respect the opinions of other kids in the class. It helped me see and sometimes agree with where people were coming from, even if my opinion was different from theirs in the beginning.**”

-Anonymous Student



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Multiple Weeks

Week One

Part One: Begin by reading McIntosh, P., White privilege: Unpacking the invisible backpack.

Part Two: **By Sunday, 11:59 p.m. (ET)** of the first week of this lesson, share one passage with your discussion group that represents what you think is the most significant idea in the article – share only the passage and don't comment yet. You will have a chance to “talk” at the end of the discussion.

Part Three: Next, respond to your groups' posts with comments about what their passages made you think about and what questions they raise for you. Post your response by **Tuesday, 11:59 p.m. of the first week of this lesson.**

Week Two

Part Four: **Finally, by Sunday, 11:59 p.m. (ET) of the second week of this lesson,** read your small group's comments on the passage you shared. Now it is your turn to respond to the group. Explain why you chose the passage you did and respond to – or build on - what you heard from your small group.



Multiple Weeks Feedback

“The discussion spread out over 2 weeks was great! A lot of times I feel like people wait until the last minute to post, and that makes it hard to post replies to other students in class because I like to get things done early. **Clear expectations about when to post and what to post makes things a lot easier!** Stretching out the discussion for 2 weeks makes for better posts from everyone, and more time to really discuss the subject.”

-Anonymous Student



Summary

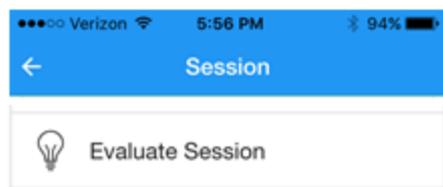




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Questions?

Session Evaluations Contest



- **Download and open OLC Conferences mobile app**
- **Navigate to specific session to evaluate**
- **Click "Evaluate Session" at the bottom of session details screen**
- **Complete session evaluation***

Each session evaluation completed (limited to one per session) = one contest entry
Five (5) \$25 gift cards will be awarded to five (5) individuals
Must submit evals using the OLC Conferences mobile app or website

(As part of our "green" initiatives, OLC is no longer using paper forms for session evaluations.)

**Contact information required for contest entry but will not be shared with the presenters. Winners will be contacted post-conference.*

Contact Information

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Resources

- Cuyahoga Community College. (2013). Best practices: The discussion board. Office of Learning and Innovation.
- Howard, E. (2015, August 5). Best Practices in Online Discussion Boards. Retrieved from <http://www.lc2.ca/item/235-best-practices-in-online-discussion-boards>
- Gilbert, P. K., & Dabbagh, N. (2005). How to structure online discussions for meaningful discourse: A case study. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 36(1), 5-18.
- An examination of asynchronous communication experiences and perspectives of students in an online course: a case study

