

Asynchronous Discussion Boards

Research-Based Practices & Tutorials

1. **Create an aligned, open-ended question**

If your question does not correlate with the objectives and material presented within the module, then students have not been adequately prepared to engage in a robust discussion (Woods & Bliss, 2016). Once you have established alignment, ensure that your question is also open-ended. A discussion board assignment is simply going to fall flat if the answer to the question is simply “yes”, “no”, or a specific answer. Provide your students with the opportunity to be creative and diverge from their classmates’ responses (Aloni & Harrington, 2018).

2. **Include two distinct due dates for initial and response posts**

By setting up two distinct due dates, students will have the opportunity to read and review the course material and write their initial post. After all students have written their initial posts, they will then have the opportunity to prepare a response based on their classmates’ posts. As a best practice, give students at least three days in between each due date.

3. **Develop a prompt for response posts**

Go beyond instructing students to “respond to two peers” in discussion board assignment by including a prompt for the response post. Doing so will help stimulate a robust discussion and students will be avoid responding with phrases such as “I agree” and “good point”.

4. **Ensure that your question promotes critical thinking**

Posit a question that promotes critical thinking by asking students to analyze course materials, brainstorm multiple solutions to a problem, or defend a position (Aloni & Harrington, 2018). And don’t feel limited to one type of question! You may want students to brainstorm a view in their initial post and then defend their position as classmates challenge them via response posts.

5. **Choose a facilitation style**

While research does not promote one type of facilitation style over another, it does support having a facilitation plan (Darby & Lang, 2019.) Consider observing (where students are left ownership of the discussion and information shared), fact-checking (where you will pop into a discussion to clear up misconceptions), participating (where you will actively post and respond to students) or summarizing (where you will create a single-page summary of key takeaways at the end of the discussion board cycle.)

6. **Consider organization for student participation**

Dividing students into groups or roles can help manage discussion flow, especially in larger classes. Small groups allow you to assign each group a different prompt (or create space to amplify voices with the original prompt.) If you’d like to keep your large group together, consider assigning students roles (Herman & Nilson, 2018.) Perhaps half the class posts initial responses, and the other half of the class is only responsible for response posts. During the next cycle, the groups switch.

7. **Establish an assessment criteria**

Use no more than six criteria to avoid overwhelming students. Common criteria include but are not limited to demonstration of higher-level thinking, timeliness, proper citations, clarity, and evidence offered to support claims (Herman & Nilson, 2018).

8. **Communicate the assessment criteria to students**

Provide students with a rubric before the class discussions begin. This allows students to ask questions and makes expectations clear from the start.

References

- Aloni, M., & Harrington, C. (2018). [Research based practices for improving the effectiveness of asynchronous online discussion boards](https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000121). *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 4(4), 271–289. <https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000121>
- Darby, F. & Lang, J. (2019). *Small Teaching Online*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., San Francisco, CA.
- Herman, J. H. & Nilson, L. B. (2018). *Creating Engaging Discussions: Strategies for "Avoiding Crickets" in Any Size Classroom and Online*. Stylus Publishing LLC. Sterling, VA. 126-127.
- Woods, K., & Bliss, K. (2016). [Facilitating Successful Online Discussions](#). *The Journal of Effective Teaching*, 16(2), 76-92.

Updated: 05.2021