

## Creating Effective Online Discussion Activities

1. Formulate focused questions or problems to begin discussions. Seek postings that provide unique, rather than repetitive, responses. If you want students to respond to one another, specify that each student must post an initial response to the prompt early in the week as well as respond to two other postings by classmates.
2. Establish and communicate general ground rules. Think about behavior you would like to encourage (e.g., probe questions to extend the discussion) as well as behavior you want to avoid (e.g., personal affronts, overly personal disclosures or prejudicial statements).
3. Prepare specific prompts for students to use in the forums. For example, "My experience is...," "I believe...," "Research shows...," and "A scholar says..."
4. Establish a friendly, enthusiastic environment for others to join. Model the style and tone you want your students to use in their postings. Use student's name when you respond.
5. Clearly differentiate threads and responses by distinguishing them in the subject line. Have the students identify the type of comment they are posting such as argument, evidence, critique, or explanation. This will enable you and your students to easily locate specific posts.
6. If a student sends an email question directly to you that could pique the interest of other students, you may want to use it to begin a new forum ("Questions and Answers") and share the question and your response with others in the class.
7. At the end of a discussion, summarize the postings or assign a student to summarize them to bring closure to the dialogue. This strengthens your presence in the course
8. Save all the comments you create the first time you teach the course. You will probably be able to use most of them the next time.
9. Once you have more than about 15 students participating in a discussion forum, consider dividing them into smaller groups.
10. Create a rubric if you plan to grade discussion participation. Students appreciate knowing what your expectations are. It will also help you when grading.