

NOTES

Why Isn't Anyone Talking to Me?!: Online Course Discussion Do's, Don'ts, and Best Practices for Faculty

AGENDA

Techniques for ...

- jumpstarting more meaningful online course discussions.
- keeping the conversations going.
- using what you know about effective face-to-face dialogue to make an impact.

DO'S: Remember what works in a face-to-face conversation, and replicate it in the online environment.

Posting ≠ Interacting

Snip and Respond: Students "snip" or "copy" lines from others' messages, paste them into a new message and respond to, elaborate on, or question the snippet.

Correct, Clarify, and Reorient: Students correct, clarify or reorient comments made by other students by saying, for example, "I believe student X meant..." or "Building on student X's earlier comment...." They can also repair comments they themselves have made.

Summarize and Assess: Based on previous messages, students summarize and assess where the conversation is headed. For example, someone might write, "The tone of recent postings has changed, signifying a shift in the class's thinking...." Sometimes students suggest new directions or topic shifts.

Label: Students identify the type of message he/she posts. Messages tagged "quibble," "addendum," "joke," "opinion," "evidence" or "question" tend to spark reaction from other students because they know how to interpret the message, and therefore how to respond.

(Murray, 2000)

Before discussions start ...

- Impress upon students they are responsible for productive, engaging, and lively discussions
- Share with students their responsibilities
- Quickly engage and make connections
- Communicate the "right" kind of tone
- Clarify your expectations; use a rubric that answers whether a student's posts ...
 - added to the learning experience.
 - engaged his/her classmates during primetime.
 - went beyond the minimum.
 - properly/accurately connected to the textbook or personal experiences.
 - answered others' questions and/or pose meaningful questions to the class.
 - sounded respectfully informal without the use of colloquial words and/or phrases.
 - adhered to the standards of edited American English.
- Encourage not only discussion but also reflection
- Promote goal-based exploration
- Respond swiftly to create and maintain momentum

Bridgett McGowen-Hawkins, Senior Professional Educator

Cengage Learning | Engagement Services

Peer-to-Peer Faculty Development

800.856.5727 | bridgett.mcgowen-hawkins@cengage.com | www.cengage.com/teamup

DO'S: Remember what works in a face-to-face conversation, and replicate it in the online environment. (cont.)

Before discussions start ... (cont.)

- Develop a sense of community

(Halstead, 2005; Henson, 2003; Lam, 2004; Lizano-DiMare, 2009; Merritts & Walter; 2006; Paul & Elder; 2007; Roehm & Bonnel, 2009; D. Givehand, personal communication, July 3, 2014; M. Miller, personal communication, July 14, 2014; S. Orr, personal communication, July 3, 2014)

DONT'S: They are really best practices disguised as don'ts.

Write B.O.S.S. questions, and show thinking in action.

Aim to ask involving questions, questions that bring out serious substance (B.O.S.S.), questions that require divergent thinking and/or evaluative thinking, not questions that require convergent thinking and standard answers that do not call for creativity.

CONVERGENT	DIVERGENT	EVALUATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why ...• How ...• In what ways ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Imagine ...• Suppose ...• Predict ...• If ..., then ...• How might ...• Create ...• What are some possible consequences ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defend• Judge• Justify• What do you think about ...• What is your opinion about ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does gravity differ from electrostatics attraction?• In what ways are Freud's theories considered controversial?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Imagine you were friends with Romeo and Juliet. What advice would you give them?• How might life in 2100 differ from life today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defend a proposed law that would require a newborn's parents to take and pass an assessment before exiting the hospital.

(Discussion board; R. Onorato, personal communication, July 3, 2014)

ADDITIONAL B.O.S.S. Questions for Specific Student Types

Reaching for Rationale Type: provides conclusions that can be a bit of a stretch or even emotional; usually offer little to no support or evidence

- a. What information or experience convinced you of this?
- b. What specifically from our readings led you to this conclusion?
- c. Did you base this on hard facts or soft data? In academics, how is the former more convincing than the latter?

Clear as Mud Type: posts contain assertions or logic that is hard to understand or follow

- a. Please provide an example or an illustration of your point.
- b. What is this similar to that we might already recognize?
- c. How would you explain this to someone who is not enrolled in this course?
- d. What from our readings connects to this?

DO'S: Write B.O.S.S. questions, and show thinking in action. (cont.)

ADDITIONAL B.O.S.S. Questions for Specific Student Types (cont.)

Dodger Challenger Type: might dodge providing direct answers and/or challenge/question almost everything

- a. What other POVs should also be considered?
- b. If everyone looks at it from only this perspective, then what are the implications?
- c. What assumptions underlie your POV? What alternate assumptions might you make?
- d. What information or data did you fail to consider?

The Silent Type: has little to say; may be the type to respond just in time.

- a. Place students in small groups to conduct discussions with a limited number of classmates instead of with the entire class
- b. Prime the pump
 - b.1. Create a resource bank; draw from the news: both the students and instructor contribute to a common area links to applicable currents and other citations for class-wide use in stimulating ideas.
 - b.2. Assign a video to watch first: Post a video or the link to a video as springboard for in-depth discussion. After viewing the video, have each student post a concept that was new to him/her; a concept that s/he found confusing and why; or a concept that, in the student's opinion, relates either to the course text or to a previous discussion and how. Use sparingly, though, so as to not overwhelm students with regular viewings of videos. Consider options such as YouTube, TeacherTube, and instructor supplements from your publisher.
- c. Use low-stakes classroom assessment techniques (CATs)
 - c.1. Polls: list four or five concepts, and have students rank them in order of importance; even consider using www.polleverywhere.com for this activity.
 - c.2. Listing: ask students to provide five to ten ideas related to a topic being discussed that week
 - c.3. K-W-L: Ask students to post answers to "What do you KNOW? " and "What do you WANT to know? " At the conclusion of the week's discussion ask for responses to "What did you LEARN?"

(McGowen-Hawkins, 2013; Moore, 2013; Using; A. Wolf, personal communication, September 9, 2014; D. Good, personal communication, September 30, 2014)

Assign Roles: Students sign up to contribute to the discussions as an eternal optimist, pessimist, devil's advocate, or trouble-shooter or discussion moderator.

(Bonk in Murray, 2000)

Always open students' minds: approach facilitating an online course as an academic conversation, remembering the difference between covering material and teaching.

BEST PRACTICES: They are not requirements but are good to know.

1. Give attention to all posts; for the overly frequent poster, use the catch and throw technique: thank the student, and ask someone else for his/her opinion.
2. Keep your personality: be the same energizer, fascinator, or inspirer in your online classroom that you are in face-to-face settings.

BEST PRACTICES: They are not requirements but are good to know. (cont.)

3. Recall what keeps face-to-face class sessions from derailing: use what you know works to create policies, direct efforts, and operate in a manner that works for the online classroom.
4. Show thinking in action: always provide more than one point of view; ensure you agree AND disagree, provide more than one reading selection, and call attention to inaccuracies

(Lepi, 2014; J. Hurd, personal communication, July 2, 2014; McGowen-Hawkins, 2012)

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