

# Forums in Online Courses

You need enough people to a good discussion 4-5, but too many becomes overwhelming. Group 5-15 students into forum areas (i.e., topics, professional interests, grade level interests, problem, team). Post grading criteria and provide examples.

## Class Discussion Areas

- ❖ Introduce yourself
- ❖ Practice posting assignments – HTML practice area
- ❖ Peer assistance and help
- ❖ General sharing areas (by need, by interest, by topic)

## Collaboration Areas

- ❖ Plan a project (i.e., write a paper, build a webpage, design project)
- ❖ Solve a problem (i.e., WebQuest)
- ❖ Work as a committee (i.e., build consensus, vote, make decision)

## Discussion Areas

- ❖ Read/view (i.e., article, photograph, video) and respond (i.e., summarize, ask questions, reflect, take a stand, trace idea).
- ❖ React to a question.
- ❖ Locate and share a resource.
- ❖ Compare and contrast to things (i.e., reading, approach)
- ❖ Share a plan (i.e., action plan, lesson plan, strategy).
- ❖ Repurpose or adapt (i.e., lesson, idea, approach).
- ❖ Evaluate or critique a reading.
- ❖ Pose a problem and respond with alternative solutions
- ❖ Review or summarize and discuss.
- ❖ Conduct an interview (i.e., webmaster, professional, community member) and share results.

## Tips for Students

- ❖ Use a descriptive SUBJECT line
- ❖ Separate long entries with blank lines
- ❖ End an entry with a challenge or question
- ❖ Include hotlinks, citations, and other materials to support your perspective
- ❖ Be sure to sign your postings
- ❖ Add an attachment for long entries (i.e., Word)
- ❖ If you attach file, be sure to indicate the format (i.e., Inspiration, Microsoft Publisher). When possible, make it a PDF.

## Tips for Facilitators

When facilitating discussions...

- ❖ let the discussions flow
- ❖ avoid adding comments that might lead or distract
- ❖ be patient, students will self-correct over time

# Sample Forums Guidelines

**Two points are possible on postings. One point** is given for adequately addressing the specific requirements of the activity and posting it in the appropriate location. **One point** is given for providing an insightful posting with concrete, vivid examples. Your posting should cause classmates to think, react, investigate, question, laugh, or cry. Okay, maybe not laugh or cry, but at least stop and think, "that's interesting"... Quality postings contain some of the following characteristics:

- ❖ References the professional literature (texts, websites, supplemental reading, additional relevant materials located by the student)
- ❖ Concise and on target (100 to 250 words), but detailed enough for understanding and meaningful application to the issue addressed
- ❖ Raises an area of inquiry or an issue in a clear manner for further discussion or debate
- ❖ Recommends a resource which helps a fellow student gain more understanding on an issue or topic
- ❖ Summarizes information as evidence that either validates (supports) or suggests a different perspective (counters) and the information is referenced; such information may or may not agree with the poster's personal opinion
- ❖ Links together several postings to suggest a conclusion, a recommendation, a plan or a broader observation that what has been previously posted on the issue or topic
- ❖ Messages are on a frequent basis across the semester so that they interact with messages from other classmates and are not bunched for delivery.

**One point is given for adding at least one response on the assignment thread.** These can be added to the discussion of your posting or the posting of another student. It is suggested that you go back and read through the comments and suggestions added to your posting, but you are not required to respond specifically these comments. Below you'll find examples of the kinds of "responses" that will be counted. Feel free to "get into" the discussion with as many comments to your peers as you'd like. However to receive your 1 response point, be sure that your response is insightful and will help others in their learning.

- ❖ Act on a suggestion. For example, after reading a comment from a peer, you might decide to add an example, suggest a website address or other resource, answer a question, or clarify an idea.
- ❖ Provide feedback to others such as a specific comment or idea along with an example, expansion, or suggestion. In other words, "way to go Susie" is a good start, but won't get you a point. You could even start with "that's crap Susie", however the key is providing positive, constructive criticism or helpful and encouraging advice. Healthy debate is fine, but let's discourage mean-spirited comments.
- ❖ State an opinion and provide supportive evidence or arguments. This can be fun because it can really get a discussion going.
- ❖ Add an insight. If you've had an encounter with the topic being discussed, it would be valuable to hear your thoughts and "real world" experiences. This should be more than "I'll use the idea in class." How and why will you use the idea? Would the idea work in another area? How or why?