

## New to Discussion Boards?

### A Discussion Board Primer

A discussion board forum prompt should promote student interaction and the exchange of ideas. Additionally, it should require students to apply course-content knowledge to form a response. There is not a "right or wrong" answer, but there are a range of answers that can be supported by course content, facts, or current knowledge. Students will also have an opportunity to agree or disagree with other. This facilitates a genuine discussion.

A discussion board prompt should have an open-ended element. It often lends itself to debate, allowing students to insert their opinions based on what they are learning.

Here is an example of an unacceptable discussion board forum prompt:

Define the terms at the end of the chapter. Respond to 2 of your classmates.

A definition has an answer that can be correct or incorrect. Furthermore, what is there to discuss? How can students respond to each other except to say, "You did a good job." "That is the same definition I have."

Here is an example of an acceptable discussion forum prompt in MED122: Medical Terminology II:

As soon as we hear words such as "oncology" or "cancer," fear and panic often surface. In your opinion, what are some ways that we can face the challenges of cancer that help us and others remain calm and focused, keeping fear and panic in check? While cancer is a serious and life-threatening disease, how do you think the medical field has advanced in cancer treatment? Include specific examples that are based on your reading and research.

Students will use what they are learning to form their answers. They also have an opportunity to interject their experiences.

One more pitfall to avoid: Consider this question—Do you think there should be tighter laws regarding gun control?

Well, that question only requires a "yes" or "no" answer. If you want students to elaborate, you must direct them to do so! Here is the same question:

In your opinion, should there be tighter laws regarding gun control? Defend your answer and provide support from the information you have learned in this module or previous modules. Cite any sources you use, as well.

The student quickly realizes that her/his opinion is required; however, this opinion should be supported (or backed-up!) with sound, valid information. This leads to reflective thought and possibly to a little research on the student's part! Both of these by-products are a good thing! 😊

An excellent resource for a discussion board forum is a case study or scenario. Student have to apply their knowledge about interviewing, counseling, or human behavior in order to analyze or propose an action plan. By including open-ended questions, student will offer a variety of responses. Some of those responses may be the catalyst for more in-depth conversation with in the forum.

Here are examples of acceptable discussion board forums.

*Course: Child Guidance*

In this module, we have read about 3 types of approaches to child guidance: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Review these approaches. Then, reflect on your childhood and your experiences with child guidance. Describe an instance in which one or more of these approaches were used. Respond to the following questions:

- In your opinion, which is the most effective approach and why?
- What are the advantages of each approach?
- What are the disadvantages of each approach?

*Course: Health, Safety, and Nutrition*

Read the following scenario and respond to the following discussion questions.

You are a first-year teacher who works with experienced teachers of many years. Upon working with this group of teachers, you notice that the experienced teachers frequently omit safety procedures and precautions while working with the children. Supervision is neglected in the hallways, as well as on the playground when the director is not present.

1. What should you, as the new teacher, do?
2. Should you approach the teachers? Why or why not?
3. If you think you should approach the teachers, what would you say?
4. How would you approach the director? What would you say?
5. What are your ethical responsibilities?

*Course: North Carolina History or Biology*

We have read about the eugenics program in North Carolina and learned that at least 30 other states initiate such a program. In light of what you have learned, consider this scenario: Suppose we could identify specific genes and alleles that can clearly be demonstrated to result in serious antisocial behavior, such as extreme violence or disregard for life. If this were the case, would you favor involuntary sterilization programs under these circumstances? Why or why not? (In other words, defend your position.)

*Course: Industrial Systems Safety*

In this course, we have read and talked extensively about job safety. Using the proper tools and wearing protective gear goes a long way to reduce injuries to you and others. Safety must be a conscientious practice every day while on the job site. Imagine that you are a supervisor and have witnessed a veteran employee ignore key safety practices. For example, he has used certain tools without eye protection and carried heavy items improperly. You mention this on the occasions that you have seen this only to be ignored. One day, this employee sustains an eye injury from flying debris. You learn that he was not wearing safety glasses.

When you start completing the required forms to report the injury, medical attention given, results, and workers' compensation details, you realize that your details will significantly affect the future of this employee, including how his medical charges are paid. You work for a big company who can afford to pay the medical expenses; workers' compensation would not be a big deal for such a large company.

However, the employee was at fault. He is a veteran who consistently took safety shortcuts. If he loses this job, he will have a difficult time finding another one at his age. On the other hand, he is a skilled worker with a great deal of experience that can work in his favor. The other side of this is the cost of medical care. The company's health insurance will cover 80%; however, the remaining 20% can be thousands of dollars that will have to be paid out of the employee's pocket.

What are your responsibilities to the company, if any?

What are your responsibilities to the employee, if any?

In your opinion, what is the best solution to this situation so that there is a "win-win" for the company and for the veteran employee?

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As for the number of forums each week and how long, that is a tough question! It really does depend on the course, content, and what the instructor hopes students will glean from the e-conversation.

I don't want to sound so vague! However, it really is about quality rather than quantity. For example, I have this question in an EDU course I teach: Based on the research you have read about homework in elementary grades, will you assign homework? You may insert your personal opinion and experiences; however, your position must be supported by what you have read and learned in this chapter. If you use research beyond the pages of your textbook, wonderful! Just make sure you cite all of your sources parenthetically. ("How to Cite" is in the Resource section of this course. Look it up! <smile>)

This particular forum lasts about 1.5 weeks, giving students time to compose a response. They are not allowed to reply to their classmates until a particular deadline has passed. Then, they have five days to read their classmates' posts and reply.

I know an incredible English instructor who has only two forums in his Southern Culture online course. However, each forum lasts about 4 weeks! Students were so engaged in one of his forums that it was continued AFTER the course ended!! It was incredible!! We moved the forum to a special server outside of Blackboard and let the conversation continue!

Above all, a forum should engage and challenge students. They need to learn how to communicate, agree, and disagree in socially acceptable ways. Instead of "are you out of your mind?," I want students to learn how to say, "I disagree with your position that . . ."

This is the type of influence the VLC wants to have . . . one that creates an environment for stimulating, intellectual conversations. I believe that every student has something to bring to a forum; something of value. We just have to model different ways to communicate to encourage them to participate. This is why I love how Blackboard has the "video everywhere" feature! Even students can use it! (I'm not sure about Moodle. I don't think it does.) I allow my online students to compose in Standard English (that is a requirement!!!!) OR respond with a video.