

Efficient Discussions

Unknown macro: 'space-breadcrumbs'

Time Management Challenge #2: Discussion management is too time-consuming.

★ Run a student-centered discussion.

Rethink [your role](#) as a teacher: become more of a facilitator and less of a subject-matter expert in the discussion. Instead of spending a lot of time writing long, content-heavy posts, focus on encouraging your students to take the lead in talking about a topic.

★ Encourage students to post early in the week.



TIP

If students wait until the last minute to post, it's almost impossible for a real dialogue to happen. So it's helpful to remind them that they do not need to read all the module content before making an initial post in the discussion. (And this means that at least one of the discussion questions must be broad and speculative enough that students can make a post based on their personal experience and/or on what they have already learned in the class.) I also think it's useful to set a deadline (Wednesday or Thursday) for the initial post.

★ Acknowledge students' comments briefly.



TIP

If the students are having a good discussion, rather than writing a long screed that touches every student's comment, often I put in a written equivalent of "uh-huh":

Great discussion, everyone, what do you think of this clip?

I realize it might be better to say:

Jennifer, I agree with your statement about the use of the pluperfect, but have you considered when you would use the imperfect?

Steve, your understanding of the categorical imperative is extraordinary!

Elise, I think you need to review which verbs are conjugated with être and which with avoir.

Esteban, I also love Wittgenstein, but I find him a difficult read in the original; I much prefer Gagarin's 1985 Russian translation.

But sometimes I think "uh-huh" is actually just as effective in maintaining a "presence" in the class, and it can save me a lot of time.

★ Use some "canned" responses, but limit your content-based posts to one or two.



TIP

I keep a file of what I call my "Friday" posts—which I post in the appropriate discussion each week on (obviously) Fridays. These posts offer an interesting example or a different perspective on the topic under discussion, but they generally don't compete with what students are contributing.

★ Ask follow-up questions.

- [What Sort of Teacher are You?](#)

★ Require students to end every post with a question to the class.



TIP

If you want to encourage (or require) your students to respond to one another's ideas and not to talk only with you, it's helpful to require them to end all their discussion posts with a question addressed to the class. This helps other students figure out where to begin in responding to a post and once they get the hang of it, it makes for a much richer discussion. I include a new question in all my posts, as well, to model this practice and to encourage more thought and conversation.

★ Correct mistakes, and redirect the conversation, as needed.



TIP

When a student doesn't follow directions or takes the conversation off-topic or posts incorrect information (particularly if that error is likely to have an impact on the rest of the class), I edit the "problem" post and add my comments and corrections at the bottom of the post (in my own signature font and color, so it's easy to tell what I have added). This makes it very clear to everyone who comes into the discussion afterwards that they should not follow the lead of this particular student. It's a great strategy for nipping problems in the bud, whether in an assignment or a discussion.

★ Respond to several students at once.



Discussions can be time-consuming to read, but I really enjoy them if the students are having good dialogue and making interesting postings. I often respond to multiple students in the same posting. Or better yet, I will make two or three postings within a discussion that acknowledge particular students or concerns from multiple students, and encourage certain behaviors, or suggest how to improve something.

There is no need to respond to every student post individually! Compare this with how you would run a discussion in an on-campus class.

★ Post your final (wrap-up) comments in an announcement.



Once a new module opens, it's rare for students to go back and read the final comments in the previous module discussion. So in order to make sure they see my final notes about a discussion, I post it as an announcement, instead of (or sometimes in addition to) posting it in the original discussion topic. This makes it more likely that students will actually see these comments!

★ Simplify your discussion grading.



I grade the Discussion as O,S,U or NC (Outstanding: they receive full credit. Satisfactory: they've met the requirements. Unsatisfactory: only one comment. No Credit: haven't participated.) Most students receive an S, which is 75% in Easy Grade Pro.

I've set up Easy Grade Pro so that Discussions are either EXCELLENT, SATISFACTORY, or NOT SATISFACTORY (check plus, check, check minus). It makes grading the Discussion topics feel like less work! I hate grading the discussion with letter grades — what a waste of time! But it is easy to know if I have been impressed, content or disappointed.

- [Grading Online Discussion Participation](#)

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