Discussion Boards

# What Is a Discussion Board?

A discussion board is an online activity that is common in online and hybrid classes. Unlike assignments that you turn in directly to the instructor, a discussion board is shared with the class. Students read each other’s ideas, comment on them, ask questions, and continue the discussion.

When you share concepts from a chapter in a textbook or a lecture, you review the course content for yourself and expand your knowledge by reading others’ perspectives. A discussion board can bring up an interesting question, example, or comparison that makes you think a little differently about the topic.

Posts and Replies

**Posts** are your opportunity to respond to discussion questions or the content of a module such as a reading or a video. Below are some examples of sentence starters to help you write a post:

* What stood out the most to me was …
* I think the most important point in the text is …
* The part of the text that I feel is most confusing is …
* If we take the main argument of this text seriously, then …
* If we do not take the main argument of this text seriously, then ...

**Replies** involve reading carefully to understand your classmate’s point of view. Notice any thoughts their post brought up for you and consider what you could add that others might find informative.

A reply typically begins with a summary of your classmate’s post. Then, add your point of view, a related idea from the class, additional examples, or questions. The following can help you start your reply:

* I agree with your idea that [summary] because …
* I would like to build on your idea that [summary] by adding …
* I agree with what you wrote about [summary], but I wonder ...
* I agree with your idea that [summary] in most cases, but one possible exception is …
* I understand what you wrote about [summary] but I have another perspective, which is ...
* I like how you describe [summary] because I never thought about …
* You bring up an interesting point that [summary], and now I am wondering ...
* A question I have about your idea that [summary] is …

# Example: Post and Reply

**Post:** Hi, class. After reading the article, “The Empathy Gap: Digital Culture Needs What Talk Therapy Offers,” I think the most important point Sherry Turkle makes is that technology cannot fix the problems technology is causing. She mentions psychologist Sara Konrath, who developed an app to help people practice empathy. Turkle reminds us that "*we are the empathy app!*” She is saying if people do not have empathy because they are not spending enough time together talking, then the answer is not more apps. The answer is more time off our devices. This part of the article stood out because it shows that having empathy and relationships with friends and family offline is more important than the latest app that promises to meet all your needs.

**Reply:** I noticed that part too, Julia. I agree with your idea that building relationships offline is better and that we can’t rely on apps to solve problems caused by apps. I would add that I appreciated the description of people who use apps to relax or analyze their life stories as if apps can do the work of a therapist (Turkle). There are apps like Calm that people use to improve their sleep, for example, and if that works for them, I think that’s a good use of technology. But people need to know it’s not the same as mental healthcare. It’s more like self-care or lifestyle changes. You pointed out the importance of building relationships offline, and I think that's true of therapy. It’s a relationship that you build. It’s not just reminders and calming music.

# How Are Discussion Boards Different from In-Class Discussions?

A discussion board activity is a writing assignment, intended for others to read hours or days after you have shared it. Your instructor and classmates cannot hear your tone of voice or see your body language, and you do not have the chance to immediately correct yourself or elaborate.

Disagreements are part of a healthy discussion, but disagreements should be friendly and on-topic. Consider if your words may be interpreted as a personal attack. To keep the discussion board a welcoming and productive place, anything you would not feel comfortable saying aloud in a live classroom is also not appropriate for a discussion board.

# General Suggestions

# Consider the **purpose** of your class’s discussion board. Is it a casual space for personal reflections and conversations? Is it only for academic discussion?

* Write your posts and replies on a separate document to check for clarity and save your work.
* Summarize before adding your own ideas. If you are referring to a text, your instructor might ask you to quote, paraphrase, and cite in your posts and replies.
* Replies should be guided toward learning, understanding, and supporting your peers. Encourage others to continue to learn and share.
* Focus on your peers’ ideas, not their choice of words, punctuation, or spelling.
* When someone replies to you, try to respond back. Keep the discussion going when possible.