Creating a Successful Discussion Board Thread
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As part of many classes, teachers assign discussion board posts that require students to answer a prompt and respond to readings, film, music, events, etc. Typically, these assignments ask students to provide a thoughtful answer to the prompt, with in-depth responding that extends the class discussion. Below is a quick checklist that will help you to double check that you are offering a discussion board that makes connections and moves the conversation forward.

Checklist:

✓ Are you answering all parts of the discussion prompt?
  o Often, a prompt will contain at least a few questions and/or ideas to consider when responding. What key concepts do you need to know to answer this prompt?

✓ Are you offering a comprehensive response to the discussion prompt?
  o Comprehensive discussion posts will not be vague concepts, but provide concrete detail. Did you use part of your readings/class discussions to guide you?

✓ Did you read through your class readings carefully before responding to the discussion?
  o Unfortunately, many students skim the readings, and then struggle with their responses to the prompt. If you highlight and take notes as you read, you can use this textual evidence in your discussion posts.

✓ Are you simply answering the prompt, or are you making connections with the course learning objectives?
  o If you are responding to class readings or previous class discussions, successful responses use concrete details, quotes, or paraphrasing from the readings. Your responses should analyze the readings/discussions in relation to the prompt.
  o Can you find a connection between other readings/class discussions and the prompt? How might you approach these connections in a way that answers the prompt?

✓ Are you moving the conversation forward or simply repeating what others are saying?
  o Sometimes, you are permitted to see what others are posting. If so, what are they saying? How can you bring up a new point, see it from a new angle, or extend what is being discussed?
  o When you are not allowed to see others’ discussion posts, think about what you’ve read and bring up parts of the reading that need to be clarified. You can also bring up a side of the conversation that the author didn’t, or you can try to expand on a theory presented by the readings.

Examples of problematic discussion answers and suggestions for improvement

• “I agree with the author.”—But how and why do you agree?
“When the author brings up Odysseus, and the sirens, it makes me think of my Aunt Susan’s Caribbean cruise last summer…”—How is this related to the reading?

“The author makes a good point because this situation is a real problem in America right now.”—What “good point” did the author make? What is “this situation”? Also, using textual evidence (such as quotes/paraphrasing) will help support your claim.

When everyone is saying, “Dr. Jones is suggesting X,” you should bring up something new: “Even though Dr. Jones is suggesting X, I feel that we also need to look at Y.”—A new perspective expands the conversation.

**Examples of a prompt with a successful discussion and peer response**

**Prompt:** In your discussion thread, give a brief description of a literacy experience from your youth and explain how it can be connected to one of our readings. To what societal issues can you relate this connection?

**Discussion Thread:** One summer, I fell off my roof and broke my leg. In a cast all summer, all I wanted to do was watch TV or read some mystery books. We couldn’t afford cable that year and our school didn’t have a library. My mom pointed at the encyclopedia set she’d gotten from the thrift store. That summer, I learned a lot about the 1970s. During school the next year, that encyclopedia information came in handy for political science class. I knew just where to look in the encyclopedia set at home and because of that, I did well in class. I was reminded of this literacy experience when reading about Malcolm X’s prison literacy narrative. While in prison, he read and copied the entire dictionary to improve his own education, learning about racial struggles. Malcolm X’s prison education was the foundation for his many political movements on the social struggles of African Americans, which ultimately changed history. I learned about racial tension and the severe discrimination problems plaguing Malcolm X’s era. I was then able to re-read his narrative with a better understanding about what it was like to be a black man during those times, having to deal with institutional oppression and discrimination. Being that I was raised in a poor country town, I often experienced people discriminating against my lower-class family. As for institutional oppression, I have noticed how my school has fewer books, almost no PE equipment, and packed classes with only one teacher.

**Peer Response:** I like how you related your literacy experience to the reading (Malcolm X’s prison literacy narrative), and then in the end, to a bigger social problem as well as social problems that you face. I wanted to hear more about something in particular that you learned about from the encyclopedias that affected your education and/or view on the world. Also, was there something from the Malcolm X reading that stood out to you that you could bring into this response, like a quote?

The **discussion thread** created above offers a clear recollection of his/her literacy experience and the effects. The student also related that information to the reading assigned that week. The **peer response** replied to the discussion thread and offered valuable feedback for the thread writer to think about. Namely, the responder asked questions about concrete detail, such as textual evidence, as evidence of the reading and literacy experience connection. When you can show, in your discussion thread, that you’ve carefully read the assignment and posted, according to the instructor’s prompt wherein you’ve made connections back to the readings and offered new concepts or extended the conversation in some way, you are improving your chances to create a successful discussion thread.