**Discussion forum grades**

This document describes the requirements for your grade on discussion assignments.

The requirements for behavior in class discussions is described in the Class Conduct Policy.

## 1. Definitions

A post is a contribution to the discussion. A reply in a thread which someone else starts counts as a post.

**2. Minimum number of posts required**

**2.1 Unit forums**

For the discussion portion of a unit, you are required to post a minimum of **2 times**. You are required to do peer review of **2 posts**.

## 2.2 Other graded discussions

I will announce the minimum number of posts when I ask you to participate in a graded discussion forum.

## 2.3 Posts above minimum required count

If you post more than the minimum required count, the additional posts will not receive additional credit. However, if you write 3 posts and 1 is not deemed substantive, you will get full credit.

[Note on draft policy: I’m very open to other suggestions about how to handle this situation ⎯extra credit, making up for missing posts elsewhere, et cetera⎯ though each has its drawbacks. I’d rather have everyone work hard on 2 posts instead of tossing a bunch of things up to see what gets credit]

## 2.4 Non-substantive posts

A contribution which does not meet our standards receives no credit.

**3. Requirements for credit**

So, all you need to do is find someone else's post, write "I agree", hit submit, and repeat until you've commented the minimum number of times, right? Sorry, no.

## 3.1 Basic principle

To count as a post, your contribution must articulate and support a substantive claim or ask a substantive question. Posts which answer another student’s question should make a substantive claim about the correct answer.

A post makes a substantive claim or asks a substantive question only if it contributes to other students’ understanding of the topic.

## 3.2 Posts making a substantive claim

For your contribution to make a substantive claim, you must clearly articulate the claim and give reasons for believing that claim. Above all else, we don’t just want to hear what you believe. We want to hear why you think the rest of us should believe it too.

An objection to an argument which someone else has given makes the substantive claim that the argument is mistaken. It is very important that you make sure it is clear what aspect of their argument your objection targets.

You don’t have to be either completely in favor or completely opposed to a proposition. Indeed, being able to set out reasons in favor and reasons against a claim usually demonstrates that you really understand what’s going on.[[1]](#footnote-1)

## 3.3 Posts asking a substantive question

For your contribution to be a substantive question, you need to make it clear why the question matters and say what you think the answers might be.

## 3.4 Minimum length

Most posts should be at least a paragraph in length. There is no official minimum word count for something to count as a post. However, it is extremely unlikely that you will be able to make a quality contribution to the discussion in only a few words.

## 3.5 Spelling, grammar, and style

A post will receive credit only if its spelling, grammar, and style are appropriate to a professional environment. That doesn’t mean the tone must be formal. Nor does it mean that the spelling and grammar must be perfect. Though you will not go wrong with a formal style, and perfect spelling and grammar.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Personally, I believe there is a place for (carefully used) profanity in professional contexts. However, the danger of misinterpretation in an online class discussion forum is too high. Do not use profanity in your posts.

## 4. Savings clause

Note that everything in this document is subject to change at my discretion. Any changes will be announced on Canvas and only apply from the time of the announcement going forward.

## Appendix 1: Great minds thinking alike

What if you’ve got a great post all ready to go and you log in to Canvas only to discover that someone else has said the same thing.

Don’t freak out. You spent a good amount of time drafting and thinking about your post (right?). I’m not going to tell you to throw it out. In fact, you’re in luck ⎯someone else did some of your thinking for you, so your post is going to be even better. Here’s how we’ll modify it.

First, acknowledge that the other person had the same/similar idea. Praise them for their obvious genius.

Read their post carefully. It’s unlikely you completely agree. Maybe they left something out which you thought important. It’s very likely that while both of you agree about a conclusion, you disagree about the argument in favor of that conclusion. Add an explanation of how your views differ and an argument that yours is more likely to be right (if you think it is) and you’re good.

If the arguments are similar enough, maybe there’s a problem which you were worried about when you were writing your post which you can bring up.

Maybe they identified a problem which you didn’t think of when you were writing your post. Revise your post to discuss it.

Maybe someone else has posed a problem for them after they posted. Great! Take your original post, acknowledge the shared genius, and spend some time thinking about how to answer the problem.

If all else fails, update your post to acknowledge that great minds think alike and then spend some time thinking about how your joint argument might apply to other things or otherwise extend and expand on their argument.

## Appendix 2: Examples

Here are some a silly examples to try to illustrate our requirements.

Note: The posts in this Appendix are probably shorter than what will be needed for our actual topics.

## Posts making claims

## Post #1

## Content

I love tacos

## Grade

No credit

## Why

You haven’t told us anything that the rest of us can engage with. To put it another way, you haven’t given us any a stranger could disagree with.[[3]](#footnote-3)

## Post #2

## Post content

Tacos are the best food.

## Grade

No credit

## Why

This is applicable to the rest of us. It could be more precise (For anyone? For babies?), but at least you’ve given us something we could disagree with. However, you haven’t yet told us why we should agree with you about taco superiority.

## Post #3

## Content

I think tacos are the best food for at least three reasons.

First, they are nearly always more delicious than other foods. You might object that many believe the tacos at taco bell are gross. However, the things taco bell sells only resemble tacos; I am talking about real tacos.

Second, they are incredibly versatile and come in many varieties: asada, pastor, lingua, even vegetarian, to name just a few.

Third, their portability is rivaled only by the banana. While the banana comes in its own handy protective cover and emergency napkin, bananas are nowhere near as delicious nor do they come in as many varieties as tacos.

## Grade

Credit

## Why

This tells us what you think and gives us three reasons for believing it. Notice how many more places to disagree you’ve created. With Post2, someone else can really only say “I agree!” or “No they aren’t.” For Post3, there are a ton of possible follow up posts others can write. Here are some examples:

Someone could question all three of your reasons and reject your conclusion that tacos are the best. Someone else could come to your defense and answer their criticisms. Another student could take the side of your critic and give further reasons for rejecting your claim.

Someone else could respond that you’ve come to the right conclusion about taco supremacy, but question your reasons. For example, they might agree about deliciousness, but not think that variety or portability are reasons for thinking a food is the best. Someone else could agree with all the reasons, but suggest that you haven’t fully responded to the banana partisans, who might also raise nutritional content.

Notice that at the end of this, we might not decide which food is the best, but we’ll all have a much better idea of what can be said for and against taco supremacy. That’s the whole point of what we’re doing in this class, though, sadly, not about tacos.

## Posts raising questions

Suppose we’ve read an article where the author argues that tacos are the best food.

## Post #4

## Content

Why does [author of article] think tacos are the best food?

## Grade

No credit

## Why

You haven’t given us enough to understand what you aren’t sure about or to really answer your question. Indeed, it seems like the answer to this question is the entire article. You haven’t really done any work in coming up with the question; it seems like you’re asking us to do all the work for you.

## Post #5

## Content

I’m really not understanding why [author of article] thinks tacos are the best food.

I get that she puts a heavy weight on the variety of tacos. But I don’t understand why their portability matters. Is she assuming that everyone eats on the go? She does often say things like “with our busy modern lives…” (e.g., 3rd paragraph on page 4), though that could just be a cliché.

Or maybe she’s claiming tacos are the best all-around food ⎯for example, salads are good but can only be eaten at a table; tacos can be eaten at a table or in the car. But I’m sure there are things tacos are bad at ⎯for example, soup is more hydrating⎯ and I didn’t see anywhere she gives an exhaustive list of what makes food good.

## Grade

Credit

## Why

You’ve clearly tried to think this through. You’ve got some ideas of what’s going on but can’t tell which one is correct. That’s the sort of thing we can help you with. More importantly, it’s possible that we read your question and think “Hey. I hadn’t thought about the assumptions about eating-location that were going on in the article.” That is, we’ve learned something from your question.

**Appendix 3: Peer review rubric**

Each of the following questions is answered on a 4-value Likert scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree.

(1) The claim being made in the post is clearly stated and understandable; of, if a question, the question being raised is clear and understandable.

(2) The post clearly expresses reasons why others should believe the claim it makes; or, if a question, it clearly articulates possible answers and says why the author is unsure which is correct.

(3) The tone, grammar, spelling, and style of the post are professional and appropriate.

(4) The post makes a positive contribution to other students' understanding of the topic.

(5) The post is consistent with the Class Conduct Policy.

(6) This post should receive full credit

1. Some advice: you should practice doing this, either here or elsewhere. It’s like a superpower in a lot of group decision-making. When you’re in a contentious meeting, if you can listen to the debate and make a comment like “It sounds like a, b, c are the strongest reasons in favor of doing x and d, e, f are the strongest reasons against doing x. I think we should do x since I find b to be decisive because…”, you’ll probably get your way. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. If you’d like an example: The spelling, grammar, and formality of this document are sufficiently professional. There are probably some errors and awkward constructions; the tone is far from formal. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I add ‘a stranger’ to avoid confusion since it is possible to disagree with statements about your feelings. Your friend could say things like ”No you don’t. It’s been months since you’ve been to a taco tent.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)