**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 [link].

## 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**

**2.1 Unit forums**

For the discussion portion of a unit, you are required to post a minimum of **4 times**.

## 2.2 Other graded discussions

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

**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. Not so fast.

## 3.1 General principle

To count as a post, your contribution must articulate a substantive 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.

Quality comments possess one or more of the following properties:

* Offers a different and unique, but relevant, perspective;
* Contributes to moving the discussion and analysis forward;
* Builds on other comments;
* Transcends the “I feel” syndrome. That is, it includes some evidence, argumentation, or recognition of inherent tradeoffs.  In other words, the comment demonstrates some reflective thinking.

## 3.2 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.

## 3.3 Agreement posts

What if you’ve got a great post all worked out, you log in to Canvas and find out that someone else has said the same thing.

Don’t freak out. You spent 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.[[1]](#footnote-1) 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.

## 4. Grades

Posts above minimum required count

Non-substantive posts

Suppose Violet posts 7 times. 3 posts are substantive; 4 are not

1. It’s often said that you’ll find no more vicious fights in academia than between people who agree on the conclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)