**One of the staples of interaction, no matter with school you use for distance learning, is some type of discussion forum. This is the main place where you develop a sense of community.** This is where you interact with your peers. Sure, you can do the minimum. But, **if you settle for doing the minimum requirements in the class discussion, you’ll also reap the minimum benefits.**

Here are some tips for making successful discussion posts in distance learning environments.

**1. Make sure to complete the posted requirements.** This is really one of the most important requirements.  However, it’s the bare minimum.  Do some research early.  Find out what the class requires.  Chances are that you will be required to answer one or more questions about the topic.  You will probably also be required to discuss with your peers.  Find out what those requirements are and make sure you at least fulfill those.

**2.  Use the resources to answer questions.** Although you may rarely find questions that ask for your opinion, more often than not, the questions are designed to ensure that you are reading the required materials.  Some online classes may contain some video content from instructors.  However, most simply have written lectures and other readings.  Don’t try to answer the required questions until you have read the readings.  **Instructors are not so much impressed by how fast you answer the questions but by how you demonstrate that you are learning something from the assigned materials. When you answer a question, refer to something that you read from the assigned materials.  It’s even ok to use a very short quote, as long as you reference it.** **Don’t try to answer a question, using only your opinions unless that question specifically asks for your opinion.  You should be learning something new and you should be demonstrating that you have learned something new.**

**3.  Respond to your classmates in a meaningful way.** Don’t just do the minimum required.  When your classmates make a post, respond to them.  Let them know that you are actually reading what they are saying.  In this way, you are helping to grow that feel of online community in your class.  When you respond, make sure you add something.  Add something to what they said.  Ask them a question about what they said.  **Don’t post a response to a peer just to take up space.  Make sure that your response adds something to the discussion.**

**4.  Watch your tone carefully.** In face-to-face environments, we can see other people’s body language, facial expressions and even general attitudes when they are talking to us.  We don’t have this luxury in an online environment.  Read over your posts a few times before you submit them.  **If there is any chance that anything you are saying might be misunderstood, then clarify.** If you are simply giving a second point of view, but you are afraid it will construed as a vicious argument, then state something like, “This is only my opinion and yours is valid, as well.”  Sarcasm doesn’t tend to work well in online environments, unless you are careful to label it as such.    It is too easily taken as truth, without the body language to watch.

**5.  Don’t be harsh or critical.** Another problem with online environments is that the anonymity sometimes makes people feel it’s ok to say things that they wouldn’t normally say, if they were speaking to the person, face-to-face.  Make sure to remain calm and objective.  **It’s ok to have a different point of view.  But, don’t argue.  Don’t criticize.**

**6.  Proofread.** Look back over your posts before you submit them.  More than likely you will have a spell check and possibly even a grammar check.  Use them, but don’t rely on them.  **Spell checks definitely make mistakes.** So, look back over your posts, yourself, before you send them.  You want to appear professional in your spelling and grammar. HOWEVER….

**7.  Don’t plagiarize, even in the informal discussion.** The law is the law.  Someone’s property is their property, no matter what.  If you quote someone or something, you need to put the information in quotes and reference where you quoted it from.  Granted, you might not have to use proper APA or MLA format.  But, you still need to **give credit where credit is due**.  Don’t try to pass it off as your own words.