

# 20 TIPS FOR WRITING AN A+ DISCUSSION POST FOR YOUR ONLINE CLASS

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## A fundamental component of online courses, discussion forums give students the opportunity to engage in scholarly discourse.

There's a common myth about online learning. It's that online students are isolated and can remain anonymous – and that online learning lacks the lively, scholarly debate that takes place in a traditional on-ground classroom.

That myth is totally busted.

Unlike traditional students in campus-based classes, online students can't duck into the back of a massive lecture hall and hide. All online students are required to participate – to interact with each other and with the instructor.

How does that occur online?

Through online discussion boards.

## Purpose of discussion boards in online courses

According to Saint Leo Distance Learning Librarian Michelle Joy, "The purpose of discussion posts is to facilitate discussion similar to what would occur in an on-site class."

Discussion questions are designed to probe further into some aspect of the weekly course content, which could be through a current event, a recent court ruling, or a related hot-button topic, says Online Services Librarian Sandy Hawes.

"It's an opportunity for students to make a personal examination of what the weekly topic means to them and gives every member of the class the opportunity to express an opinion and be heard."

## Why doing your best matters

While specific requirements may vary depending on the course and the instructor, basic requirements generally include a weekly discussion question, or a choice of multiple weekly questions, to which students are required to make an initial post by mid-week. After that, students usually respond to at least one or two posts from others in the class or to additional questions from the instructor before the end of the week.

Because discussion posts are graded and contribute to a student's success in the course, it's important for online students to learn how to develop strong posts that add to a meaningful learning experience.

"The advantage of an online discussion forum over a classroom discussion is that you have the time to carefully craft your responses without feeling rushed," says Sandy.

Taking your time and working carefully is important to crafting a quality post. Here are some additional tips Michelle and Sandy offer that can help make your next discussion post stand out.

## Tips for acing your next discussion post

1. Read and reflect thoroughly on the issues presented in the weekly discussion question.
2. Refer to the course syllabus and any rubric that might offer insight into what your instructor expects and what you will be graded on.
3. If you don't understand something, email your instructor right away and ask for clarification.
4. Posts are intended to be scholarly discussions, so providing fact-based sources in support of your opinion is important.
5. Defend your opinions with verifiable supporting information from vetted websites, reliable academic e-books, and reports of research from the scholarly journal literature.
6. Don't procrastinate. Respond promptly.
7. Write a logical, well-organized, thought-through post.
8. Use the required in-text citation format and provide properly formatted citations to scholarly sources.
9. Avoid language that is not appropriate for an academic setting.
10. Avoid overly informal language. Discussion posts are not Twitter, SnapChat or Instagram posts. Use appropriate academic writing style, not text-speak.
11. Integrate prior readings in postings.
12. Offer personal observations and knowledge in an accurate and insightful way.



13. Present new observations whenever you can. Don't simply repeat what everyone else is saying.
14. Incorporate your own experience if it relates to the topic.
15. Give thorough consideration to classmates' postings and respond constructively with something substantive.
16. Always be polite. Review your post for tone and clarity.
17. Be respectful of others' opinions.
18. Don't use emojis, exclamation points or contractions.
19. Review your spelling and **punctuation**.
20. Participate in all module discussions.

### **Don't be intimidated**

Sandy and Michelle agree that for new online students, weekly discussion posts can be a bit intimidating at first.

"Discussion questions and student posts and responses are your opportunity to reflect critically on the week's course content, to practice your academic writing skills, and to hone your ability to craft, present, and defend your reasoned responses relying on logic and facts," says Sandy. "Simply keep in mind that there really is no 'right' position. What is vital is that you learn how to defend whatever your position is."

"If you're brand new to online learning, you could easily approach your first discussion post assignment with some trepidation," says Michelle. "But if you treat it like a discussion occurring in class, you can be successful."

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