

## **How to write an excellent discussion posting and earn a great grade.**

Discussion postings are intended to simulate the onground part of a college course, where students and faculty discuss the current lesson. Every LCNE online and blended course has at least one discussion every week, to help faculty and students stay connected with each other in the online classroom, and to help students learn.

Like the in-class experience, the teacher asks the questions, and the students respond so that all can listen and learn. Unlike the classroom, the discussion board is part of your grade, and every student must respond. Also in contrast is the absence of visual and audio cues; the only representation of your work and your thinking is your writing.

**How long should posting a good discussion response take?** It will benefit your final grade to do an excellent job each week in posting.

The college estimates that it will take about **1.75 hours** to answer an easy discussion question, such as one that asks for your opinion or your description of your experiences with a given topic.

More difficult discussion questions, that take organizing, research, review, might take **3 hours**. This is not a quick commentary part of the lesson.

As you can see from the process below, discussions are not quick and informal. They take work and rework to do well. And the process of writing a good response looks a lot like writing an academic essay.

### **Here is a process to help with preparing and posting a good response:**

1. Start early in the week—procrastinating until the last minute means that you will not have enough time to prepare your answer adequately.
  - a. Your teacher and your classmates will recognize a hasty job on this assignment.
  - b. Because this is an online class where you can prepare your answers, the teacher can ask harder questions that require study and thinking—so take the time to learn before you post.
2. Read the discussion question, and make sure you know what all the words mean. Read the question before beginning your preparations to answer it.
  - a. If you don't know a word, look it up in a dictionary—electronic dictionaries are easy to use.
3. Do the homework for the week associated with answering the question for the week.
  - a. These are not responses to be composed off the top of your head.
  - b. Answering without being fully knowledgeable can be embarrassing in front of the whole class.
4. Plan your response, with an outline, brainstorm, list of items to include in your response. Add important details from your textbook, class lectures, other reading to develop your answers and explain your point of view.

- a. If you don't have a plan, you and your readers [teacher, other students] will spend time trying to figure out the plan. Confusing and frustrating your reader does not lead to a strong grade.
  - b. If you don't have details, your answers are just your opinion without evidence to back up what you say. You don't have a strong case without the details.
  - c. If you don't have developed answers, you will not cover the material thoroughly enough to convince your teacher that you know it.
    - i. A good, substantial posting is at least four sentences long—longer if the topic requires it.
    - ii. A great, substantial post may be even longer.
    - iii. A great, substantial post is about the course material, not about you. Even long responses that talk only about your personal experience will not earn a great grade.
    - iv. If the answer requires research outside your textbook, you must cite your source, using the style guide required in the course.
    - v. If the discussion calls for responses to more than one question, make sure you answer ALL the questions.
5. Draft your response in a word processing package, for uploading later. Use a spell check and grammar check on the first draft.
- a. Write formally, as if you were writing an academic essay. Do not write as you speak or text or chat electronically.
  - b. Observe the rules of netiquette—no insults, even if you think something or someone is stupid or wrong-headed.
  - c. Do not compose your answer directly into the discussion board block. No one enjoys reading a rough draft.
  - d. If you are the kind of student who typically needs help with writing, please use Smarthinking, either by submitting your writing for review, or scheduling time with a tutor. Or ask questions during your teacher's regular office hours.
  - e. Bad grammar and mechanics in writing don't make you look very smart—remember, the teacher and the whole class are all reading what you say. So use what you learn in your English classes to write a polished submission.
  - f. Think for yourself—reading other people's answers does not help you learn to think and speak for yourself. Freedom of speech and thought are your fundamental academic and constitutional rights, so use them.
  - g. Don't be boring—there is no requirement to drone on about what everyone already knows. Even teachers like interesting responses.
  - h. Reread the discussion question or questions to make sure you have answered all parts of the question for the week.
6. Revise your answers as needed. Remember, you will be graded on your response.
7. After a review of your writing, post your response by cutting and pasting from your revised document.
8. After your post is the time to read and learn from what others have written.

9. Respond to someone else, respectfully and substantially, with something more than 'I agree.' You will find that receiving responses is one of the gratifying aspects of the online discussion board. Someone else noticed what you wrote and responded

Getting that kind of attention happens to good discussion postings online; sometimes in the on ground classroom, it does not happen at all.

**Remember your audience: the teacher and all your classmates are watching and reading what you write.**