Online Discussions

1. Begin discussions with questions you know most students can answer correctly. Start out with simple topics so all can gain confidence in contributing.

2. Provide lots of feedback and praise what is best in student messages.

3. Define “participation”. Let students know that “I agree” and “Me, too!” responses aren’t enough.

4. Clearly spell out the criteria for acceptable responses. (For example, must include one example from the textbook and another from a journal article.)

5. Require participation—even if ungraded it should receive credit, and penalties should accrue for lack of participation. Likewise, rewards should accrue for active engagement in the discussions.

6. Tell where or under what topic comments should be posted in the Discussions area.

7. Give a guideline on length of messages. (For example, 100-150 words, 1-2 paragraphs, etc.)

8. Define level of formality required for responses. A typical style is informal but not colloquial.

9. Be lenient about typos and poor grammar, when possible. Remember that WebCT has no spell check! Take time to make corrections for “serious” assignments where spelling and grammar DO count.

10. Be specific about posting deadlines. (For example, this week’s comments must be posted by Friday noon.)

11. Include directions on how to post until students get used to doing it. (For example, to post your comments, open the topic labeled Introductions, click the Reply button and type your brief introduction. When you have finished, click the Post button. To see your new posting, click the Update Listing button.)

12. Remind students to post early—in case of technical difficulties, server down, etc.

13. If class is small enough, consider requiring “unique” postings—this also encourages students to post early!

14. Require students to respond to (support or challenge) peer remarks. Remind them to be thoughtful in their responses to one another.

15. Online discussion is the general way of taking attendance in an online course—it indicates who’s participating and active in the class.

16. Remind students not to post their comments in all caps (IT IS RUDE AND CONSIDERED SHOUTING)!

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