**Developing Weekly Discussions**

Ask questions to elicit the level of thinking and learning that you want. Well-defined questions help students to understand content and can guide them in elaborative and critical thinking about content. Be sure to explain the topics for discussion and what is expected of the student.

Provide titles for all discussion boards.

Ask questions designed to:

* Extract factual *knowledge*
* Query a student's *comprehension*
* Ask a learner to *apply* his/her knowledge and comprehension
* Ask the learner to *analyze* information
* Challenge the student to *synthesize* information
* Have the learner *evaluate* and make judgments

The first week usually contains an introductions discussion where students introduce themselves to each other and the instructor. An example for the first week is shown below. You are welcome to customize the discussion to suit the needs of the course, as long as it serves the goal of helping students get to know one another and feel connected as part of a group.

Introduce yourself to your fellow students. Include information such as where you live, your undergraduate education, and what you hope to do after completing your coursework.

Including discussions also furthers the socialization in an online section, as these are the only real means for students to connect with the instructor and other students. As you write/develop discussions, please keep the following general guidelines in mind:

* *Be specific*.
	+ Ask a specific question related to the week’s topic to start the discussion.
	+ If you want students to respond to their classmates’ posts, provide specific guidance concerning what those responses should contain.
	+ Specific instructions may include:
		- Identify which concepts from this week’s readings are present in the initial post.
		- Respond to the post with a question.
		- Give an alternative to the post.
		- Find a post for which you disagree and state why you disagree (back up your argument).
		- Apply the original post to a different organization/industry/person/scenario, etc. and explain what the similarities and differences are or would be.
		- Critique the original posts (but you cannot just agree — you must justify your critique).
* *Provide multiple suggested discussion questions.*
	+ Consider providing 2-3 questions from which the instructor may choose one.
	+ Ultimately, the instructor may choose to use your discussion question(s) or create his/her own.
* *Remember that these are discussions, not writing assignments.*
	+ Avoid requiring students to follow APA guidelines. Students in a face-to-face classroom do not physically discuss topics using APA. Why should they do so in an online section? However*, if students quote from a source, they should cite it.*
	+ Overly restrictive requirements tend to inhibit free-flowing discussion.
	+ An assignment requiring submission of an attachment is just that – a written assignment – not a discussion. If you want students to review each other’s work, create a peer-review assignment.
* *Generally, include no more than two discussions per week.*
	+ These are in addition to any other written assignments for the week.
	+ Excessive numbers of discussions tend to limit students’ participation in any one discussion.

## Layers Strategy

To give students a beneficial experience with weekly discussion questions - try to create a tiered question based on this design:

* Part I {perhaps due by Wednesday evening for attendance tracking} – Design a question prompt that asks student to provide an initial post which is more experiential in nature (i.e. tell us about your experience with this topic, share what preconceived notions you may have about this topic, etc.) or something that *requires minimal reading and research* (not the full question you seek an opinion on or observation over or analysis over).
* Part II {perhaps due by Friday evening or Saturday} - Design an elaboration to the main topic/question so that a student can now provide a response that is a *substantial* post and apply the principles and topics learned that week (rather than just the non-descriptive “respond to two other comments”) after having had the majority of the week to work through the main assignments, read all the assigned readings, and hopefully learned the main concepts and principles desired for the week.
* Part III {perhaps due by Sunday evening} - Encourage the students to take part in the Peer Interaction element by providing detailed and thought provoking peer analysis where a student responds to someone else/responds to posts. This seems to create a more meaningful interaction than just telling students to “respond to two classmates by the end of the week” method.

Here is an example using a layer strategy:

**Cloud Computing in Healthcare IT**Based on the reading assignment “Healthcare IT Priorities: No Breathing Room”, the Health IT survey 2014 results point out that 30% say their organizations have no plans to use cloud computing. What do you think about healthcare IT now? Can healthcare IT survive without cloud computing?

Consider the following general rules for making a rich contribution to this week's online discussion:

1. Compose an initial post commenting on the topic as discussed above. It can be purely opinion based, and does not have to reflect any real data or statistics.
2. Once peers have posted their entries, react to initial posts made by other students. Again, you can agree or disagree with comments from others in a professional manner.
3. Most importantly look at how you are contributing to the collaborative discussion and how you make an effort to support your original ideas later in the week by industry facts. Focus on what you can learn from others, as well as what you can contribute independently to the topic. This type of discussion format helps to ensure a rich and meaningful online interaction and in turn, allows for high grading marks.
4. Follow the criteria set forth in the discussion rubric for all your weekly discussions unless your instructor tells you to insert any additional dimensions or expand your requirements further.

## MANIC Strategy

There is another method called the MANIC method you may consider using:

For each reading or combination of readings, students answer:

* What was the **M**ost important thing in the reading?
* What was something you **A**gree with in the reading?
* What was something you do **N**ot agree with in the reading?
* What was something you found **I**nteresting in the reading?
* What was something you found **C**onfusing in the reading?

Students quote from readings and follow up with detailed and thoughtful MANIC responses. In this method students must still provide substantive responses/comments. You may require one or more MANIC responses from at least two peers. Remember that Instructors need to provide guidance regarding what they consider “substantive” or “meaningful” responses.

If interested learn more about MANIC:
Curry, J. & Cook, J. (2014). Facilitating discussions at a MANIC pace: A new strategy for an old problem. Quarterly Review of Distance Education 15(3).

## Final Thoughts

Discussion boards can be set up as a “Post first” discussion – meaning participants must create a thread (post a response to the question) in order to view other threads in this board. Or discussions can be set up as group/team discussions. You must identify if you wish any of these types of settings or boards.

Journals, wikis, and blogs exist and may offer different group/collaborative options and individual reflection other than a discussion board. Consider these options but be aware these *are not discussion boards*. If you desire one of these items be sure to use the correct terminology.

A Discussion Rubric is included in the LMS and you will be asked to review and verify its use *as is,* or if you wish to make customizations to the rubric to better suit your course.