



Writing for Discussion Boards

By the time you graduate from college, you'll likely have taken at least one hybrid or online course. This means you'll be required to post periodically in the discussion board.

Writing for an online audience isn't the same as writing an essay, and there are conventions students should follow to create the most effective discussion posts:

1. **Use a specific subject line.** The subject line should tell the reader what to expect from the content of your post (e.g. The Importance of Subject Lines).
2. **Keep to one main idea or topic per post.** If you have a lot of ideas, choose one major idea for one post, and then write other posts for your other ideas. Sticking to this rule helps your readers.
3. **Remember the difference between starting a discussion thread and responding to someone else's post.** If you start a new thread, that's a new post. If you're responding to someone else, it's part of an existing thread. Your online/hybrid course will likely require you to do both.
4. **Write informally.** There are two types of writing styles that you'll use in college: Formal Academic English and Informal Academic English. In Informal Academic English, you'll still follow some conventions of academia: citations, works cited entries or references, avoiding slang or "text speak," etc. However, your writing doesn't have to be as "polished" as it would be when you write a paper (Formal Academic English). You can expect to write an effective discussion post in about an hour rather than the many hours it takes to write a paper.
5. **Do not dominate the discussion.** Don't feel the need to respond to every post or to "spam" the discussion board with several threads. One to two posts and one to three responses are probably perfect for weekly participation in an online/hybrid course.
6. **Be polite, and apply the rules of etiquette.** Don't post anything that you wouldn't want to see on the news. Remember: The Internet is forever, and security can be breached. For effective posts, use standard capitalization and punctuation. Avoid all caps because it looks like "shouting." Avoid using emojis: The post should be professional.
7. **Remember that a lot of people may have access to your posts.** Students, the instructor, college technical staff, and administrators could all be reading everything you post. Write accordingly.

Conventions for Writing Excellent Content Online

In addition to the guidelines above, there are other conventions that can help you develop effective content in your posts that contribute to course discussions well.

- 1. Review the purpose of the discussion.** What is your instructor requiring? Be sure to read any directions or questions carefully and create a post that meets the instructor's expectations.
- 2. Work with the background reading required for the discussion.** Many hybrid/online courses' discussions revolve around the textbook or other required reading assignments. Be sure you have a firm grasp of the material before posting on the discussion board. Annotating the text with your ideas and questions will help you develop a strong post.
- 3. Realize that discussion is a give-and-take situation, a conversation.** Have a steady rhythm in your participation in the discussion board. Post your discussions, respond to classmates. Consider responding to students to respond to your posts. This is how conversations develop, which will make everyone's online learning experience more enriching.
- 4. Realize that each participant can choose from among many discussion roles and functions.** When posting, you don't have to have "all the answers." You can post ideas, respond to other ideas, point out similarities between everyone's ideas, ask questions, add examples, extend the conversation in other directions, or even bring the conversation back to the original topic. The discussion board should be lively and exciting. i

i Adapted from "Discussion Board Style and Structure" and "Writing for Discussion Boards: Conventions for Online Discussions" at owl.excelsior.edu/online-writing-and-presentations