Online Discussion Dos and Don’ts

Qualities of Good Responses to Initial Discussion Prompts

• Comments are well-supported with specific references to texts, experiences, or discussions

• Reference relevant past lectures, comments, discussions, course texts, or incorporate hyperlinks to relevant outside sources to augment the discussion

• Comments are posted on time, are well-organized and proofread with minimal or no spelling or grammar usage errors, using appropriate vocabulary and tone for an informal but academic setting

DO!

• Read the readings before responding to the discussion prompts

• Refer to specifics in the reading when you respond to it in your post
  
  For example
  
  When Smith wrote “all cases of this indicate that,” I took that to mean...

• Make connections between your own experiences, research, and other coursework and the concepts from the course readings
  
  For example
  
  When Smith said x, it reminded me of something I learned in...

• Include hyperlinks to other relevant texts you’ve come across in your research and coursework, and explain how they relate

Comments to Other Comments

Think of comment responses as if they were the contributions you would make in a large or small group discussion in a face-to-face course. When you respond to another student’s post, you want to do more than just agree with what they are saying. In order to move the discussion forward you should address the person you are responding to by name, or identify whether you are addressing an individual or the whole class.
DO!

• **Expand** upon other commenter's ideas  
  *For example*  
  *Good point, Leo. I was thinking that in addition to what you found ...*

• **Argue** a different point of view  
  *For example*  
  *While I can see where you're coming from Yolanda, another way to look at this is ...*

• **Explain** or clarify their thought with an example

• **Ask** a question that requires an individual to clarify, elaborate, or give examples  
  *For example*  
  *Interesting idea, Gertrude! I wasn't quite sure what you meant when you said "x," can you explain it or give an example?*

• **Ask** a question that provokes additional responses from the group  
  *For Example*  
  *This question is for everybody: As I was reading Fred's response, I wondered*

DON’T!

• Just agree or disagree, or give your classmate’s post a “thumbs up”  
  *For example*  
  *Great comment, man! I really liked it.*

• Be overly informal (carefully consider the use of slang and profanity)  
  *For example*  
  *Wendy, when I read your comment I was like WTF?...*

• Make assumptions about your classmates’ gender, age, experiences, values, etc.

• **Misspell** your classmates’ or instructors names!

A Few More Dos

• Check in with our discussion multiple times during the week. Respond to those who have taken the time to write a response to your posts. This will help create an ongoing conversation.
• Use “subscribe” tools to receive notifications when someone has responded to a discussion or your posts.

• When you write your posts, address the class as a whole or the specific person you are responding to. Please refrain from addressing your comments solely to the instructor. Online learning is a collaborative process.

• Be respectful of one another, but don’t be afraid to disagree! Constructive conflict helps us all learn. Besides, things get really boring when everyone comes to the same conclusions.