Using LMS-Based Discussion Forums to Extend Learning

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Learning Objective:
Utilize timely practical guidance on building multimodal discussions within the course LMS to improve student learning outcomes.

Learning Outcome:
Write an effective discussion prompt that will engage learners through critical reflection, inquiry practice, and anecdotal example.

KNOWLEDGE ACTIVATOR:

THINK ABOUT THE WAYS STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM DISCUSSION.

- How does discussion extend the students' content learning into the cohort environment?

- What barriers to learning may be overcome by providing an online forum for deeper learning?

Setting parameters for online discussion activities guides this learner-driven experience by providing the necessary clarity to function within a digital context.

1. Set community guidelines.
2. Establish timeframes.
3. Communicate expectations for posts and replies.

Provide a setup. | Ask students to commit. | Prompt students to expand.
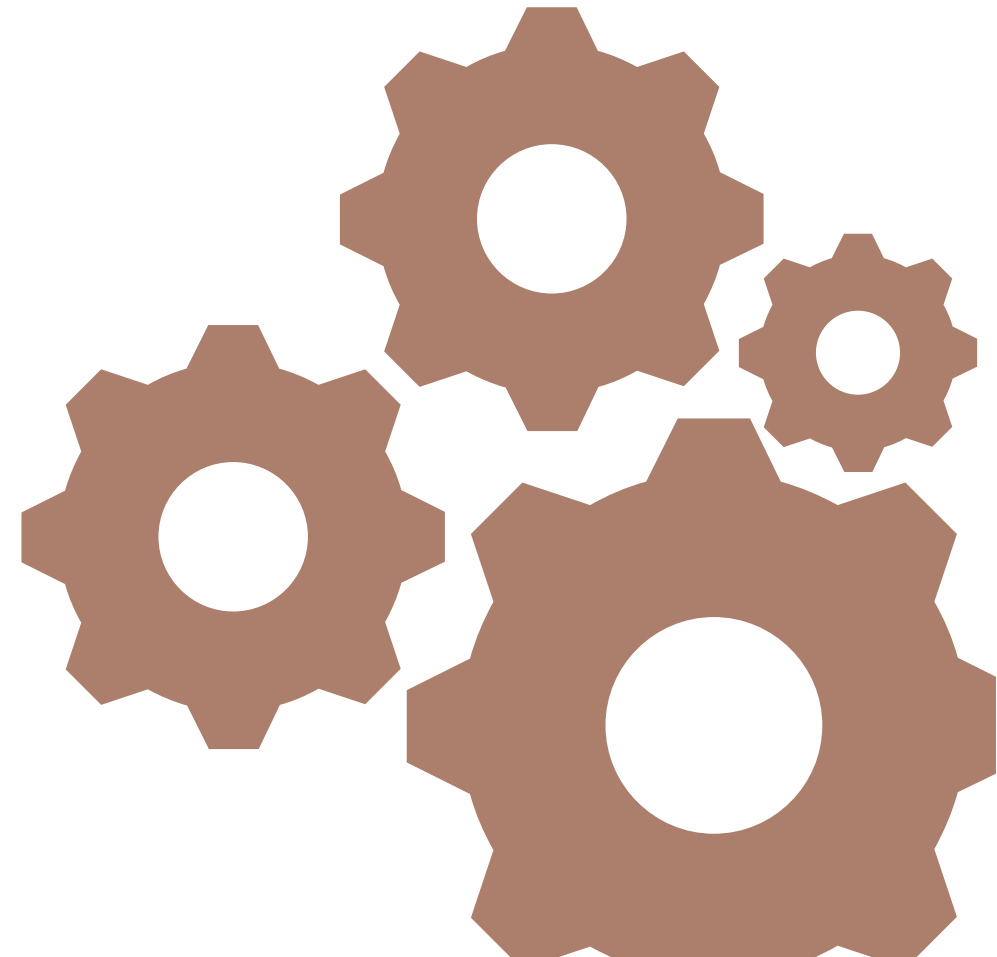
▶ Online course discussion is an excellent opportunity for teaching and prompting critical thinking. By presenting challenging open-ended questions, you can engage in a sort of asynchronous Socratic questioning with your students.

▶ Present a statement, observation, or scenario that requires students to reexamine or apply what they're learning.

▶ Ask a specific question, one that won't have an obvious right answer, such as:

"What do you think about ___?" "How do you feel about ___?"

"In the past, how have you responded when ___?" "Have you ever had an experience where ___?"

"What conclusion do you draw from ___|?" "Of ___, ___, or ___, which choice makes the most sense given ___?"

"How would you go about ___?" "In what order would you ___?"

"What would you do if ___?"

▶ Give students clear directions for defending or explaining their responses.

"Why or why not?"

"Explain your reasoning."

"Defend your response through one of the theoretical frameworks in this week's reading."

"Explain your response using data from this week's field observations."

"How does this relate to what we have learned?"

ELICIT

1. Introduce a fresh angle
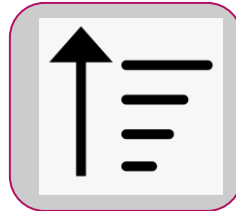2. Extend content into other domains
3. Provide a new activity

INVITE

1. Ask for practical examples
2. Relate content to work and service
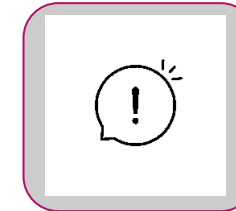3. Set the stage for a story

01

04

02

03

PRIORITIZE

1. Set parameters of form and function
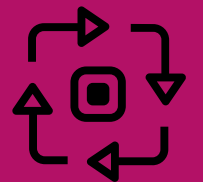2. Establish guidelines and timeframes
3. Maintain expectations and decorum

EMPHASIZE

1. Maintain a role of facilitator
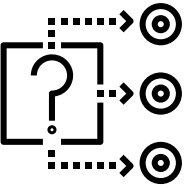2. Allow peer-to-peer dialogue
3. Prioritize process over perfection

Considerations for discussion implementation

From theory to practice …

HOW DOES THIS WORK?

Types of Discussions
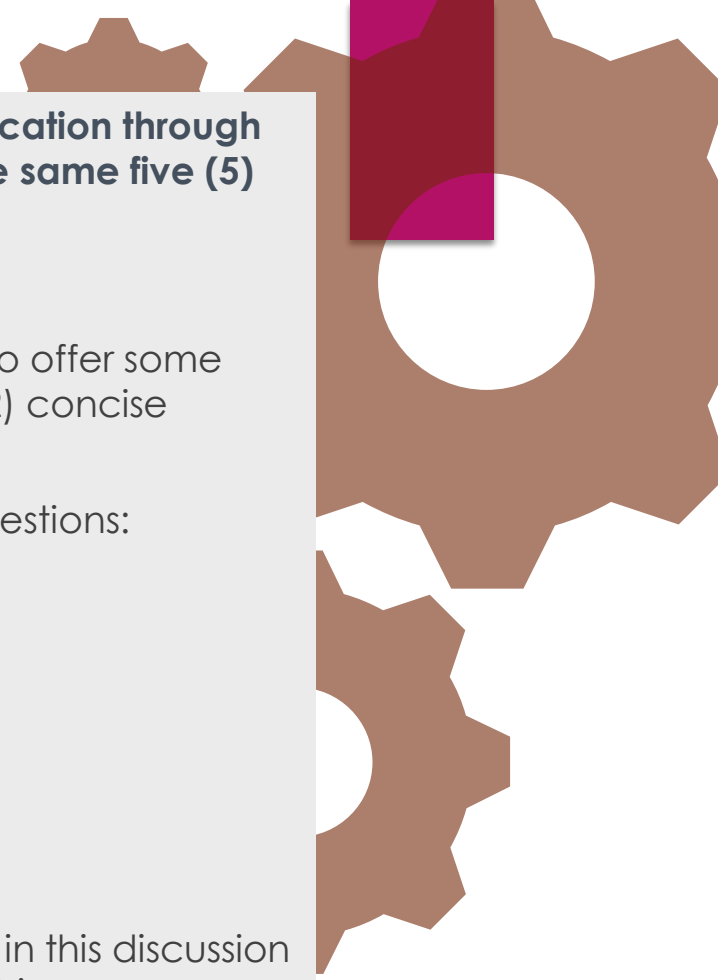
- ▶ **Prompt and respond**

- ▶ **Quote and question**

- ▶ **Engage and report**

- ▶ **Resource repository**

PROMPT AND RESPOND

▶ **This type of discussion forum invites students to articulate what they know about a new idea, concept, problem, or closely related experience. The purpose of this discussion activity is twofold – for students to become aware of what they already know and engage their curiosity about the new knowledge they are developing, and for instructors to gain insight into students' understanding.**

Now it's your turn! Think of a time when you personally engaged in an interpersonal communication through which a humorous disconnect or misunderstanding occurred. Frame this situation by using the same five (5) questions posed in the lesson.

Here's what you'll need to do:

1. In **one paragraph**, briefly describe your funny interpersonal communication story; feel free to offer some relevant background and/or dialogue. You should accomplish this with eight (8) to twelve (12) concise sentences.

2. Then, using the example you've shared, compose a **second paragraph** to answer these questions:

- Who are the communicators?

- What messages were exchanged?

- What (if any) noise distorts the message?

- How is feedback given?

- What is the context of the communication?

3. When you have finished writing your first two paragraphs, please post them as a single post in this discussion thread, along with a **third paragraph** of five (5) to ten (10) sentences detailing why you think this miscommunication occurred and how interpersonal communication skills may help situations such as these.

4. After you have made your **initial post**, read over your classmates' responses and post a constructive **reply** (at least five (5) sentences) to at least two (2) of your peers' posts.

Your personal responses should be posted to this forum by Friday evening, so you have at least two days to read and comment on each others' posts by midnight on Sunday.

Have fun getting to know each other through this exercise! ~ Professor Donlan

PROMPT and RESPOND

QUOTE AND QUESTION

▶ This exploratory discussion forum lays the foundation for student-to-student conversation, interaction, and support by creating a situation where each learner assumes the role of both a student and a teacher. The emphasis in this forum is for students to **find a meaningful, thought-provoking, or problematic quote** from the current course readings and offer it up to the group as fodder for discourse, along **with a question designed to engage deeper dialogue** about the topics raised in the quote.

By now you have learned that there are four characteristics of a mature reasoner: (1) well-informed, (2) self-critical, (3) audience-minded, and (4) context-aware.

This week's discussion exercise serves as a critical self-examination tool to evaluate our own views on the use of effective argument (in the academic sense).

Here's what you'll need to do:

1. Read the Thomas Paine quote below about argument:

"To argue with a person who has renounced the use of reason is like administering medicine to the dead."

2. Determine what Paine meant by his statement, and consider how the qualities of mature reasoning may relate to preventing "administering medicine to the dead."

3. In this Discussion thread, please post a thorough, thoughtful, and academically appropriate response of at least four (4) paragraphs explaining

- what Paine meant by his quote (giving full consideration to what you have learned about the true definition of argument),

- how the tenets of mature reasoning relate to more effective argument, and

- how you might encourage others to utilize more rational thinking in both their speaking and their writing.

- For your fourth paragraph, please insert an academically appropriate poster, meme, or gif that reflects your current stance on reason and argument.

4. After you have made your initial post, read over your classmates' responses and comment with a thoughtful reply (at least 6 sentences) to at least two (2) of your peers' posts. I recommend completing your initial posts by Friday evening, so you have at least two days to read and comment on each others' posts.
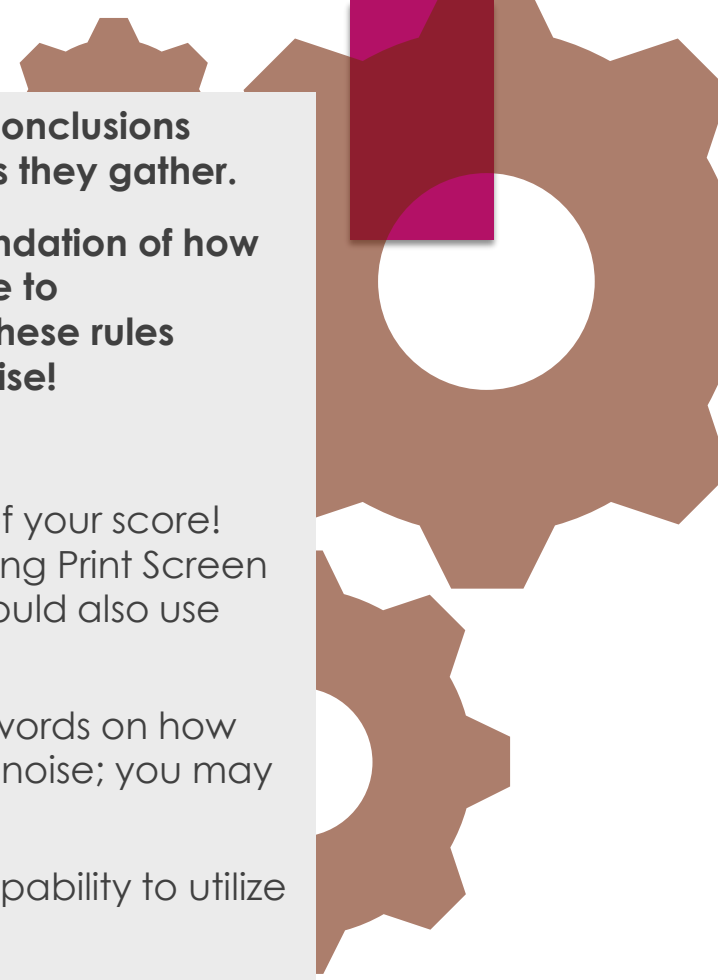
Enjoy your reading, and happy writing!! ~ Professor Donlan

QUOTE and QUESTION
(teacher-led variation)

ENGAGE AND REPORT

▶ **The purpose of this discussion type is to seriously engage students with content and supplementary content-related exercises. This** discussion type relies on activities that direct students to read, analyze, investigate, or otherwise engage with content material. New content knowledge builds on the student's understandings and expands the knowledge base needed to **apply and use the knowledge.**

Logical thinkers observe and analyze phenomena, reactions, and feedback and then draw conclusions based on that input. They can justify their strategies, actions, and decisions based on the facts they gather.

Even though we don't go around thinking about logic on a day-to-day basis, it is the very foundation of how we communicate and how we make statements about the world. Ideas and the words we use to communicate them are vague – but logic allows us to apply rules to our words, and through these rules assign simple values to them identifying them. Let's give our logical thinking skills some exercise!

Here's what you'll need to do for this Discussion:

1. Take this ten-item online logic quiz: <u>Test Your Logical Thinking Skills</u>. Then, take a screenshot of your score! (On a laptop or PC, you can do this by pressing and holding the Windows key and then pressing Print Screen key – the photo should automatically appear in your Photos folder under Screenshots.) You could also use your mobile device for this.

2. After you have received and photographed your score, write a paragraph of at least 100 words on how your performance in this logic exercise may be a reflection of your communication style or of noise; you may also indicate what question(s) on the test was most interesting or perplexing to you.

In a second paragraph of about 150 words, identify how using logic might strengthen your capability to utilize effective interpersonal communication and make valid, informed conversational points.

3. Please post your two (2) paragraphs as a single post in this discussion thread, along with the screenshot of your score.

4. After you have posted your initial response, read over your classmates' responses and post a constructive reply (at least 5 sentences) to at least two (2) of your peers' posts.

Your personal responses should be submitted by Friday evening, so you have at least two days to read and comment on each other's posts.
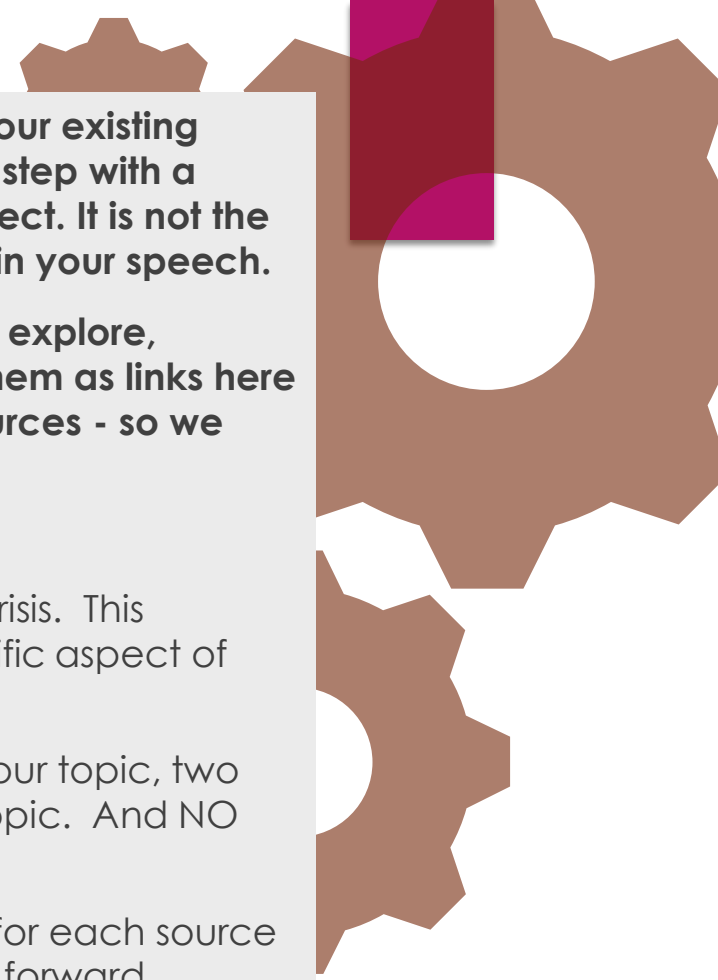
Good luck, and may the logic be with you! ~ Professor Donlan

ENGAGE and REPORT

RESOURCE REPOSITORY

▶ **This discussion type has a primary purpose of gathering evidence for student understanding.** It includes activities that require students to use their new content knowledge to solve problems through **investigating and compiling a set of shared resources** and then critique those resources within the student-built repository. More than a curation activity, this type of discussion engages reflective, integrative, and action-oriented activity through **substantial thinking and research,** including citing important sources.

It is good to speak about something for which you have a passion and a context. That way, your existing knowledge forms the first step of your research process. Background research begins this first step with a review of summaries available for your topic – this helps build your knowledge about the subject. It is not the more focused and academic research that you will actually use to support and verbally cite in your speech.

Your task this week is to continue to focus on the specific aspect of the crisis that you'd like to explore, investigate, and address. We will then gather information to support those topics, and share them as links here in our discussion. This is crucial to our COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY as we discover information sources - so we want to make sure we do not duplicate information.

Here's what you'll need to do in this Discussion thread:

1. Write a one-paragraph description of your specific topic relating to the Australian wildfire crisis. This paragraph should be more specific than last week's paragraph, and should explore the specific aspect of the issue you have identified as important.

2. Do some RESEARCH! You will need to provide at least two (2) scholarly journal articles on your topic, two (2) news sourced articles, and two (2) videos. Remember - these should be specific to your topic. And NO DUPLICATES - if someone else has already listed the source, you cannot list it again.

3. Create your list of sources and hyperlink each source; provide a one-sentence description for each source about how you might use this information to explore your topic in greater depth as you move forward.

4. When you have finished these tasks, please post them as a single initial post in this discussion thread, along with a final paragraph detailing which of the pieces you posted on your specific topic is most useful to your speech and why you feel that way.

5. After you have posted your initial response, read over your classmates' responses and post a constructive reply (at least 3 sentences) to at least two (2) of your peers' posts.

Good luck in your searching and sharing about this important global issue! ~ Professor Donlan

RESOURCE REPOSITORY

For entire lesson plan, click here: National Geographic Lesson Plan: Empowered Speaking to a Large-Scale Environmental Crisis.

Types of Discussions

▶ Prompt and respond

This type of discussion forum invites students to articulate what they know about a new idea, concept, problem, or closely related experience. The purpose of this discussion activity is twofold – for students to become aware of what they already know and encourage their curiosity about the new knowledge they are developing, and for instructors to gain insight into students' understanding.

▶ Quote and question

This exploratory discussion forum lays the foundation for student-to-student conversation, interaction, and support by creating a situation where each learner assumes the role of both a student and a teacher. The emphasis in this forum is for students to find a meaningful, thought-provoking, or problematic quote from the current course readings and offer it up to the group as fodder for discourse, along with a question designed to engage deeper dialogue about the topics raised in the quote. This is truly a community of inquiry exchange and helps build trust and camaraderie. A variation of this type of discussion involves the teacher posing the quote along with thought-provoking questions for the cohort's interpretation.

▶ Engage and report

The purpose of this discussion type is to seriously engage students with content and supplementary content-related exercises. This discussion type relies on activities that direct students to read, analyze, investigate, or otherwise engage with content material. New content knowledge builds on the student's understandings and expands the knowledge base needed to apply and use the knowledge.

▶ Resource repository

This discussion type has a primary purpose of gathering evidence for student understanding. It includes activities that require students to use their new content knowledge to solve problems through investigating and compiling a set of shared resources and then critique those resources within the student-built repository. More than a curation activity, this type of discussion engages reflective, integrative, and action-oriented activity through substantial thinking and research, including citing important sources.

Discussion 4 - Language and Logic

Posted Sun Jan 16, 2022 at 11:36 am

| Criteria	Grading Scale			
Initial Post	**60** Proficient Post is well articulated and understandable, meets an expected standard of thoroughness consistent with suggested word or paragraph count, and exhibits critical thinking and original ideas.	**50** Satisfactory Post is clear and understandable, meets an expected standard of thoroughness consistent with suggested word or paragraph count, and shows some evidence of analysis and accuracy.	**40** Not Yet Post lacks clarity and contains errors OR does not meet an expected standard of thoroughness consistent with suggested word or paragraph count OR does not demonstrate clarity and/or originality.	**0** Missing Post is missing.
Response(s)	**25** Proficient Interacts at least 2 times with other students and/or instructor with an expected standard of thoroughness.	**20** Satisfactory Interacts only once with other students and/or Instructor with an expected standard of thoroughness.	**10** Not Yet Interacts superficially with other students without extending the discussion (one-sentence responses or "likes" rather than dialogue).	**0** Missing Response(s) are missing.
Timeliness	**15** Proficient Post and all responses made on time.	**10** Satisfactory Post made on time but at least one response is late.	**5** Not Yet Post and responses are late.	**0** Missing No evidence of presence in discussion.

Total pts: 100

Discussion Rubric Example

Source: C. Donlan, Luzerne County Community College

Reflective Practice Challenge: What are your next steps?
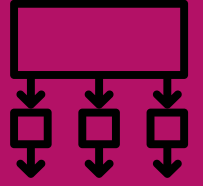
- ▶ **Identify how this practice could help discourse in your class become more learner-centered.**

- ▶ **Dedicate space and time within your course to try out an LMS-based discussion forum and see what happens.**

- ▶ **Consider the ways this type of learning activity may shift and expand roles within the learning context.**

- ▶ **Build discussions using formats that mesh best with your course topics and learning objectives.**
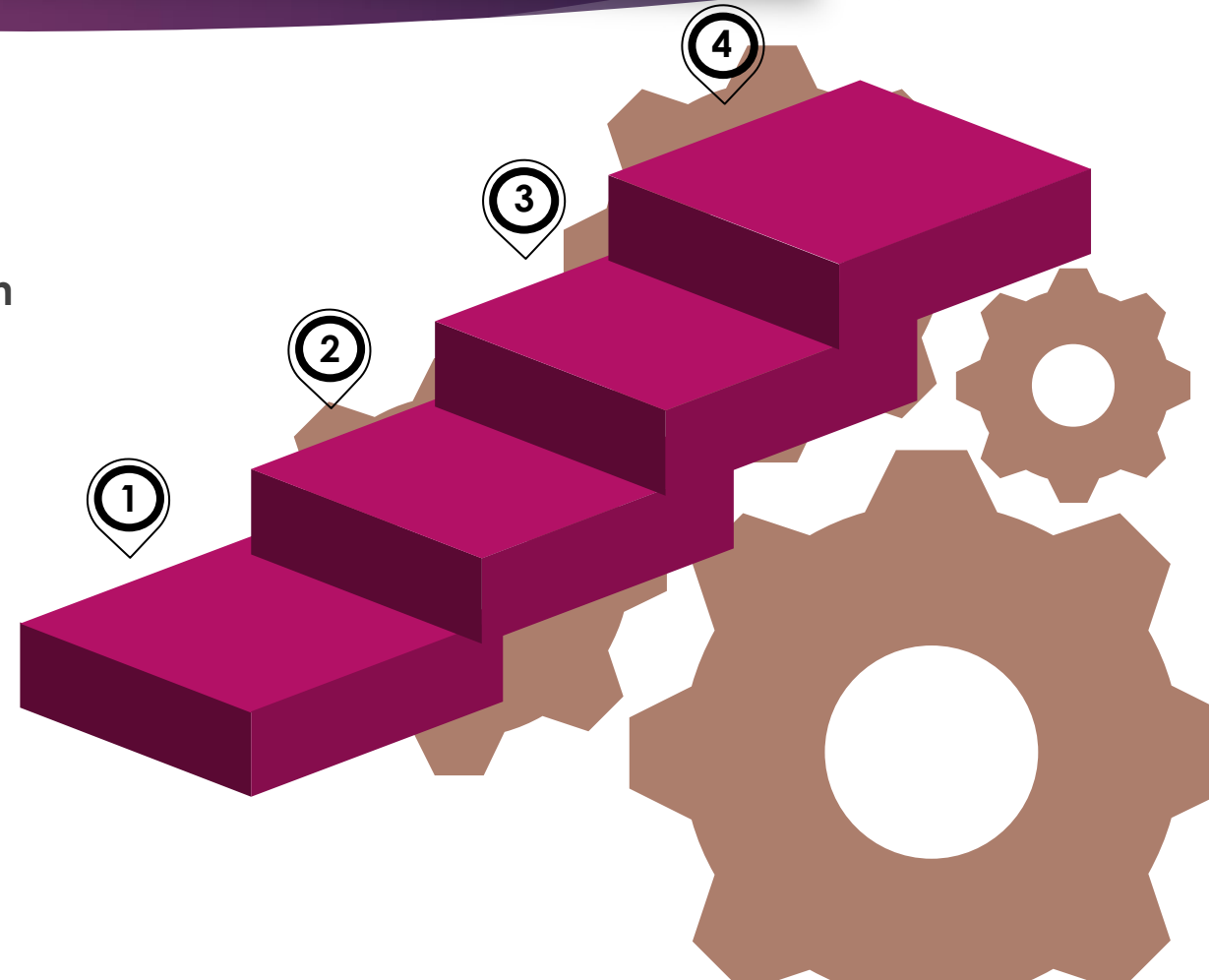
What did you learn?

▶ Create a six-word story reflecting what you've learned today about LMS-based discussions as a tool to extend content learning across modalities:
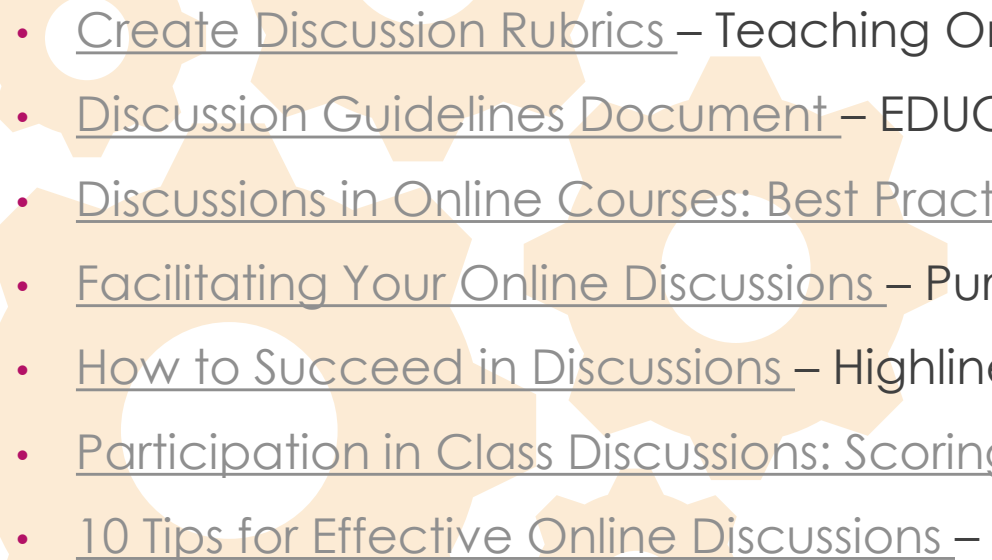
Extending conversations into student-driven digital discourse

Creating meaning beyond the physical classroom

We're all doing our best here!

Six-Word Stories

A Literary Brainteaser
Combining Drama and Poetry
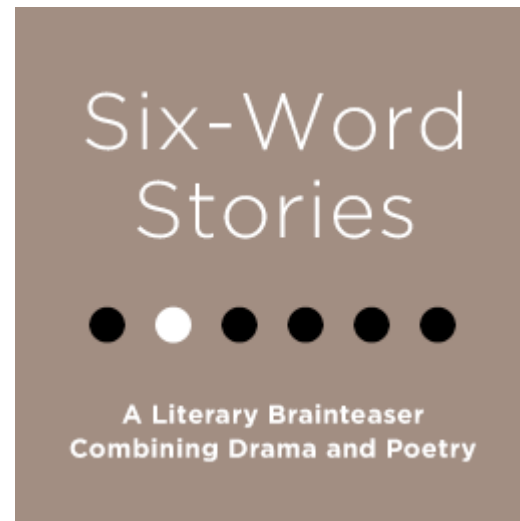
Resources for Additional Guidance

- Create Discussion Rubrics – Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository (TOPR)

- Discussion Guidelines Document – EDUCAUSE

- Discussions in Online Courses: Best Practices and Expectations – Johns Hopkins

- Facilitating Your Online Discussions – Purdue

- How to Succeed in Discussions – Highline College

- Participation in Class Discussions: Scoring and Examples – Purdue

- 10 Tips for Effective Online Discussions – EDUCAUSE

IDL6543 Discussion Rubric

Points	10	7	3	0
Quality of Post	Appropriate comments: thoughtful, reflective, and respectful of other's postings.	Appropriate comments and responds respectfully to other's postings	Responds, but with minimum effort. (e.g. "I agree with Bill")	No posting.
Relevance of Post	Posts topics related to discussion topic; prompts further discussion of topic	Posts topics that are related to discussion content	Posts topics which do not relate to the discussion content; makes short or irrelevant remarks	No posting.
Contribution to the Learning Community	Aware of needs of community; attempts to motivate the group discussion; presents creative approaches to topic	Attempts to direct the discussion and to present relevant viewpoints for consideration by group; interacts freely	Does not make effort to participate in learning community as it develops	No feedback provided to fellow student.

Discussion Rubric Example

Source: Center for Distributed Learning, UCF

For more information …

Please check out my new professional development course:

Promoting Discussion and Community of Inquiry in Any Modality

Upcoming this month in Canvas!

For instructional design consultation, contact me: donlanc@etown.edu