

Writing Forum Posts and Responses

When You Are Starting a New Thread or Making the First Post

Read the Directions Carefully

Your instructors usually outline their expectations for forum and discussion board posts in the syllabus. Make sure to read their rules for posting. Some instructors may have specific word count expectations, or require certain things. Every instructor and every course is different, so make sure you understand what you're supposed to be writing in your discussion post.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask Questions

You can *always* email your instructor to ask for more details about discussion board assignments. It may feel intimidating, but reaching out is the best thing to do if you're unsure of how to respond to a topic question or instructor-led discussion. Your instructor is there to help you grow.

Actually Say Something

To get the most out of your online discussion board posts, you need to actually have a conversation. When you're posting, think about what you're saying: why do you think this way? Using sources like your textbooks or even a journal article can boost your credibility and increase the points you earn for your posts.

Don't Procrastinate

Be sure to post your discussion thread well before the deadline. If you post at the last minute, you're not likely to get thoughtful and enlightening responses, and you're not making the most of your online experience.

Review and Proofread Your Post

Before hitting "submit" or "create thread," read over your post at least once. Make sure you're not going off subject and look for any spelling or grammar mistakes.

One important difference between in-person class discussions and online discussion boards is the lack of context. In person, you can use body language to determine how someone feels about what they're saying. When writing online, it can be difficult to understand the tone your writing gives off to your readers.

Try using empathy - read your post as if you were a classmate or friend and consider how they might respond if this was a post they read.

Avoid all-caps (IT LOOKS LIKE YELLING), "text speak" and slang terms (LOL, omg, on fleek), and use typical punctuation (not multiple exclamation points or emoticons). As always, never use racial or ethnic slurs, aggressive language, profanity, or language that could be offensive to other cultures or religions.

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When You Are Posting Replies to Classmates' Posts

Again, Read the Direction Carefully

Your instructor may have one set of expectations for original posts, and an entirely different set of rules for replying to your classmates' posts. If there aren't any guidelines in the syllabus about replying to posts, don't hesitate to ask your instructor what he or she expects replies to include.

Make Meaningful Conversation

Discussion boards are meant to be conversations, where each post builds on the previous comment. Responding to a post gives you the ability to expand the conversation. Reference material from your textbook, class lectures, or relate to your own life experiences when appropriate. Don't just agree or disagree: continue the conversation! This is called responding constructively - just like construction, you're building upon a post.

There are three main ways to respond constructively to a post:

- "No, because..."
- "Yes, and..."
- "Yes, but..."

Respectfully Disagreeing - "No, because..."

If you disagree with someone's post, show that you appreciate that your classmate has an opinion, even if it's different from your own. Don't personally attack the writer, and avoid using emotional appeals.

Instead, focus on the logic of view your classmate has: does it make sense? Do the causes and effects as explained really relate to one another? Does one claim necessary follow another? Are there flaws in your classmate's argument? Ask questions to better understand the writer's logic.

Agreeing With and Expanding Upon a Post - "Yes, and..."

Let's say you agree with the writer's main idea, and you want to add more to it. Take the original opinion or view that your classmate expresses and consider other angles. Are there factors about this topic that your classmate hasn't mentioned? Do you have insight that provides a clearer picture or helps build the discussion?

Agreeing With and Expanding Upon a Post - "Yes, but..."

This is very similar to "Yes, and..." with the exception that you are playing "devil's advocate" - you're pointing out things that don't quite mesh with the view or opinion your classmate posts. You agree with what your classmate is saying, but you're pointing out problems with the view or statement that make it harder to defend.

If you're getting points taken off for discussion board assignments and you're not sure why, ask your instructor for feedback. You can also come visit the Writing Center for help - we're not just for essays! We can review your discussion board posts and replies, and give you feedback to help you say what you mean to say.

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(Examples from this website: <https://writingcommons.org/open-text/new-media/online-forums/651-online-forums-responding-thoughtfully>)

Let's say a classmate posts the following message about abortion on your class discussion board:

All women should have abortions if they're unmarried. Having children when a woman is unmarried can cause severe problems for that child later in life. The child can grow up and become a drug addict. So it's the woman's duty to have an abortion if there is no father in the picture.

“No, because...”

Here are two examples of responses you could give that respectfully disagree:

1. *I respectfully disagree with your views regarding abortion. I do understand your concerns, but I wonder whether drug addiction necessarily follows a fatherless life. I was raised without a father and have never touched a drug in my life. Do you think that all children who are raised without fathers cannot lead fulfilling and successful lives?*
2. *Perhaps we might consider the logic employed in this post: while I understand your concern for the child's quality of life, I do not understand that connections you're drawing. Perhaps you—or someone else who agrees with this post—could elaborate upon why you feel this way?*

Both responses are respectful of your classmate's position, even if you strongly disagree. They point to issues with the writer's logic and end with questions which continue the discussion.

“Yes, and...”

Here's an example of agreeing with the post about abortion, and adding onto it:

I definitely see your point about the child's quality of life. In fact, I know someone who dealt with a previous experience. I would also like to add this question: What about women who have been raped? Would that trauma necessarily carry over to the child?

You're adding another point to the original question. This helps continue the conversation with other students who may also comment on this post, and gives the conversation more depth.

“Yes, but...”

Here's an example of agreeing with the post about abortion, but disagreeing with some parts:

The quality of life of a child raised without both parents is certainly something to consider. I'm not sure that being unmarried is the biggest issue though. There are relationships where unmarried women still have the support of their partners, giving the children two parents or parental figures.